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LES MISÉRABLES

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[Illustration: Frontispiece]

[Illustration: Titlepage Volume One]

[Illustration: Titlepage Verso]

Contents

LES MISÉRABLES

PREFACE

VOLUME I—FANTINE

BOOK FIRST—A JUST MAN

CHAPTER I—M. MYRIEL

CHAPTER II—M. MYRIEL BECOMES M. WELCOME

CHAPTER III—A HARD BISHOPRIC FOR A GOOD BISHOP

CHAPTER IV—WORKS CORRESPONDING TO WORDS

CHAPTER V—MONSEIGNEUR BIENVENU MADE HIS CASSOCKS LAST TOO LONG

CHAPTER VI—WHO GUARDED HIS HOUSE FOR HIM

CHAPTER VII—CRAVATTE

CHAPTER VIII—PHILOSOPHY AFTER DRINKING

CHAPTER IX—THE BROTHER AS DEPICTED BY THE SISTER

CHAPTER X—THE BISHOP IN THE PRESENCE OF AN UNKNOWN LIGHT

CHAPTER XI—A RESTRICTION

CHAPTER XII—THE SOLITUDE OF MONSEIGNEUR WELCOME

CHAPTER XIII—WHAT HE BELIEVED

CHAPTER XIV—WHAT HE THOUGHT

BOOK SECOND—THE FALL

CHAPTER I—THE EVENING OF A DAY OF WALKING

CHAPTER II—PRUDENCE COUNSELLED TO WISDOM

CHAPTER III—THE HEROISM OF PASSIVE OBEDIENCE

CHAPTER IV—DETAILS CONCERNING THE CHEESE-DAIRIES OF PONTARLIER

CHAPTER V—TRANQUILLITY

CHAPTER VI—JEAN VALJEAN

CHAPTER VII—THE INTERIOR OF DESPAIR

CHAPTER VIII—BILLOWS AND SHADOWS

CHAPTER IX—NEW TROUBLES

CHAPTER X—THE MAN AROUSED

CHAPTER XI—WHAT HE DOES

CHAPTER XII—THE BISHOP WORKS

CHAPTER XIII—LITTLE GERVAIS

BOOK THIRD—IN THE YEAR 1817

CHAPTER I—THE YEAR 1817

CHAPTER II—A DOUBLE QUARTETTE

CHAPTER III—FOUR AND FOUR

CHAPTER IV—THOLOMYÈS IS SO MERRY THAT HE SINGS A SPANISH DITTY

CHAPTER V—AT BOMBARDA’S

CHAPTER VI—A CHAPTER IN WHICH THEY ADORE EACH OTHER

CHAPTER VII—THE WISDOM OF THOLOMYÈS

CHAPTER VIII—THE DEATH OF A HORSE

CHAPTER IX—A MERRY END TO MIRTH

BOOK FOURTH—TO CONFIDE IS SOMETIMES TO DELIVER INTO A PERSON’S POWER

CHAPTER I—ONE MOTHER MEETS ANOTHER MOTHER

CHAPTER II—FIRST SKETCH OF TWO UNPREPOSSESSING FIGURES

CHAPTER III—THE LARK

BOOK FIFTH—THE DESCENT

CHAPTER I—THE HISTORY OF A PROGRESS IN BLACK GLASS TRINKETS

CHAPTER II—MADELEINE

CHAPTER III—SUMS DEPOSITED WITH LAFFITTE

CHAPTER IV—M. MADELEINE IN MOURNING

CHAPTER V—VAGUE FLASHES ON THE HORIZON

CHAPTER VI—FATHER FAUCHELEVENT

CHAPTER VII—FAUCHELEVENT BECOMES A GARDENER IN PARIS

CHAPTER VIII—MADAME VICTURNIEN EXPENDS THIRTY FRANCS ON MORALITY

CHAPTER IX—MADAME VICTURNIEN’S SUCCESS

CHAPTER X—RESULT OF THE SUCCESS

CHAPTER XI—CHRISTUS NOS LIBERAVIT

CHAPTER XII—M. BAMATABOIS’S INACTIVITY

CHAPTER XIII—THE SOLUTION OF SOME QUESTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE

MUNICIPAL POLICE

BOOK SIXTH—JAVERT

CHAPTER I—THE BEGINNING OF REPOSE

CHAPTER II—HOW JEAN MAY BECOME CHAMP

BOOK SEVENTH—THE CHAMPMATHIEU AFFAIR

CHAPTER I—SISTER SIMPLICE

CHAPTER II—THE PERSPICACITY OF MASTER SCAUFFLAIRE

CHAPTER III—A TEMPEST IN A SKULL

CHAPTER IV—FORMS ASSUMED BY SUFFERING DURING SLEEP

CHAPTER V—HINDRANCES

CHAPTER VI—SISTER SIMPLICE PUT TO THE PROOF

CHAPTER VII—THE TRAVELLER ON HIS ARRIVAL TAKES PRECAUTIONS FOR

DEPARTURE

CHAPTER VIII—AN ENTRANCE BY FAVOR

CHAPTER IX—A PLACE WHERE CONVICTIONS ARE IN PROCESS OF FORMATION

CHAPTER X—THE SYSTEM OF DENIALS

CHAPTER XI—CHAMPMATHIEU MORE AND MORE ASTONISHED

BOOK EIGHTH—A COUNTER-BLOW

CHAPTER I—IN WHAT MIRROR M. MADELEINE CONTEMPLATES HIS HAIR

CHAPTER II—FANTINE HAPPY

CHAPTER III—JAVERT SATISFIED

CHAPTER IV—AUTHORITY REASSERTS ITS RIGHTS

CHAPTER V—A SUITABLE TOMB

VOLUME II—COSETTE

BOOK FIRST—WATERLOO

CHAPTER I—WHAT IS MET WITH ON THE WAY FROM NIVELLES

CHAPTER II—HOUGOMONT

CHAPTER III—THE EIGHTEENTH OF JUNE, 1815

CHAPTER IV—A

CHAPTER V—THE QUID OBSCURUM OF BATTLES

CHAPTER VI—FOUR O’CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON

CHAPTER VII—NAPOLEON IN A GOOD HUMOR

CHAPTER VIII—THE EMPEROR PUTS A QUESTION TO THE GUIDE LACOSTE

CHAPTER IX—THE UNEXPECTED

CHAPTER X—THE PLATEAU OF MONT-SAINT-JEAN

CHAPTER XI—A BAD GUIDE TO NAPOLEON; A GOOD GUIDE TO BÜLOW

CHAPTER XII—THE GUARD

CHAPTER XIII—THE CATASTROPHE

CHAPTER XIV—THE LAST SQUARE

CHAPTER XV—CAMBRONNE

CHAPTER XVI—QUOT LIBRAS IN DUCE?

CHAPTER XVII—IS WATERLOO TO BE CONSIDERED GOOD?

CHAPTER XVIII—A RECRUDESCENCE OF DIVINE RIGHT

CHAPTER XIX—THE BATTLE-FIELD AT NIGHT

BOOK SECOND—THE SHIP ORION

CHAPTER I—NUMBER 24,601 BECOMES NUMBER 9,430

CHAPTER II—IN WHICH THE READER WILL PERUSE TWO VERSES, WHICH ARE OF

THE DEVIL’S COMPOSITION, POSSIBLY

CHAPTER III—THE ANKLE-CHAIN MUST HAVE UNDERGONE A CERTAIN PREPARATORY

MANIPULATION TO BE THUS BROKEN WITH A BLOW FROM A HAMMER

BOOK THIRD—ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE PROMISE MADE TO THE DEAD WOMAN

CHAPTER I—THE WATER QUESTION AT MONTFERMEIL

CHAPTER II—TWO COMPLETE PORTRAITS

CHAPTER III—MEN MUST HAVE WINE, AND HORSES MUST HAVE WATER

CHAPTER IV—ENTRANCE ON THE SCENE OF A DOLL

CHAPTER V—THE LITTLE ONE ALL ALONE

CHAPTER VI—WHICH POSSIBLY PROVES BOULATRUELLE’S INTELLIGENCE

CHAPTER VII—COSETTE SIDE BY SIDE WITH THE STRANGER IN THE DARK

CHAPTER VIII—THE UNPLEASANTNESS OF RECEIVING INTO ONE’S HOUSE A POOR

MAN WHO MAY BE A RICH MAN

CHAPTER IX—THÉNARDIER AND HIS MANŒUVRES

CHAPTER X—HE WHO SEEKS TO BETTER HIMSELF MAY RENDER HIS SITUATION

WORSE

CHAPTER XI—NUMBER 9,430 REAPPEARS, AND COSETTE WINS IT IN THE LOTTERY

BOOK FOURTH—THE GORBEAU HOVEL

CHAPTER I—MASTER GORBEAU

CHAPTER II—A NEST FOR OWL AND A WARBLER

CHAPTER III—TWO MISFORTUNES MAKE ONE PIECE OF GOOD FORTUNE

CHAPTER IV—THE REMARKS OF THE PRINCIPAL TENANT

CHAPTER V—A FIVE-FRANC PIECE FALLS ON THE GROUND AND PRODUCES A TUMULT

BOOK FIFTH—FOR A BLACK HUNT, A MUTE PACK

CHAPTER I—THE ZIGZAGS OF STRATEGY

CHAPTER II—IT IS LUCKY THAT THE PONT D’AUSTERLITZ BEARS CARRIAGES

CHAPTER III—TO WIT, THE PLAN OF PARIS IN 1727

CHAPTER IV—THE GROPINGS OF FLIGHT

CHAPTER V—WHICH WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE WITH GAS LANTERNS

CHAPTER VI—THE BEGINNING OF AN ENIGMA

CHAPTER VII—CONTINUATION OF THE ENIGMA

CHAPTER VIII—THE ENIGMA BECOMES DOUBLY MYSTERIOUS

CHAPTER IX—THE MAN WITH THE BELL

CHAPTER X—WHICH EXPLAINS HOW JAVERT GOT ON THE SCENT

BOOK SIXTH—LE PETIT-PICPUS

CHAPTER I—NUMBER 62 RUE PETIT-PICPUS

CHAPTER II—THE OBEDIENCE OF MARTIN VERGA

CHAPTER III—AUSTERITIES

CHAPTER IV—GAYETIES

CHAPTER V—DISTRACTIONS

CHAPTER VI—THE LITTLE CONVENT

CHAPTER VII—SOME SILHOUETTES OF THIS DARKNESS

CHAPTER VIII—POST CORDA LAPIDES

CHAPTER IX—A CENTURY UNDER A GUIMPE

CHAPTER X—ORIGIN OF THE PERPETUAL ADORATION

CHAPTER XI—END OF THE PETIT-PICPUS

BOOK SEVENTH—PARENTHESIS

CHAPTER I—THE CONVENT AS AN ABSTRACT IDEA

CHAPTER II—THE CONVENT AS AN HISTORICAL FACT

CHAPTER III—ON WHAT CONDITIONS ONE CAN RESPECT THE PAST

CHAPTER IV—THE CONVENT FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF PRINCIPLES

CHAPTER V—PRAYER

CHAPTER VI—THE ABSOLUTE GOODNESS OF PRAYER

CHAPTER VII—PRECAUTIONS TO BE OBSERVED IN BLAME

CHAPTER VIII—FAITH, LAW

BOOK EIGHTH—CEMETERIES TAKE THAT WHICH IS COMMITTED THEM

CHAPTER I—WHICH TREATS OF THE MANNER OF ENTERING A CONVENT

CHAPTER II—FAUCHELEVENT IN THE PRESENCE OF A DIFFICULTY

CHAPTER III—MOTHER INNOCENTE

CHAPTER IV—IN WHICH JEAN VALJEAN HAS QUITE THE AIR OF HAVING READ

AUSTIN CASTILLEJO

CHAPTER V—IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO BE DRUNK IN ORDER TO BE IMMORTAL

CHAPTER VI—BETWEEN FOUR PLANKS

CHAPTER VII—IN WHICH WILL BE FOUND THE ORIGIN OF THE SAYING: DON’T

LOSE THE CARD

CHAPTER VIII—A SUCCESSFUL INTERROGATORY

CHAPTER IX—CLOISTERED

VOLUME III—MARIUS

BOOK FIRST—PARIS STUDIED IN ITS ATOM

CHAPTER I—PARVULUS

CHAPTER II—SOME OF HIS PARTICULAR CHARACTERISTICS

CHAPTER III—HE IS AGREEABLE

CHAPTER IV—HE MAY BE OF USE

CHAPTER V—HIS FRONTIERS

CHAPTER VI—A BIT OF HISTORY

CHAPTER VII—THE GAMIN SHOULD HAVE HIS PLACE IN THE CLASSIFICATIONS OF

INDIA

CHAPTER VIII—IN WHICH THE READER WILL FIND A CHARMING SAYING OF THE

LAST KING

CHAPTER IX—THE OLD SOUL OF GAUL

CHAPTER X—ECCE PARIS, ECCE HOMO

CHAPTER XI—TO SCOFF, TO REIGN

CHAPTER XII—THE FUTURE LATENT IN THE PEOPLE

CHAPTER XIII—LITTLE GAVROCHE

BOOK SECOND—THE GREAT BOURGEOIS

CHAPTER I—NINETY YEARS AND THIRTY-TWO TEETH

CHAPTER II—LIKE MASTER, LIKE HOUSE

CHAPTER III—LUC-ESPRIT

CHAPTER IV—A CENTENARIAN ASPIRANT

CHAPTER V—BASQUE AND NICOLETTE

CHAPTER VI—IN WHICH MAGNON AND HER TWO CHILDREN ARE SEEN

CHAPTER VII—RULE: RECEIVE NO ONE EXCEPT IN THE EVENING

CHAPTER VIII—TWO DO NOT MAKE A PAIR

BOOK THIRD—THE GRANDFATHER AND THE GRANDSON

CHAPTER I—AN ANCIENT SALON

CHAPTER II—ONE OF THE RED SPECTRES OF THAT EPOCH

CHAPTER III—REQUIESCANT

CHAPTER IV—END OF THE BRIGAND

CHAPTER V—THE UTILITY OF GOING TO MASS, IN ORDER TO BECOME A

REVOLUTIONIST

CHAPTER VI—THE CONSEQUENCES OF HAVING MET A WARDEN

CHAPTER VII—SOME PETTICOAT

CHAPTER VIII—MARBLE AGAINST GRANITE

BOOK FOURTH—THE FRIENDS OF THE A B C

CHAPTER I—A GROUP WHICH BARELY MISSED BECOMING HISTORIC

CHAPTER II—BLONDEAU’S FUNERAL ORATION BY BOSSUET

CHAPTER III—MARIUS’ ASTONISHMENTS

CHAPTER IV—THE BACK ROOM OF THE CAFÉ MUSAIN

CHAPTER V—ENLARGEMENT OF HORIZON

CHAPTER VI—RES ANGUSTA

BOOK FIFTH—THE EXCELLENCE OF MISFORTUNE

CHAPTER I—MARIUS INDIGENT

CHAPTER II—MARIUS POOR

CHAPTER III—MARIUS GROWN UP

CHAPTER IV—M. MABEUF

CHAPTER V—POVERTY A GOOD NEIGHBOR FOR MISERY

CHAPTER VI—THE SUBSTITUTE

BOOK SIXTH—THE CONJUNCTION OF TWO STARS

CHAPTER I—THE SOBRIQUET: MODE OF FORMATION OF FAMILY NAMES

CHAPTER II—LUX FACTA EST

CHAPTER III—EFFECT OF THE SPRING

CHAPTER IV—BEGINNING OF A GREAT MALADY

CHAPTER V—DIVERS CLAPS OF THUNDER FALL ON MA’AM BOUGON

CHAPTER VI—TAKEN PRISONER

CHAPTER VII—ADVENTURES OF THE LETTER U DELIVERED OVER TO CONJECTURES

CHAPTER VIII—THE VETERANS THEMSELVES CAN BE HAPPY

CHAPTER IX—ECLIPSE

BOOK SEVENTH—PATRON MINETTE

CHAPTER I—MINES AND MINERS

CHAPTER II—THE LOWEST DEPTHS

CHAPTER III—BABET, GUEULEMER, CLAQUESOUS, AND MONTPARNASSE

CHAPTER IV—COMPOSITION OF THE TROUPE

BOOK EIGHTH—THE WICKED POOR MAN

CHAPTER I—MARIUS, WHILE SEEKING A GIRL IN A BONNET, ENCOUNTERS A MAN

IN A CAP

CHAPTER II—TREASURE TROVE

CHAPTER III—QUADRIFRONS

CHAPTER IV—A ROSE IN MISERY

CHAPTER V—A PROVIDENTIAL PEEP-HOLE

CHAPTER VI—THE WILD MAN IN HIS LAIR

CHAPTER VII—STRATEGY AND TACTICS

CHAPTER VIII—THE RAY OF LIGHT IN THE HOVEL

CHAPTER IX—JONDRETTE COMES NEAR WEEPING

CHAPTER X—TARIFF OF LICENSED CABS: TWO FRANCS AN HOUR

CHAPTER XI—OFFERS OF SERVICE FROM MISERY TO WRETCHEDNESS

CHAPTER XII—THE USE MADE OF M. LEBLANC’S FIVE-FRANC PIECE

CHAPTER XIII—SOLUS CUM SOLO, IN LOCO REMOTO, NON COGITABUNTUR ORARE

PATER NOSTER

CHAPTER XIV—IN WHICH A POLICE AGENT BESTOWS TWO FISTFULS ON A LAWYER

CHAPTER XV—JONDRETTE MAKES HIS PURCHASES

CHAPTER XVI—IN WHICH WILL BE FOUND THE WORDS TO AN ENGLISH AIR WHICH

WAS IN FASHION IN 1832

CHAPTER XVII—THE USE MADE OF MARIUS’ FIVE-FRANC PIECE

CHAPTER XVIII—MARIUS’ TWO CHAIRS FORM A VIS-A-VIS

CHAPTER XIX—OCCUPYING ONE’S SELF WITH OBSCURE DEPTHS

CHAPTER XX—THE TRAP

CHAPTER XXI—ONE SHOULD ALWAYS BEGIN BY ARRESTING THE VICTIMS

CHAPTER XXII—THE LITTLE ONE WHO WAS CRYING IN VOLUME TWO

VOLUME IV—SAINT-DENIS

BOOK FIRST—A FEW PAGES OF HISTORY

CHAPTER I—WELL CUT

CHAPTER II—BADLY SEWED

CHAPTER III—LOUIS PHILIPPE

CHAPTER IV—CRACKS BENEATH THE FOUNDATION

CHAPTER V—FACTS WHENCE HISTORY SPRINGS AND WHICH HISTORY IGNORES

CHAPTER VI—ENJOLRAS AND HIS LIEUTENANTS

BOOK SECOND—ÉPONINE

CHAPTER I—THE LARK’S MEADOW

CHAPTER II—EMBRYONIC FORMATION OF CRIMES IN THE INCUBATION OF PRISONS

CHAPTER III—APPARITION TO FATHER MABEUF

CHAPTER IV—AN APPARITION TO MARIUS

BOOK THIRD—THE HOUSE IN THE RUE PLUMET

CHAPTER I—THE HOUSE WITH A SECRET

CHAPTER II—JEAN VALJEAN AS A NATIONAL GUARD

CHAPTER III—FOLIIS AC FRONDIBUS

CHAPTER IV—CHANGE OF GATE

CHAPTER V—THE ROSE PERCEIVES THAT IT IS AN ENGINE OF WAR

CHAPTER VI—THE BATTLE BEGUN

CHAPTER VII—TO ONE SADNESS OPPOSE A SADNESS AND A HALF

CHAPTER VIII—THE CHAIN-GANG

BOOK FOURTH—SUCCOR FROM BELOW MAY TURN OUT TO BE SUCCOR FROM ON HIGH

CHAPTER I—A WOUND WITHOUT, HEALING WITHIN

CHAPTER II—MOTHER PLUTARQUE FINDS NO DIFFICULTY IN EXPLAINING A

PHENOMENON

BOOK FIFTH—THE END OF WHICH DOES NOT RESEMBLE THE BEGINNING

CHAPTER I—SOLITUDE AND THE BARRACKS COMBINED

CHAPTER II—COSETTE’S APPREHENSIONS

CHAPTER III—ENRICHED WITH COMMENTARIES BY TOUSSAINT

CHAPTER IV—A HEART BENEATH A STONE

CHAPTER V—COSETTE AFTER THE LETTER

CHAPTER VI—OLD PEOPLE ARE MADE TO GO OUT OPPORTUNELY

BOOK SIXTH—LITTLE GAVROCHE

CHAPTER I—THE MALICIOUS PLAYFULNESS OF THE WIND

CHAPTER II—IN WHICH LITTLE GAVROCHE EXTRACTS PROFIT FROM NAPOLEON THE

GREAT

CHAPTER III—THE VICISSITUDES OF FLIGHT

BOOK SEVENTH—SLANG

CHAPTER I—ORIGIN

CHAPTER II—ROOTS

CHAPTER III—SLANG WHICH WEEPS AND SLANG WHICH LAUGHS

CHAPTER IV—THE TWO DUTIES: TO WATCH AND TO HOPE

BOOK EIGHTH—ENCHANTMENTS AND DESOLATIONS

CHAPTER I—FULL LIGHT

CHAPTER II—THE BEWILDERMENT OF PERFECT HAPPINESS

CHAPTER III—THE BEGINNING OF SHADOW

CHAPTER IV—A CAB RUNS IN ENGLISH AND BARKS IN SLANG

CHAPTER V—THINGS OF THE NIGHT

CHAPTER VI—MARIUS BECOMES PRACTICAL ONCE MORE TO THE EXTENT OF GIVING

COSETTE HIS ADDRESS

CHAPTER VII—THE OLD HEART AND THE YOUNG HEART IN THE PRESENCE OF EACH

OTHER

BOOK NINTH—WHITHER ARE THEY GOING?

CHAPTER I—JEAN VALJEAN

CHAPTER II—MARIUS

CHAPTER III—M. MABEUF

BOOK TENTH—THE 5TH OF JUNE, 1832

CHAPTER I—THE SURFACE OF THE QUESTION

CHAPTER II—THE ROOT OF THE MATTER

CHAPTER III—A BURIAL; AN OCCASION TO BE BORN AGAIN

CHAPTER IV—THE EBULLITIONS OF FORMER DAYS

CHAPTER V—ORIGINALITY OF PARIS

BOOK ELEVENTH—THE ATOM FRATERNIZES WITH THE HURRICANE

CHAPTER I—SOME EXPLANATIONS WITH REGARD TO THE ORIGIN OF GAVROCHE’S

POETRY.

CHAPTER II—GAVROCHE ON THE MARCH

CHAPTER III—JUST INDIGNATION OF A HAIR-DRESSER

CHAPTER IV—THE CHILD IS AMAZED AT THE OLD MAN

CHAPTER V—THE OLD MAN

CHAPTER VI—RECRUITS

BOOK TWELFTH—CORINTHE

CHAPTER I—HISTORY OF CORINTHE FROM ITS FOUNDATION

CHAPTER II—PRELIMINARY GAYETIES

CHAPTER III—NIGHT BEGINS TO DESCEND UPON GRANTAIRE

CHAPTER IV—AN ATTEMPT TO CONSOLE THE WIDOW HUCHELOUP

CHAPTER V—PREPARATIONS

CHAPTER VI—WAITING

CHAPTER VII—THE MAN RECRUITED IN THE RUE DES BILLETTES

CHAPTER VIII—MANY INTERROGATION POINTS WITH REGARD TO A CERTAIN LE

CABUC

BOOK THIRTEENTH—MARIUS ENTERS THE SHADOW

CHAPTER I—FROM THE RUE PLUMET TO THE QUARTIER SAINT-DENIS

CHAPTER II—AN OWL’S VIEW OF PARIS

CHAPTER III—THE EXTREME EDGE

BOOK FOURTEENTH—THE GRANDEURS OF DESPAIR

CHAPTER I—THE FLAG: ACT FIRST

CHAPTER II—THE FLAG: ACT SECOND

CHAPTER III—GAVROCHE WOULD HAVE DONE BETTER TO ACCEPT ENJOLRAS’

CARBINE

CHAPTER IV—THE BARREL OF POWDER

CHAPTER V—END OF THE VERSES OF JEAN PROUVAIRE

CHAPTER VI—THE AGONY OF DEATH AFTER THE AGONY OF LIFE

CHAPTER VII—GAVROCHE AS A PROFOUND CALCULATOR OF DISTANCES

BOOK FIFTEENTH—THE RUE DE L’HOMME ARMÉ

CHAPTER I—A DRINKER IS A BABBLER

CHAPTER II—THE STREET URCHIN AN ENEMY OF LIGHT

CHAPTER III—WHILE COSETTE AND TOUSSAINT ARE ASLEEP

CHAPTER IV—GAVROCHE’S EXCESS OF ZEAL

VOLUME V—JEAN VALJEAN

BOOK FIRST—THE WAR BETWEEN FOUR WALLS

CHAPTER I—THE CHARYBDIS OF THE FAUBOURG SAINT ANTOINE AND THE SCYLLA

CHAPTER II—WHAT IS TO BE DONE IN THE ABYSS IF ONE DOES NOT CONVERSE

CHAPTER III—LIGHT AND SHADOW

CHAPTER IV—MINUS FIVE, PLUS ONE

CHAPTER V—THE HORIZON WHICH ONE BEHOLDS FROM THE SUMMIT OF A BARRICADE

CHAPTER VI—MARIUS HAGGARD, JAVERT LACONIC

CHAPTER VII—THE SITUATION BECOMES AGGRAVATED

CHAPTER VIII—THE ARTILLERY-MEN COMPEL PEOPLE TO TAKE THEM SERIOUSLY

CHAPTER IX—EMPLOYMENT OF THE OLD TALENTS OF A POACHER AND THAT

INFALLIBLE MARKSMANSHIP WHICH INFLUENCED THE CONDEMNATION OF 1796

CHAPTER X—DAWN

CHAPTER XI—THE SHOT WHICH MISSES NOTHING AND KILLS NO ONE

CHAPTER XII—DISORDER A PARTISAN OF ORDER

CHAPTER XIII—PASSING GLEAMS

CHAPTER XIV—WHEREIN WILL APPEAR THE NAME OF ENJOLRAS’ MISTRESS

CHAPTER XV—GAVROCHE OUTSIDE

CHAPTER XVI—HOW FROM A BROTHER ONE BECOMES A FATHER

CHAPTER XVII—MORTUUS PATER FILIUM MORITURUM EXPECTAT

CHAPTER XVIII—THE VULTURE BECOME PREY

CHAPTER XIX—JEAN VALJEAN TAKES HIS REVENGE

CHAPTER XX—THE DEAD ARE IN THE RIGHT AND THE LIVING ARE NOT IN THE

WRONG

CHAPTER XXI—THE HEROES

CHAPTER XXII—FOOT TO FOOT

CHAPTER XXIII—ORESTES FASTING AND PYLADES DRUNK

CHAPTER XXIV—PRISONER

BOOK SECOND—THE INTESTINE OF THE LEVIATHAN

CHAPTER I—THE LAND IMPOVERISHED BY THE SEA

CHAPTER II—ANCIENT HISTORY OF THE SEWER

CHAPTER III—BRUNESEAU

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER V—PRESENT PROGRESS

CHAPTER VI—FUTURE PROGRESS

BOOK THIRD—MUD BUT THE SOUL

CHAPTER I—THE SEWER AND ITS SURPRISES

CHAPTER II—EXPLANATION

CHAPTER III—THE “SPUN” MAN

CHAPTER IV—HE ALSO BEARS HIS CROSS

CHAPTER V—IN THE CASE OF SAND AS IN THAT OF WOMAN, THERE IS A FINENESS

WHICH IS TREACHEROUS

CHAPTER VI—THE FONTIS

CHAPTER VII—ONE SOMETIMES RUNS AGROUND WHEN ONE FANCIES THAT ONE IS

DISEMBARKING

CHAPTER VIII—THE TORN COAT-TAIL

CHAPTER IX—MARIUS PRODUCES ON SOME ONE WHO IS A JUDGE OF THE MATTER,

THE EFFECT OF BEING DEAD

CHAPTER X—RETURN OF THE SON WHO WAS PRODIGAL OF HIS LIFE

CHAPTER XI—CONCUSSION IN THE ABSOLUTE

CHAPTER XII—THE GRANDFATHER

BOOK FOURTH—JAVERT DERAILED

CHAPTER I

BOOK FIFTH—GRANDSON AND GRANDFATHER

CHAPTER I—IN WHICH THE TREE WITH THE ZINC PLASTER APPEARS AGAIN

CHAPTER II—MARIUS, EMERGING FROM CIVIL WAR, MAKES READY FOR DOMESTIC

WAR

CHAPTER III—MARIUS ATTACKED

CHAPTER IV—MADEMOISELLE GILLENORMAND ENDS BY NO LONGER THINKING IT A

BAD THING THAT M. FAUCHELEVENT SHOULD HAVE ENTERED WITH SOMETHING

UNDER HIS ARM

CHAPTER V—DEPOSIT YOUR MONEY IN A FOREST RATHER THAN WITH A NOTARY

CHAPTER VI—THE TWO OLD MEN DO EVERYTHING, EACH ONE AFTER HIS OWN

FASHION, TO RENDER COSETTE HAPPY

CHAPTER VII—THE EFFECTS OF DREAMS MINGLED WITH HAPPINESS

CHAPTER VIII—TWO MEN IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND

BOOK SIXTH—THE SLEEPLESS NIGHT

CHAPTER I—THE 16TH OF FEBRUARY, 1833

CHAPTER II—JEAN VALJEAN STILL WEARS HIS ARM IN A SLING

CHAPTER III—THE INSEPARABLE

CHAPTER IV—THE IMMORTAL LIVER

BOOK SEVENTH—THE LAST DRAUGHT FROM THE CUP

CHAPTER I—THE SEVENTH CIRCLE AND THE EIGHTH HEAVEN

CHAPTER II—THE OBSCURITIES WHICH A REVELATION CAN CONTAIN

BOOK EIGHTH—FADING AWAY OF THE TWILIGHT

CHAPTER I—THE LOWER CHAMBER

CHAPTER II—ANOTHER STEP BACKWARDS

CHAPTER III—THEY RECALL THE GARDEN OF THE RUE PLUMET

CHAPTER IV—ATTRACTION AND EXTINCTION

BOOK NINTH—SUPREME SHADOW, SUPREME DAWN

CHAPTER I—PITY FOR THE UNHAPPY, BUT INDULGENCE FOR THE HAPPY

CHAPTER II—LAST FLICKERINGS OF A LAMP WITHOUT OIL

CHAPTER III—A PEN IS HEAVY TO THE MAN WHO LIFTED THE FAUCHELEVENT’S

CART

CHAPTER IV—A BOTTLE OF INK WHICH ONLY SUCCEEDED IN WHITENING

CHAPTER V—A NIGHT BEHIND WHICH THERE IS DAY

CHAPTER VI—THE GRASS COVERS AND THE RAIN EFFACES

LETTER TO M. DAELLI

FOOTNOTES:

List of Illustrations

Bookshelf

Bookcover

Frontpapers

Frontispiece Volume One

Titlepage Volume One

Titlepage Verso

The Comforter

The Fall

Awakened

Cossette Sweeping

Candlesticks Into the Fire

Father Champmathieu on Trial

Frontispiece Volume Two

Titlepage Volume Two

The Ship Orion, an Accident

The Gorbeau Hovel

The Black Hunt

Javert on the Hunt

The Resurrection

Royalist Bank-note

Frontispiece Volume Three

Titlepage Volume Three

Little Gavroche

Friends of the A B C

Excellence of Misfortune

Rose in Misery

Red Hot Chisel

Snatched up a Paving Stone

Frontispiece Volume Four

Titlepage Volume Four

A Street Orator

Code Table

Succor from Below

Cosette With Letter

Slang

The Grandeurs of Despair

Frontispiece Volume Five

Titlepage Volume Five

Last Drop from the Cup

The Twilight Decline

Darkness

LES MISÉRABLES

PREFACE

So long as there shall exist, by virtue of law and custom, decrees of

damnation pronounced by society, artificially creating hells amid the

civilization of earth, and adding the element of human fate to divine

destiny; so long as the three great problems of the century—the

degradation of man through pauperism, the corruption of woman through

hunger, the crippling of children through lack of light—are unsolved;

so long as social asphyxia is possible in any part of the world;—in

other words, and with a still wider significance, so long as ignorance

and poverty exist on earth, books of the nature of Les Misérables

cannot fail to be of use.

HAUTEVILLE HOUSE, 1862.

VOLUME I

FANTINE

BOOK FIRST—A JUST MAN

CHAPTER I—M. MYRIEL

In 1815, M. Charles-François-Bienvenu Myriel was Bishop of D—— He was

an old man of about seventy-five years of age; he had occupied the see

of D—— since 1806.

Although this detail has no connection whatever with the real substance

of what we are about to relate, it will not be superfluous, if merely

for the sake of exactness in all points, to mention here the various

rumors and remarks which had been in circulation about him from the

very moment when he arrived in the diocese. True or false, that which

is said of men often occupies as important a place in their lives, and

above all in their destinies, as that which they do. M. Myriel was the

son of a councillor of the Parliament of Aix; hence he belonged to the

nobility of the bar. It was said that his father, destining him to be

the heir of his own post, had married him at a very early age, eighteen

or twenty, in accordance with a custom which is rather widely prevalent

in parliamentary families. In spite of this marriage, however, it was

said that Charles Myriel created a great deal of talk. He was well

formed, though rather short in stature, elegant, graceful, intelligent;

the whole of the first portion of his life had been devoted to the

world and to gallantry.

The Revolution came; events succeeded each other with precipitation;

the parliamentary families, decimated, pursued, hunted down, were

dispersed. M. Charles Myriel emigrated to Italy at the very beginning

of the Revolution. There his wife died of a malady of the chest, from

which she had long suffered. He had no children. What took place next

in the fate of M. Myriel? The ruin of the French society of the olden

days, the fall of his own family, the tragic spectacles of ’93, which

were, perhaps, even more alarming to the emigrants who viewed them from

a distance, with the magnifying powers of terror,—did these cause the

ideas of renunciation and solitude to germinate in him? Was he, in the

midst of these distractions, these affections which absorbed his life,

suddenly smitten with one of those mysterious and terrible blows which

sometimes overwhelm, by striking to his heart, a man whom public

catastrophes would not shake, by striking at his existence and his

fortune? No one could have told: all that was known was, that when he

returned from Italy he was a priest.

In 1804, M. Myriel was the Curé of B—— [Brignolles]. He was already

advanced in years, and lived in a very retired manner.

About the epoch of the coronation, some petty affair connected with his

curacy—just what, is not precisely known—took him to Paris. Among other

powerful persons to whom he went to solicit aid for his parishioners

was M. le Cardinal Fesch. One day, when the Emperor had come to visit

his uncle, the worthy Curé, who was waiting in the anteroom, found

himself present when His Majesty passed. Napoleon, on finding himself

observed with a certain curiosity by this old man, turned round and

said abruptly:—

“Who is this good man who is staring at me?”

“Sire,” said M. Myriel, “you are looking at a good man, and I at a

great man. Each of us can profit by it.”

That very evening, the Emperor asked the Cardinal the name of the Curé,

and some time afterwards M. Myriel was utterly astonished to learn that

he had been appointed Bishop of D——

What truth was there, after all, in the stories which were invented as

to the early portion of M. Myriel’s life? No one knew. Very few

families had been acquainted with the Myriel family before the

Revolution.

M. Myriel had to undergo the fate of every newcomer in a little town,

where there are many mouths which talk, and very few heads which think.

He was obliged to undergo it although he was a bishop, and because he

was a bishop. But after all, the rumors with which his name was

connected were rumors only,—noise, sayings, words; less than

words—\_palabres\_, as the energetic language of the South expresses it.

However that may be, after nine years of episcopal power and of

residence in D——, all the stories and subjects of conversation which

engross petty towns and petty people at the outset had fallen into

profound oblivion. No one would have dared to mention them; no one

would have dared to recall them.

M. Myriel had arrived at D—— accompanied by an elderly spinster,

Mademoiselle Baptistine, who was his sister, and ten years his junior.

Their only domestic was a female servant of the same age as

Mademoiselle Baptistine, and named Madame Magloire, who, after having

been \_the servant of M. le Curé\_, now assumed the double title of maid

to Mademoiselle and housekeeper to Monseigneur.

Mademoiselle Baptistine was a long, pale, thin, gentle creature; she

realized the ideal expressed by the word “respectable”; for it seems

that a woman must needs be a mother in order to be venerable. She had

never been pretty; her whole life, which had been nothing but a

succession of holy deeds, had finally conferred upon her a sort of

pallor and transparency; and as she advanced in years she had acquired

what may be called the beauty of goodness. What had been leanness in

her youth had become transparency in her maturity; and this diaphaneity

allowed the angel to be seen. She was a soul rather than a virgin. Her

person seemed made of a shadow; there was hardly sufficient body to

provide for sex; a little matter enclosing a light; large eyes forever

drooping;—a mere pretext for a soul’s remaining on the earth.

Madame Magloire was a little, fat, white old woman, corpulent and

bustling; always out of breath,—in the first place, because of her

activity, and in the next, because of her asthma.

On his arrival, M. Myriel was installed in the episcopal palace with

the honors required by the Imperial decrees, which class a bishop

immediately after a major-general. The mayor and the president paid the

first call on him, and he, in turn, paid the first call on the general

and the prefect.

The installation over, the town waited to see its bishop at work.

CHAPTER II—M. MYRIEL BECOMES M. WELCOME

The episcopal palace of D—— adjoins the hospital.

The episcopal palace was a huge and beautiful house, built of stone at

the beginning of the last century by M. Henri Puget, Doctor of Theology

of the Faculty of Paris, Abbé of Simore, who had been Bishop of D—— in

1712. This palace was a genuine seignorial residence. Everything about

it had a grand air,—the apartments of the Bishop, the drawing-rooms,

the chambers, the principal courtyard, which was very large, with walks

encircling it under arcades in the old Florentine fashion, and gardens

planted with magnificent trees. In the dining-room, a long and superb

gallery which was situated on the ground floor and opened on the

gardens, M. Henri Puget had entertained in state, on July 29, 1714, My

Lords Charles Brûlart de Genlis, archbishop; Prince d’Embrun; Antoine

de Mesgrigny, the capuchin, Bishop of Grasse; Philippe de Vendôme,

Grand Prior of France, Abbé of Saint Honoré de Lérins; François de

Berton de Crillon, bishop, Baron de Vence; César de Sabran de

Forcalquier, bishop, Seignor of Glandève; and Jean Soanen, Priest of

the Oratory, preacher in ordinary to the king, bishop, Seignor of

Senez. The portraits of these seven reverend personages decorated this

apartment; and this memorable date, the 29th of July, 1714, was there

engraved in letters of gold on a table of white marble.

The hospital was a low and narrow building of a single story, with a

small garden.

Three days after his arrival, the Bishop visited the hospital. The

visit ended, he had the director requested to be so good as to come to

his house.

“Monsieur the director of the hospital,” said he to him, “how many sick

people have you at the present moment?”

“Twenty-six, Monseigneur.”

“That was the number which I counted,” said the Bishop.

“The beds,” pursued the director, “are very much crowded against each

other.”

“That is what I observed.”

“The halls are nothing but rooms, and it is with difficulty that the

air can be changed in them.”

“So it seems to me.”

“And then, when there is a ray of sun, the garden is very small for the

convalescents.”

“That was what I said to myself.”

“In case of epidemics,—we have had the typhus fever this year; we had

the sweating sickness two years ago, and a hundred patients at

times,—we know not what to do.”

“That is the thought which occurred to me.”

“What would you have, Monseigneur?” said the director. “One must resign

one’s self.”

This conversation took place in the gallery dining-room on the ground

floor.

The Bishop remained silent for a moment; then he turned abruptly to the

director of the hospital.

“Monsieur,” said he, “how many beds do you think this hall alone would

hold?”

“Monseigneur’s dining-room?” exclaimed the stupefied director.

The Bishop cast a glance round the apartment, and seemed to be taking

measures and calculations with his eyes.

“It would hold full twenty beds,” said he, as though speaking to

himself. Then, raising his voice:—

“Hold, Monsieur the director of the hospital, I will tell you

something. There is evidently a mistake here. There are thirty-six of

you, in five or six small rooms. There are three of us here, and we

have room for sixty. There is some mistake, I tell you; you have my

house, and I have yours. Give me back my house; you are at home here.”

On the following day the thirty-six patients were installed in the

Bishop’s palace, and the Bishop was settled in the hospital.

M. Myriel had no property, his family having been ruined by the

Revolution. His sister was in receipt of a yearly income of five

hundred francs, which sufficed for her personal wants at the vicarage.

M. Myriel received from the State, in his quality of bishop, a salary

of fifteen thousand francs. On the very day when he took up his abode

in the hospital, M. Myriel settled on the disposition of this sum once

for all, in the following manner. We transcribe here a note made by his

own hand:—

NOTE ON THE REGULATION OF MY HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES.

For the little seminary . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 1,500 livres

Society of the mission . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 100 ”

For the Lazarists of Montdidier . . . . . . . . . . 100 ”

Seminary for foreign missions in Paris . . . . . . 200 ”

Congregation of the Holy Spirit . . . . . . . . . . 150 ”

Religious establishments of the Holy Land . . . . . 100 ”

Charitable maternity societies . . . . . . . . . . 300 ”

Extra, for that of Arles . . . . . . . . . . . . . 50 ”

Work for the amelioration of prisons . . . . . . . 400 ”

Work for the relief and delivery of prisoners . . . 500 ”

To liberate fathers of families incarcerated for debt 1,000 ”

Addition to the salary of the poor teachers of the

diocese . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 2,000 ”

Public granary of the Hautes-Alpes . . . . . . . . 100 ”

Congregation of the ladies of D——, of Manosque, and of

Sisteron, for the gratuitous instruction of poor

girls . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 1,500 ”

For the poor . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 6,000 ”

My personal expenses . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 1,000 ”

———

Total . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 15,000 ”

M. Myriel made no change in this arrangement during the entire period

that he occupied the see of D—— As has been seen, he called it

\_regulating his household expenses\_.

This arrangement was accepted with absolute submission by Mademoiselle

Baptistine. This holy woman regarded Monseigneur of D—— as at one and

the same time her brother and her bishop, her friend according to the

flesh and her superior according to the Church. She simply loved and

venerated him. When he spoke, she bowed; when he acted, she yielded her

adherence. Their only servant, Madame Magloire, grumbled a little. It

will be observed that Monsieur the Bishop had reserved for himself only

one thousand livres, which, added to the pension of Mademoiselle

Baptistine, made fifteen hundred francs a year. On these fifteen

hundred francs these two old women and the old man subsisted.

And when a village curate came to D——, the Bishop still found means to

entertain him, thanks to the severe economy of Madame Magloire, and to

the intelligent administration of Mademoiselle Baptistine.

One day, after he had been in D—— about three months, the Bishop said:—

“And still I am quite cramped with it all!”

“I should think so!” exclaimed Madame Magloire. “Monseigneur has not

even claimed the allowance which the department owes him for the

expense of his carriage in town, and for his journeys about the

diocese. It was customary for bishops in former days.”

“Hold!” cried the Bishop, “you are quite right, Madame Magloire.”

And he made his demand.

Some time afterwards the General Council took this demand under

consideration, and voted him an annual sum of three thousand francs,

under this heading: \_Allowance to M. the Bishop for expenses of

carriage, expenses of posting, and expenses of pastoral visits.\_

This provoked a great outcry among the local burgesses; and a senator

of the Empire, a former member of the Council of the Five Hundred which

favored the 18 Brumaire, and who was provided with a magnificent

senatorial office in the vicinity of the town of D——, wrote to M. Bigot

de Préameneu, the minister of public worship, a very angry and

confidential note on the subject, from which we extract these authentic

lines:—

“Expenses of carriage? What can be done with it in a town of less than

four thousand inhabitants? Expenses of journeys? What is the use of

these trips, in the first place? Next, how can the posting be

accomplished in these mountainous parts? There are no roads. No one

travels otherwise than on horseback. Even the bridge between Durance

and Château-Arnoux can barely support ox-teams. These priests are all

thus, greedy and avaricious. This man played the good priest when he

first came. Now he does like the rest; he must have a carriage and a

posting-chaise, he must have luxuries, like the bishops of the olden

days. Oh, all this priesthood! Things will not go well, M. le Comte,

until the Emperor has freed us from these black-capped rascals. Down

with the Pope! [Matters were getting embroiled with Rome.] For my part,

I am for Cæsar alone.” Etc., etc.

On the other hand, this affair afforded great delight to Madame

Magloire. “Good,” said she to Mademoiselle Baptistine; “Monseigneur

began with other people, but he has had to wind up with himself, after

all. He has regulated all his charities. Now here are three thousand

francs for us! At last!”

That same evening the Bishop wrote out and handed to his sister a

memorandum conceived in the following terms:—

EXPENSES OF CARRIAGE AND CIRCUIT.

For furnishing meat soup to the patients in the hospital. 1,500 livres

For the maternity charitable society of Aix . . . . . . . 250 ”

For the maternity charitable society of Draguignan . . . 250 ”

For foundlings . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 500 ”

For orphans . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 500 ”

——-

Total . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 3,000 ”

Such was M. Myriel’s budget.

As for the chance episcopal perquisites, the fees for marriage bans,

dispensations, private baptisms, sermons, benedictions, of churches or

chapels, marriages, etc., the Bishop levied them on the wealthy with

all the more asperity, since he bestowed them on the needy.

After a time, offerings of money flowed in. Those who had and those who

lacked knocked at M. Myriel’s door,—the latter in search of the alms

which the former came to deposit. In less than a year the Bishop had

become the treasurer of all benevolence and the cashier of all those in

distress. Considerable sums of money passed through his hands, but

nothing could induce him to make any change whatever in his mode of

life, or add anything superfluous to his bare necessities.

Far from it. As there is always more wretchedness below than there is

brotherhood above, all was given away, so to speak, before it was

received. It was like water on dry soil; no matter how much money he

received, he never had any. Then he stripped himself.

The usage being that bishops shall announce their baptismal names at

the head of their charges and their pastoral letters, the poor people

of the country-side had selected, with a sort of affectionate instinct,

among the names and prenomens of their bishop, that which had a meaning

for them; and they never called him anything except Monseigneur

Bienvenu [Welcome]. We will follow their example, and will also call

him thus when we have occasion to name him. Moreover, this appellation

pleased him.

“I like that name,” said he. “Bienvenu makes up for the Monseigneur.”

We do not claim that the portrait herewith presented is probable; we

confine ourselves to stating that it resembles the original.

CHAPTER III—A HARD BISHOPRIC FOR A GOOD BISHOP

The Bishop did not omit his pastoral visits because he had converted

his carriage into alms. The diocese of D—— is a fatiguing one. There

are very few plains and a great many mountains; hardly any roads, as we

have just seen; thirty-two curacies, forty-one vicarships, and two

hundred and eighty-five auxiliary chapels. To visit all these is quite

a task.

The Bishop managed to do it. He went on foot when it was in the

neighborhood, in a tilted spring-cart when it was on the plain, and on

a donkey in the mountains. The two old women accompanied him. When the

trip was too hard for them, he went alone.

One day he arrived at Senez, which is an ancient episcopal city. He was

mounted on an ass. His purse, which was very dry at that moment, did

not permit him any other equipage. The mayor of the town came to

receive him at the gate of the town, and watched him dismount from his

ass, with scandalized eyes. Some of the citizens were laughing around

him. “Monsieur the Mayor,” said the Bishop, “and Messieurs Citizens, I

perceive that I shock you. You think it very arrogant in a poor priest

to ride an animal which was used by Jesus Christ. I have done so from

necessity, I assure you, and not from vanity.”

In the course of these trips he was kind and indulgent, and talked

rather than preached. He never went far in search of his arguments and

his examples. He quoted to the inhabitants of one district the example

of a neighboring district. In the cantons where they were harsh to the

poor, he said: “Look at the people of Briançon! They have conferred on

the poor, on widows and orphans, the right to have their meadows mown

three days in advance of every one else. They rebuild their houses for

them gratuitously when they are ruined. Therefore it is a country which

is blessed by God. For a whole century, there has not been a single

murderer among them.”

In villages which were greedy for profit and harvest, he said: “Look at

the people of Embrun! If, at the harvest season, the father of a family

has his son away on service in the army, and his daughters at service

in the town, and if he is ill and incapacitated, the curé recommends

him to the prayers of the congregation; and on Sunday, after the mass,

all the inhabitants of the village—men, women, and children—go to the

poor man’s field and do his harvesting for him, and carry his straw and

his grain to his granary.” To families divided by questions of money

and inheritance he said: “Look at the mountaineers of Devolny, a

country so wild that the nightingale is not heard there once in fifty

years. Well, when the father of a family dies, the boys go off to seek

their fortunes, leaving the property to the girls, so that they may

find husbands.” To the cantons which had a taste for lawsuits, and

where the farmers ruined themselves in stamped paper, he said: “Look at

those good peasants in the valley of Queyras! There are three thousand

souls of them. Mon Dieu! it is like a little republic. Neither judge

nor bailiff is known there. The mayor does everything. He allots the

imposts, taxes each person conscientiously, judges quarrels for

nothing, divides inheritances without charge, pronounces sentences

gratuitously; and he is obeyed, because he is a just man among simple

men.” To villages where he found no schoolmaster, he quoted once more

the people of Queyras: “Do you know how they manage?” he said. “Since a

little country of a dozen or fifteen hearths cannot always support a

teacher, they have schoolmasters who are paid by the whole valley, who

make the round of the villages, spending a week in this one, ten days

in that, and instruct them. These teachers go to the fairs. I have seen

them there. They are to be recognized by the quill pens which they wear

in the cord of their hat. Those who teach reading only have one pen;

those who teach reading and reckoning have two pens; those who teach

reading, reckoning, and Latin have three pens. But what a disgrace to

be ignorant! Do like the people of Queyras!”

Thus he discoursed gravely and paternally; in default of examples, he

invented parables, going directly to the point, with few phrases and

many images, which characteristic formed the real eloquence of Jesus

Christ. And being convinced himself, he was persuasive.

CHAPTER IV—WORKS CORRESPONDING TO WORDS

His conversation was gay and affable. He put himself on a level with

the two old women who had passed their lives beside him. When he

laughed, it was the laugh of a schoolboy. Madame Magloire liked to call

him Your Grace [\_Votre Grandeur\_]. One day he rose from his armchair,

and went to his library in search of a book. This book was on one of

the upper shelves. As the bishop was rather short of stature, he could

not reach it. “Madame Magloire,” said he, “fetch me a chair. My

greatness [\_grandeur\_] does not reach as far as that shelf.”

One of his distant relatives, Madame la Comtesse de Lô, rarely allowed

an opportunity to escape of enumerating, in his presence, what she

designated as “the expectations” of her three sons. She had numerous

relatives, who were very old and near to death, and of whom her sons

were the natural heirs. The youngest of the three was to receive from a

grandaunt a good hundred thousand livres of income; the second was the

heir by entail to the title of the Duke, his uncle; the eldest was to

succeed to the peerage of his grandfather. The Bishop was accustomed to

listen in silence to these innocent and pardonable maternal boasts. On

one occasion, however, he appeared to be more thoughtful than usual,

while Madame de Lô was relating once again the details of all these

inheritances and all these “expectations.” She interrupted herself

impatiently: “Mon Dieu, cousin! What are you thinking about?” “I am

thinking,” replied the Bishop, “of a singular remark, which is to be

found, I believe, in St. Augustine,—‘Place your hopes in the man from

whom you do not inherit.’”

At another time, on receiving a notification of the decease of a

gentleman of the country-side, wherein not only the dignities of the

dead man, but also the feudal and noble qualifications of all his

relatives, spread over an entire page: “What a stout back Death has!”

he exclaimed. “What a strange burden of titles is cheerfully imposed on

him, and how much wit must men have, in order thus to press the tomb

into the service of vanity!”

He was gifted, on occasion, with a gentle raillery, which almost always

concealed a serious meaning. In the course of one Lent, a youthful

vicar came to D——, and preached in the cathedral. He was tolerably

eloquent. The subject of his sermon was charity. He urged the rich to

give to the poor, in order to avoid hell, which he depicted in the most

frightful manner of which he was capable, and to win paradise, which he

represented as charming and desirable. Among the audience there was a

wealthy retired merchant, who was somewhat of a usurer, named M.

Géborand, who had amassed two millions in the manufacture of coarse

cloth, serges, and woollen galloons. Never in his whole life had M.

Géborand bestowed alms on any poor wretch. After the delivery of that

sermon, it was observed that he gave a sou every Sunday to the poor old

beggar-women at the door of the cathedral. There were six of them to

share it. One day the Bishop caught sight of him in the act of

bestowing this charity, and said to his sister, with a smile, “There is

M. Géborand purchasing paradise for a sou.”

When it was a question of charity, he was not to be rebuffed even by a

refusal, and on such occasions he gave utterance to remarks which

induced reflection. Once he was begging for the poor in a drawing-room

of the town; there was present the Marquis de Champtercier, a wealthy

and avaricious old man, who contrived to be, at one and the same time,

an ultra-royalist and an ultra-Voltairian. This variety of man has

actually existed. When the Bishop came to him, he touched his arm,

\_“You must give me something, M. le Marquis.”\_ The Marquis turned round

and answered dryly, \_“I have poor people of my own, Monseigneur.” “Give

them to me,”\_ replied the Bishop.

One day he preached the following sermon in the cathedral:—

“My very dear brethren, my good friends, there are thirteen hundred and

twenty thousand peasants’ dwellings in France which have but three

openings; eighteen hundred and seventeen thousand hovels which have but

two openings, the door and one window; and three hundred and forty-six

thousand cabins besides which have but one opening, the door. And this

arises from a thing which is called the tax on doors and windows. Just

put poor families, old women and little children, in those buildings,

and behold the fevers and maladies which result! Alas! God gives air to

men; the law sells it to them. I do not blame the law, but I bless God.

In the department of the Isère, in the Var, in the two departments of

the Alpes, the Hautes, and the Basses, the peasants have not even

wheelbarrows; they transport their manure on the backs of men; they

have no candles, and they burn resinous sticks, and bits of rope dipped

in pitch. That is the state of affairs throughout the whole of the

hilly country of Dauphiné. They make bread for six months at one time;

they bake it with dried cow-dung. In the winter they break this bread

up with an axe, and they soak it for twenty-four hours, in order to

render it eatable. My brethren, have pity! behold the suffering on all

sides of you!”

Born a Provençal, he easily familiarized himself with the dialect of

the south. He said, \_“En bé! moussu, sés sagé?”\_ as in lower Languedoc;

\_“Onté anaras passa?”\_ as in the Basses-Alpes; \_“Puerte un bouen moutu

embe un bouen fromage grase,”\_ as in upper Dauphiné. This pleased the

people extremely, and contributed not a little to win him access to all

spirits. He was perfectly at home in the thatched cottage and in the

mountains. He understood how to say the grandest things in the most

vulgar of idioms. As he spoke all tongues, he entered into all hearts.

Moreover, he was the same towards people of the world and towards the

lower classes. He condemned nothing in haste and without taking

circumstances into account. He said, “Examine the road over which the

fault has passed.”

Being, as he described himself with a smile, an \_ex-sinner\_, he had

none of the asperities of austerity, and he professed, with a good deal

of distinctness, and without the frown of the ferociously virtuous, a

doctrine which may be summed up as follows:—

“Man has upon him his flesh, which is at once his burden and his

temptation. He drags it with him and yields to it. He must watch it,

check it, repress it, and obey it only at the last extremity. There may

be some fault even in this obedience; but the fault thus committed is

venial; it is a fall, but a fall on the knees which may terminate in

prayer.

“To be a saint is the exception; to be an upright man is the rule. Err,

fall, sin if you will, but be upright.

“The least possible sin is the law of man. No sin at all is the dream

of the angel. All which is terrestrial is subject to sin. Sin is a

gravitation.”

When he saw everyone exclaiming very loudly, and growing angry very

quickly, “Oh! oh!” he said, with a smile; “to all appearance, this is a

great crime which all the world commits. These are hypocrisies which

have taken fright, and are in haste to make protest and to put

themselves under shelter.”

He was indulgent towards women and poor people, on whom the burden of

human society rest. He said, “The faults of women, of children, of the

feeble, the indigent, and the ignorant, are the fault of the husbands,

the fathers, the masters, the strong, the rich, and the wise.”

He said, moreover, “Teach those who are ignorant as many things as

possible; society is culpable, in that it does not afford instruction

gratis; it is responsible for the night which it produces. This soul is

full of shadow; sin is therein committed. The guilty one is not the

person who has committed the sin, but the person who has created the

shadow.”

It will be perceived that he had a peculiar manner of his own of

judging things: I suspect that he obtained it from the Gospel.

One day he heard a criminal case, which was in preparation and on the

point of trial, discussed in a drawing-room. A wretched man, being at

the end of his resources, had coined counterfeit money, out of love for

a woman, and for the child which he had had by her. Counterfeiting was

still punishable with death at that epoch. The woman had been arrested

in the act of passing the first false piece made by the man. She was

held, but there were no proofs except against her. She alone could

accuse her lover, and destroy him by her confession. She denied; they

insisted. She persisted in her denial. Thereupon an idea occurred to

the attorney for the crown. He invented an infidelity on the part of

the lover, and succeeded, by means of fragments of letters cunningly

presented, in persuading the unfortunate woman that she had a rival,

and that the man was deceiving her. Thereupon, exasperated by jealousy,

she denounced her lover, confessed all, proved all.

The man was ruined. He was shortly to be tried at Aix with his

accomplice. They were relating the matter, and each one was expressing

enthusiasm over the cleverness of the magistrate. By bringing jealousy

into play, he had caused the truth to burst forth in wrath, he had

educed the justice of revenge. The Bishop listened to all this in

silence. When they had finished, he inquired,—

“Where are this man and woman to be tried?”

“At the Court of Assizes.”

He went on, “And where will the advocate of the crown be tried?”

A tragic event occurred at D—— A man was condemned to death for murder.

He was a wretched fellow, not exactly educated, not exactly ignorant,

who had been a mountebank at fairs, and a writer for the public. The

town took a great interest in the trial. On the eve of the day fixed

for the execution of the condemned man, the chaplain of the prison fell

ill. A priest was needed to attend the criminal in his last moments.

They sent for the curé. It seems that he refused to come, saying, “That

is no affair of mine. I have nothing to do with that unpleasant task,

and with that mountebank: I, too, am ill; and besides, it is not my

place.” This reply was reported to the Bishop, who said, \_“Monsieur le

Curé is right: it is not his place; it is mine.”\_

He went instantly to the prison, descended to the cell of the

“mountebank,” called him by name, took him by the hand, and spoke to

him. He passed the entire day with him, forgetful of food and sleep,

praying to God for the soul of the condemned man, and praying the

condemned man for his own. He told him the best truths, which are also

the most simple. He was father, brother, friend; he was bishop only to

bless. He taught him everything, encouraged and consoled him. The man

was on the point of dying in despair. Death was an abyss to him. As he

stood trembling on its mournful brink, he recoiled with horror. He was

not sufficiently ignorant to be absolutely indifferent. His

condemnation, which had been a profound shock, had, in a manner, broken

through, here and there, that wall which separates us from the mystery

of things, and which we call life. He gazed incessantly beyond this

world through these fatal breaches, and beheld only darkness. The

Bishop made him see light.

On the following day, when they came to fetch the unhappy wretch, the

Bishop was still there. He followed him, and exhibited himself to the

eyes of the crowd in his purple camail and with his episcopal cross

upon his neck, side by side with the criminal bound with cords.

He mounted the tumbril with him, he mounted the scaffold with him. The

sufferer, who had been so gloomy and cast down on the preceding day,

was radiant. He felt that his soul was reconciled, and he hoped in God.

The Bishop embraced him, and at the moment when the knife was about to

fall, he said to him: “God raises from the dead him whom man slays; he

whom his brothers have rejected finds his Father once more. Pray,

believe, enter into life: the Father is there.” When he descended from

the scaffold, there was something in his look which made the people

draw aside to let him pass. They did not know which was most worthy of

admiration, his pallor or his serenity. On his return to the humble

dwelling, which he designated, with a smile, as \_his palace\_, he said

to his sister, \_“I have just officiated pontifically.”\_

Since the most sublime things are often those which are the least

understood, there were people in the town who said, when commenting on

this conduct of the Bishop, \_“It is affectation.”\_

This, however, was a remark which was confined to the drawing-rooms.

The populace, which perceives no jest in holy deeds, was touched, and

admired him.

As for the Bishop, it was a shock to him to have beheld the guillotine,

and it was a long time before he recovered from it.

In fact, when the scaffold is there, all erected and prepared, it has

something about it which produces hallucination. One may feel a certain

indifference to the death penalty, one may refrain from pronouncing

upon it, from saying yes or no, so long as one has not seen a

guillotine with one’s own eyes: but if one encounters one of them, the

shock is violent; one is forced to decide, and to take part for or

against. Some admire it, like de Maistre; others execrate it, like

Beccaria. The guillotine is the concretion of the law; it is called

\_vindicate\_; it is not neutral, and it does not permit you to remain

neutral. He who sees it shivers with the most mysterious of shivers.

All social problems erect their interrogation point around this

chopping-knife. The scaffold is a vision. The scaffold is not a piece

of carpentry; the scaffold is not a machine; the scaffold is not an

inert bit of mechanism constructed of wood, iron and cords.

It seems as though it were a being, possessed of I know not what sombre

initiative; one would say that this piece of carpenter’s work saw, that

this machine heard, that this mechanism understood, that this wood,

this iron, and these cords were possessed of will. In the frightful

meditation into which its presence casts the soul the scaffold appears

in terrible guise, and as though taking part in what is going on. The

scaffold is the accomplice of the executioner; it devours, it eats

flesh, it drinks blood; the scaffold is a sort of monster fabricated by

the judge and the carpenter, a spectre which seems to live with a

horrible vitality composed of all the death which it has inflicted.

Therefore, the impression was terrible and profound; on the day

following the execution, and on many succeeding days, the Bishop

appeared to be crushed. The almost violent serenity of the funereal

moment had disappeared; the phantom of social justice tormented him.

He, who generally returned from all his deeds with a radiant

satisfaction, seemed to be reproaching himself. At times he talked to

himself, and stammered lugubrious monologues in a low voice. This is

one which his sister overheard one evening and preserved: “I did not

think that it was so monstrous. It is wrong to become absorbed in the

divine law to such a degree as not to perceive human law. Death belongs

to God alone. By what right do men touch that unknown thing?”

In course of time these impressions weakened and probably vanished.

Nevertheless, it was observed that the Bishop thenceforth avoided

passing the place of execution.

M. Myriel could be summoned at any hour to the bedside of the sick and

dying. He did not ignore the fact that therein lay his greatest duty

and his greatest labor. Widowed and orphaned families had no need to

summon him; he came of his own accord. He understood how to sit down

and hold his peace for long hours beside the man who had lost the wife

of his love, of the mother who had lost her child. As he knew the

moment for silence he knew also the moment for speech. Oh, admirable

consoler! He sought not to efface sorrow by forgetfulness, but to

magnify and dignify it by hope. He said:—

“Have a care of the manner in which you turn towards the dead. Think

not of that which perishes. Gaze steadily. You will perceive the living

light of your well-beloved dead in the depths of heaven.” He knew that

faith is wholesome. He sought to counsel and calm the despairing man,

by pointing out to him the resigned man, and to transform the grief

which gazes upon a grave by showing him the grief which fixes its gaze

upon a star.

CHAPTER V—MONSEIGNEUR BIENVENU MADE HIS CASSOCKS LAST TOO LONG

The private life of M. Myriel was filled with the same thoughts as his

public life. The voluntary poverty in which the Bishop of D—— lived,

would have been a solemn and charming sight for any one who could have

viewed it close at hand.

Like all old men, and like the majority of thinkers, he slept little.

This brief slumber was profound. In the morning he meditated for an

hour, then he said his mass, either at the cathedral or in his own

house. His mass said, he broke his fast on rye bread dipped in the milk

of his own cows. Then he set to work.

A Bishop is a very busy man: he must every day receive the secretary of

the bishopric, who is generally a canon, and nearly every day his

vicars-general. He has congregations to reprove, privileges to grant, a

whole ecclesiastical library to examine,—prayer-books, diocesan

catechisms, books of hours, etc.,—charges to write, sermons to

authorize, curés and mayors to reconcile, a clerical correspondence, an

administrative correspondence; on one side the State, on the other the

Holy See; and a thousand matters of business.

What time was left to him, after these thousand details of business,

and his offices and his breviary, he bestowed first on the necessitous,

the sick, and the afflicted; the time which was left to him from the

afflicted, the sick, and the necessitous, he devoted to work. Sometimes

he dug in his garden; again, he read or wrote. He had but one word for

both these kinds of toil; he called them \_gardening\_. “The mind is a

garden,” said he.

Towards midday, when the weather was fine, he went forth and took a

stroll in the country or in town, often entering lowly dwellings. He

was seen walking alone, buried in his own thoughts, his eyes cast down,

supporting himself on his long cane, clad in his wadded purple garment

of silk, which was very warm, wearing purple stockings inside his

coarse shoes, and surmounted by a flat hat which allowed three golden

tassels of large bullion to droop from its three points.

It was a perfect festival wherever he appeared. One would have said

that his presence had something warming and luminous about it. The

children and the old people came out to the doorsteps for the Bishop as

for the sun. He bestowed his blessing, and they blessed him. They

pointed out his house to any one who was in need of anything.

[Illustration: The Comforter]

Here and there he halted, accosted the little boys and girls, and

smiled upon the mothers. He visited the poor so long as he had any

money; when he no longer had any, he visited the rich.

As he made his cassocks last a long while, and did not wish to have it

noticed, he never went out in the town without his wadded purple cloak.

This inconvenienced him somewhat in summer.

On his return, he dined. The dinner resembled his breakfast.

At half-past eight in the evening he supped with his sister, Madame

Magloire standing behind them and serving them at table. Nothing could

be more frugal than this repast. If, however, the Bishop had one of his

curés to supper, Madame Magloire took advantage of the opportunity to

serve Monseigneur with some excellent fish from the lake, or with some

fine game from the mountains. Every curé furnished the pretext for a

good meal: the Bishop did not interfere. With that exception, his

ordinary diet consisted only of vegetables boiled in water, and oil

soup. Thus it was said in the town, \_when the Bishop does not indulge

in the cheer of a curé, he indulges in the cheer of a trappist\_.

After supper he conversed for half an hour with Mademoiselle Baptistine

and Madame Magloire; then he retired to his own room and set to

writing, sometimes on loose sheets, and again on the margin of some

folio. He was a man of letters and rather learned. He left behind him

five or six very curious manuscripts; among others, a dissertation on

this verse in Genesis, \_In the beginning, the spirit of God floated

upon the waters\_. With this verse he compares three texts: the Arabic

verse which says, \_The winds of God blew;\_ Flavius Josephus who says,

\_A wind from above was precipitated upon the earth;\_ and finally, the

Chaldaic paraphrase of Onkelos, which renders it, \_A wind coming from

God blew upon the face of the waters\_. In another dissertation, he

examines the theological works of Hugo, Bishop of Ptolemaïs,

great-grand-uncle to the writer of this book, and establishes the fact,

that to this bishop must be attributed the divers little works

published during the last century, under the pseudonym of Barleycourt.

Sometimes, in the midst of his reading, no matter what the book might

be which he had in his hand, he would suddenly fall into a profound

meditation, whence he only emerged to write a few lines on the pages of

the volume itself. These lines have often no connection whatever with

the book which contains them. We now have under our eyes a note written

by him on the margin of a quarto entitled \_Correspondence of Lord

Germain with Generals Clinton, Cornwallis, and the Admirals on the

American station. Versailles, Poinçot, book-seller; and Paris, Pissot,

bookseller, Quai des Augustins.\_

Here is the note:—

“Oh, you who are!

“Ecclesiastes calls you the All-powerful; the Maccabees call you the

Creator; the Epistle to the Ephesians calls you liberty; Baruch calls

you Immensity; the Psalms call you Wisdom and Truth; John calls you

Light; the Books of Kings call you Lord; Exodus calls you Providence;

Leviticus, Sanctity; Esdras, Justice; the creation calls you God; man

calls you Father; but Solomon calls you Compassion, and that is the

most beautiful of all your names.”

Toward nine o’clock in the evening the two women retired and betook

themselves to their chambers on the first floor, leaving him alone

until morning on the ground floor.

It is necessary that we should, in this place, give an exact idea of

the dwelling of the Bishop of D——

CHAPTER VI—WHO GUARDED HIS HOUSE FOR HIM

The house in which he lived consisted, as we have said, of a ground

floor, and one story above; three rooms on the ground floor, three

chambers on the first, and an attic above. Behind the house was a

garden, a quarter of an acre in extent. The two women occupied the

first floor; the Bishop was lodged below. The first room, opening on

the street, served him as dining-room, the second was his bedroom, and

the third his oratory. There was no exit possible from this oratory,

except by passing through the bedroom, nor from the bedroom, without

passing through the dining-room. At the end of the suite, in the

oratory, there was a detached alcove with a bed, for use in cases of

hospitality. The Bishop offered this bed to country curates whom

business or the requirements of their parishes brought to D——

The pharmacy of the hospital, a small building which had been added to

the house, and abutted on the garden, had been transformed into a

kitchen and cellar. In addition to this, there was in the garden a

stable, which had formerly been the kitchen of the hospital, and in

which the Bishop kept two cows. No matter what the quantity of milk

they gave, he invariably sent half of it every morning to the sick

people in the hospital.

\_“I am paying my tithes,”\_ he said.

His bedroom was tolerably large, and rather difficult to warm in bad

weather. As wood is extremely dear at D——, he hit upon the idea of

having a compartment of boards constructed in the cow-shed. Here he

passed his evenings during seasons of severe cold: he called it his

\_winter salon\_.

In this winter salon, as in the dining-room, there was no other

furniture than a square table in white wood, and four straw-seated

chairs. In addition to this the dining-room was ornamented with an

antique sideboard, painted pink, in water colors. Out of a similar

sideboard, properly draped with white napery and imitation lace, the

Bishop had constructed the altar which decorated his oratory.

His wealthy penitents and the sainted women of D—— had more than once

assessed themselves to raise the money for a new altar for

Monseigneur’s oratory; on each occasion he had taken the money and had

given it to the poor. “The most beautiful of altars,” he said, “is the

soul of an unhappy creature consoled and thanking God.”

In his oratory there were two straw prie-Dieu, and there was an

armchair, also in straw, in his bedroom. When, by chance, he received

seven or eight persons at one time, the prefect, or the general, or the

staff of the regiment in garrison, or several pupils from the little

seminary, the chairs had to be fetched from the winter salon in the

stable, the prie-Dieu from the oratory, and the armchair from the

bedroom: in this way as many as eleven chairs could be collected for

the visitors. A room was dismantled for each new guest.

It sometimes happened that there were twelve in the party; the Bishop

then relieved the embarrassment of the situation by standing in front

of the chimney if it was winter, or by strolling in the garden if it

was summer.

There was still another chair in the detached alcove, but the straw was

half gone from it, and it had but three legs, so that it was of service

only when propped against the wall. Mademoiselle Baptistine had also in

her own room a very large easy-chair of wood, which had formerly been

gilded, and which was covered with flowered pekin; but they had been

obliged to hoist this bergère up to the first story through the window,

as the staircase was too narrow; it could not, therefore, be reckoned

among the possibilities in the way of furniture.

Mademoiselle Baptistine’s ambition had been to be able to purchase a

set of drawing-room furniture in yellow Utrecht velvet, stamped with a

rose pattern, and with mahogany in swan’s neck style, with a sofa. But

this would have cost five hundred francs at least, and in view of the

fact that she had only been able to lay by forty-two francs and ten

sous for this purpose in the course of five years, she had ended by

renouncing the idea. However, who is there who has attained his ideal?

Nothing is more easy to present to the imagination than the Bishop’s

bedchamber. A glazed door opened on the garden; opposite this was the

bed,—a hospital bed of iron, with a canopy of green serge; in the

shadow of the bed, behind a curtain, were the utensils of the toilet,

which still betrayed the elegant habits of the man of the world: there

were two doors, one near the chimney, opening into the oratory; the

other near the bookcase, opening into the dining-room. The bookcase was

a large cupboard with glass doors filled with books; the chimney was of

wood painted to represent marble, and habitually without fire. In the

chimney stood a pair of firedogs of iron, ornamented above with two

garlanded vases, and flutings which had formerly been silvered with

silver leaf, which was a sort of episcopal luxury; above the

chimney-piece hung a crucifix of copper, with the silver worn off,

fixed on a background of threadbare velvet in a wooden frame from which

the gilding had fallen; near the glass door a large table with an

inkstand, loaded with a confusion of papers and with huge volumes;

before the table an armchair of straw; in front of the bed a prie-Dieu,

borrowed from the oratory.

Two portraits in oval frames were fastened to the wall on each side of

the bed. Small gilt inscriptions on the plain surface of the cloth at

the side of these figures indicated that the portraits represented, one

the Abbé of Chaliot, bishop of Saint Claude; the other, the Abbé

Tourteau, vicar-general of Agde, abbé of Grand-Champ, order of Cîteaux,

diocese of Chartres. When the Bishop succeeded to this apartment, after

the hospital patients, he had found these portraits there, and had left

them. They were priests, and probably donors—two reasons for respecting

them. All that he knew about these two persons was, that they had been

appointed by the king, the one to his bishopric, the other to his

benefice, on the same day, the 27th of April, 1785. Madame Magloire

having taken the pictures down to dust, the Bishop had discovered these

particulars written in whitish ink on a little square of paper,

yellowed by time, and attached to the back of the portrait of the Abbé

of Grand-Champ with four wafers.

At his window he had an antique curtain of a coarse woollen stuff,

which finally became so old, that, in order to avoid the expense of a

new one, Madame Magloire was forced to take a large seam in the very

middle of it. This seam took the form of a cross. The Bishop often

called attention to it: “How delightful that is!” he said.

All the rooms in the house, without exception, those on the ground

floor as well as those on the first floor, were white-washed, which is

a fashion in barracks and hospitals.

However, in their latter years, Madame Magloire discovered beneath the

paper which had been washed over, paintings, ornamenting the apartment

of Mademoiselle Baptistine, as we shall see further on. Before becoming

a hospital, this house had been the ancient parliament house of the

Bourgeois. Hence this decoration. The chambers were paved in red

bricks, which were washed every week, with straw mats in front of all

the beds. Altogether, this dwelling, which was attended to by the two

women, was exquisitely clean from top to bottom. This was the sole

luxury which the Bishop permitted. He said, \_“That takes nothing from

the poor.”\_

It must be confessed, however, that he still retained from his former

possessions six silver knives and forks and a soup-ladle, which Madame

Magloire contemplated every day with delight, as they glistened

splendidly upon the coarse linen cloth. And since we are now painting

the Bishop of D—— as he was in reality, we must add that he had said

more than once, “I find it difficult to renounce eating from silver

dishes.”

To this silverware must be added two large candlesticks of massive

silver, which he had inherited from a great-aunt. These candlesticks

held two wax candles, and usually figured on the Bishop’s

chimney-piece. When he had any one to dinner, Madame Magloire lighted

the two candles and set the candlesticks on the table.

In the Bishop’s own chamber, at the head of his bed, there was a small

cupboard, in which Madame Magloire locked up the six silver knives and

forks and the big spoon every night. But it is necessary to add, that

the key was never removed.

The garden, which had been rather spoiled by the ugly buildings which

we have mentioned, was composed of four alleys in cross-form, radiating

from a tank. Another walk made the circuit of the garden, and skirted

the white wall which enclosed it. These alleys left behind them four

square plots rimmed with box. In three of these, Madame Magloire

cultivated vegetables; in the fourth, the Bishop had planted some

flowers; here and there stood a few fruit-trees. Madame Magloire had

once remarked, with a sort of gentle malice: “Monseigneur, you who turn

everything to account, have, nevertheless, one useless plot. It would

be better to grow salads there than bouquets.” “Madame Magloire,”

retorted the Bishop, “you are mistaken. The beautiful is as useful as

the useful.” He added after a pause, “More so, perhaps.”

This plot, consisting of three or four beds, occupied the Bishop almost

as much as did his books. He liked to pass an hour or two there,

trimming, hoeing, and making holes here and there in the earth, into

which he dropped seeds. He was not as hostile to insects as a gardener

could have wished to see him. Moreover, he made no pretensions to

botany; he ignored groups and consistency; he made not the slightest

effort to decide between Tournefort and the natural method; he took

part neither with the buds against the cotyledons, nor with Jussieu

against Linnæus. He did not study plants; he loved flowers. He

respected learned men greatly; he respected the ignorant still more;

and, without ever failing in these two respects, he watered his

flower-beds every summer evening with a tin watering-pot painted green.

The house had not a single door which could be locked. The door of the

dining-room, which, as we have said, opened directly on the cathedral

square, had formerly been ornamented with locks and bolts like the door

of a prison. The Bishop had had all this ironwork removed, and this

door was never fastened, either by night or by day, with anything

except the latch. All that the first passer-by had to do at any hour,

was to give it a push. At first, the two women had been very much tried

by this door, which was never fastened, but Monsieur de D—— had said to

them, “Have bolts put on your rooms, if that will please you.” They had

ended by sharing his confidence, or by at least acting as though they

shared it. Madame Magloire alone had frights from time to time. As for

the Bishop, his thought can be found explained, or at least indicated,

in the three lines which he wrote on the margin of a Bible, “This is

the shade of difference: the door of the physician should never be

shut, the door of the priest should always be open.”

On another book, entitled \_Philosophy of the Medical Science\_, he had

written this other note: “Am not I a physician like them? I also have

my patients, and then, too, I have some whom I call my unfortunates.”

Again he wrote: “Do not inquire the name of him who asks a shelter of

you. The very man who is embarrassed by his name is the one who needs

shelter.”

It chanced that a worthy curé, I know not whether it was the curé of

Couloubroux or the curé of Pompierry, took it into his head to ask him

one day, probably at the instigation of Madame Magloire, whether

Monsieur was sure that he was not committing an indiscretion, to a

certain extent, in leaving his door unfastened day and night, at the

mercy of any one who should choose to enter, and whether, in short, he

did not fear lest some misfortune might occur in a house so little

guarded. The Bishop touched his shoulder, with gentle gravity, and said

to him, \_“Nisi Dominus custodierit domum, in vanum vigilant qui

custodiunt eam,” Unless the Lord guard the house, in vain do they watch

who guard it.\_

Then he spoke of something else.

He was fond of saying, “There is a bravery of the priest as well as the

bravery of a colonel of dragoons,—only,” he added, “ours must be

tranquil.”

CHAPTER VII—CRAVATTE

It is here that a fact falls naturally into place, which we must not

omit, because it is one of the sort which show us best what sort of a

man the Bishop of D—— was.

After the destruction of the band of Gaspard Bès, who had infested the

gorges of Ollioules, one of his lieutenants, Cravatte, took refuge in

the mountains. He concealed himself for some time with his bandits, the

remnant of Gaspard Bès’s troop, in the county of Nice; then he made his

way to Piédmont, and suddenly reappeared in France, in the vicinity of

Barcelonette. He was first seen at Jauziers, then at Tuiles. He hid

himself in the caverns of the Joug-de-l’Aigle, and thence he descended

towards the hamlets and villages through the ravines of Ubaye and

Ubayette.

He even pushed as far as Embrun, entered the cathedral one night, and

despoiled the sacristy. His highway robberies laid waste the

country-side. The gendarmes were set on his track, but in vain. He

always escaped; sometimes he resisted by main force. He was a bold

wretch. In the midst of all this terror the Bishop arrived. He was

making his circuit to Chastelar. The mayor came to meet him, and urged

him to retrace his steps. Cravatte was in possession of the mountains

as far as Arche, and beyond; there was danger even with an escort; it

merely exposed three or four unfortunate gendarmes to no purpose.

“Therefore,” said the Bishop, “I intend to go without escort.”

“You do not really mean that, Monseigneur!” exclaimed the mayor.

“I do mean it so thoroughly that I absolutely refuse any gendarmes, and

shall set out in an hour.”

“Set out?”

“Set out.”

“Alone?”

“Alone.”

“Monseigneur, you will not do that!”

“There exists yonder in the mountains,” said the Bishop, “a tiny

community no bigger than that, which I have not seen for three years.

They are my good friends, those gentle and honest shepherds. They own

one goat out of every thirty that they tend. They make very pretty

woollen cords of various colors, and they play the mountain airs on

little flutes with six holes. They need to be told of the good God now

and then. What would they say to a bishop who was afraid? What would

they say if I did not go?”

“But the brigands, Monseigneur?”

“Hold,” said the Bishop, “I must think of that. You are right. I may

meet them. They, too, need to be told of the good God.”

“But, Monseigneur, there is a band of them! A flock of wolves!”

“Monsieur le maire, it may be that it is of this very flock of wolves

that Jesus has constituted me the shepherd. Who knows the ways of

Providence?”

“They will rob you, Monseigneur.”

“I have nothing.”

“They will kill you.”

“An old goodman of a priest, who passes along mumbling his prayers?

Bah! To what purpose?”

“Oh, mon Dieu! what if you should meet them!”

“I should beg alms of them for my poor.”

“Do not go, Monseigneur. In the name of Heaven! You are risking your

life!”

“Monsieur le maire,” said the Bishop, “is that really all? I am not in

the world to guard my own life, but to guard souls.”

They had to allow him to do as he pleased. He set out, accompanied only

by a child who offered to serve as a guide. His obstinacy was bruited

about the country-side, and caused great consternation.

He would take neither his sister nor Madame Magloire. He traversed the

mountain on mule-back, encountered no one, and arrived safe and sound

at the residence of his “good friends,” the shepherds. He remained

there for a fortnight, preaching, administering the sacrament,

teaching, exhorting. When the time of his departure approached, he

resolved to chant a \_Te Deum\_ pontifically. He mentioned it to the

curé. But what was to be done? There were no episcopal ornaments. They

could only place at his disposal a wretched village sacristy, with a

few ancient chasubles of threadbare damask adorned with imitation lace.

“Bah!” said the Bishop. “Let us announce our \_Te Deum\_ from the pulpit,

nevertheless, Monsieur le Curé. Things will arrange themselves.”

They instituted a search in the churches of the neighborhood. All the

magnificence of these humble parishes combined would not have sufficed

to clothe the chorister of a cathedral properly.

While they were thus embarrassed, a large chest was brought and

deposited in the presbytery for the Bishop, by two unknown horsemen,

who departed on the instant. The chest was opened; it contained a cope

of cloth of gold, a mitre ornamented with diamonds, an archbishop’s

cross, a magnificent crosier,—all the pontifical vestments which had

been stolen a month previously from the treasury of Notre Dame

d’Embrun. In the chest was a paper, on which these words were written,

\_“From Cravatte to Monseigneur Bienvenu.”\_

“Did not I say that things would come right of themselves?” said the

Bishop. Then he added, with a smile, “To him who contents himself with

the surplice of a curate, God sends the cope of an archbishop.”

“Monseigneur,” murmured the curé, throwing back his head with a smile.

“God—or the Devil.”

The Bishop looked steadily at the curé, and repeated with authority,

“God!”

When he returned to Chastelar, the people came out to stare at him as

at a curiosity, all along the road. At the priest’s house in Chastelar

he rejoined Mademoiselle Baptistine and Madame Magloire, who were

waiting for him, and he said to his sister: “Well! was I in the right?

The poor priest went to his poor mountaineers with empty hands, and he

returns from them with his hands full. I set out bearing only my faith

in God; I have brought back the treasure of a cathedral.”

That evening, before he went to bed, he said again: “Let us never fear

robbers nor murderers. Those are dangers from without, petty dangers.

Let us fear ourselves. Prejudices are the real robbers; vices are the

real murderers. The great dangers lie within ourselves. What matters it

what threatens our head or our purse! Let us think only of that which

threatens our soul.”

Then, turning to his sister: “Sister, never a precaution on the part of

the priest, against his fellow-man. That which his fellow does, God

permits. Let us confine ourselves to prayer, when we think that a

danger is approaching us. Let us pray, not for ourselves, but that our

brother may not fall into sin on our account.”

However, such incidents were rare in his life. We relate those of which

we know; but generally he passed his life in doing the same things at

the same moment. One month of his year resembled one hour of his day.

As to what became of “the treasure” of the cathedral of Embrun, we

should be embarrassed by any inquiry in that direction. It consisted of

very handsome things, very tempting things, and things which were very

well adapted to be stolen for the benefit of the unfortunate. Stolen

they had already been elsewhere. Half of the adventure was completed;

it only remained to impart a new direction to the theft, and to cause

it to take a short trip in the direction of the poor. However, we make

no assertions on this point. Only, a rather obscure note was found

among the Bishop’s papers, which may bear some relation to this matter,

and which is couched in these terms, \_“The question is, to decide

whether this should be turned over to the cathedral or to the

hospital.”\_

CHAPTER VIII—PHILOSOPHY AFTER DRINKING

The senator above mentioned was a clever man, who had made his own way,

heedless of those things which present obstacles, and which are called

conscience, sworn faith, justice, duty: he had marched straight to his

goal, without once flinching in the line of his advancement and his

interest. He was an old attorney, softened by success; not a bad man by

any means, who rendered all the small services in his power to his

sons, his sons-in-law, his relations, and even to his friends, having

wisely seized upon, in life, good sides, good opportunities, good

windfalls. Everything else seemed to him very stupid. He was

intelligent, and just sufficiently educated to think himself a disciple

of Epicurus; while he was, in reality, only a product of

Pigault-Lebrun. He laughed willingly and pleasantly over infinite and

eternal things, and at the “crotchets of that good old fellow the

Bishop.” He even sometimes laughed at him with an amiable authority in

the presence of M. Myriel himself, who listened to him.

On some semi-official occasion or other, I do not recollect what,

Count\*\*\* [this senator] and M. Myriel were to dine with the prefect. At

dessert, the senator, who was slightly exhilarated, though still

perfectly dignified, exclaimed:—

“Egad, Bishop, let’s have a discussion. It is hard for a senator and a

bishop to look at each other without winking. We are two augurs. I am

going to make a confession to you. I have a philosophy of my own.”

“And you are right,” replied the Bishop. “As one makes one’s

philosophy, so one lies on it. You are on the bed of purple, senator.”

The senator was encouraged, and went on:—

“Let us be good fellows.”

“Good devils even,” said the Bishop.

“I declare to you,” continued the senator, “that the Marquis d’Argens,

Pyrrhon, Hobbes, and M. Naigeon are no rascals. I have all the

philosophers in my library gilded on the edges.”

“Like yourself, Count,” interposed the Bishop.

The senator resumed:—

“I hate Diderot; he is an ideologist, a declaimer, and a revolutionist,

a believer in God at bottom, and more bigoted than Voltaire. Voltaire

made sport of Needham, and he was wrong, for Needham’s eels prove that

God is useless. A drop of vinegar in a spoonful of flour paste supplies

the \_fiat lux\_. Suppose the drop to be larger and the spoonful bigger;

you have the world. Man is the eel. Then what is the good of the

Eternal Father? The Jehovah hypothesis tires me, Bishop. It is good for

nothing but to produce shallow people, whose reasoning is hollow. Down

with that great All, which torments me! Hurrah for Zero which leaves me

in peace! Between you and me, and in order to empty my sack, and make

confession to my pastor, as it behooves me to do, I will admit to you

that I have good sense. I am not enthusiastic over your Jesus, who

preaches renunciation and sacrifice to the last extremity. ’Tis the

counsel of an avaricious man to beggars. Renunciation; why? Sacrifice;

to what end? I do not see one wolf immolating himself for the happiness

of another wolf. Let us stick to nature, then. We are at the top; let

us have a superior philosophy. What is the advantage of being at the

top, if one sees no further than the end of other people’s noses? Let

us live merrily. Life is all. That man has another future elsewhere, on

high, below, anywhere, I don’t believe; not one single word of it. Ah!

sacrifice and renunciation are recommended to me; I must take heed to

everything I do; I must cudgel my brains over good and evil, over the

just and the unjust, over the \_fas\_ and the \_nefas\_. Why? Because I

shall have to render an account of my actions. When? After death. What

a fine dream! After my death it will be a very clever person who can

catch me. Have a handful of dust seized by a shadow-hand, if you can.

Let us tell the truth, we who are initiated, and who have raised the

veil of Isis: there is no such thing as either good or evil; there is

vegetation. Let us seek the real. Let us get to the bottom of it. Let

us go into it thoroughly. What the deuce! let us go to the bottom of

it! We must scent out the truth; dig in the earth for it, and seize it.

Then it gives you exquisite joys. Then you grow strong, and you laugh.

I am square on the bottom, I am. Immortality, Bishop, is a chance, a

waiting for dead men’s shoes. Ah! what a charming promise! trust to it,

if you like! What a fine lot Adam has! We are souls, and we shall be

angels, with blue wings on our shoulder-blades. Do come to my

assistance: is it not Tertullian who says that the blessed shall travel

from star to star? Very well. We shall be the grasshoppers of the

stars. And then, besides, we shall see God. Ta, ta, ta! What twaddle

all these paradises are! God is a nonsensical monster. I would not say

that in the \_Moniteur\_, egad! but I may whisper it among friends.

\_Inter pocula\_. To sacrifice the world to paradise is to let slip the

prey for the shadow. Be the dupe of the infinite! I’m not such a fool.

I am a nought. I call myself Monsieur le Comte Nought, senator. Did I

exist before my birth? No. Shall I exist after death? No. What am I? A

little dust collected in an organism. What am I to do on this earth?

The choice rests with me: suffer or enjoy. Whither will suffering lead

me? To nothingness; but I shall have suffered. Whither will enjoyment

lead me? To nothingness; but I shall have enjoyed myself. My choice is

made. One must eat or be eaten. I shall eat. It is better to be the

tooth than the grass. Such is my wisdom. After which, go whither I push

thee, the grave-digger is there; the Pantheon for some of us: all falls

into the great hole. End. \_Finis\_. Total liquidation. This is the

vanishing-point. Death is death, believe me. I laugh at the idea of

there being any one who has anything to tell me on that subject. Fables

of nurses; bugaboo for children; Jehovah for men. No; our to-morrow is

the night. Beyond the tomb there is nothing but equal nothingness. You

have been Sardanapalus, you have been Vincent de Paul—it makes no

difference. That is the truth. Then live your life, above all things.

Make use of your \_I\_ while you have it. In truth, Bishop, I tell you

that I have a philosophy of my own, and I have my philosophers. I don’t

let myself be taken in with that nonsense. Of course, there must be

something for those who are down,—for the barefooted beggars,

knife-grinders, and miserable wretches. Legends, chimæras, the soul,

immortality, paradise, the stars, are provided for them to swallow.

They gobble it down. They spread it on their dry bread. He who has

nothing else has the good God. That is the least he can have. I oppose

no objection to that; but I reserve Monsieur Naigeon for myself. The

good God is good for the populace.”

The Bishop clapped his hands.

“That’s talking!” he exclaimed. “What an excellent and really

marvellous thing is this materialism! Not every one who wants it can

have it. Ah! when one does have it, one is no longer a dupe, one does

not stupidly allow one’s self to be exiled like Cato, nor stoned like

Stephen, nor burned alive like Jeanne d’Arc. Those who have succeeded

in procuring this admirable materialism have the joy of feeling

themselves irresponsible, and of thinking that they can devour

everything without uneasiness,—places, sinecures, dignities, power,

whether well or ill acquired, lucrative recantations, useful

treacheries, savory capitulations of conscience,—and that they shall

enter the tomb with their digestion accomplished. How agreeable that

is! I do not say that with reference to you, senator. Nevertheless, it

is impossible for me to refrain from congratulating you. You great

lords have, so you say, a philosophy of your own, and for yourselves,

which is exquisite, refined, accessible to the rich alone, good for all

sauces, and which seasons the voluptuousness of life admirably. This

philosophy has been extracted from the depths, and unearthed by special

seekers. But you are good-natured princes, and you do not think it a

bad thing that belief in the good God should constitute the philosophy

of the people, very much as the goose stuffed with chestnuts is the

truffled turkey of the poor.”

CHAPTER IX—THE BROTHER AS DEPICTED BY THE SISTER

In order to furnish an idea of the private establishment of the Bishop

of D——, and of the manner in which those two sainted women subordinated

their actions, their thoughts, their feminine instincts even, which are

easily alarmed, to the habits and purposes of the Bishop, without his

even taking the trouble of speaking in order to explain them, we cannot

do better than transcribe in this place a letter from Mademoiselle

Baptistine to Madame the Vicomtess de Boischevron, the friend of her

childhood. This letter is in our possession.

D——, Dec. 16, 18—. MY GOOD MADAM: Not a day passes without our speaking

of you. It is our established custom; but there is another reason

besides. Just imagine, while washing and dusting the ceilings and

walls, Madam Magloire has made some discoveries; now our two chambers

hung with antique paper whitewashed over, would not discredit a château

in the style of yours. Madam Magloire has pulled off all the paper.

There were things beneath. My drawing-room, which contains no

furniture, and which we use for spreading out the linen after washing,

is fifteen feet in height, eighteen square, with a ceiling which was

formerly painted and gilded, and with beams, as in yours. This was

covered with a cloth while this was the hospital. And the woodwork was

of the era of our grandmothers. But my room is the one you ought to

see. Madam Magloire has discovered, under at least ten thicknesses of

paper pasted on top, some paintings, which without being good are very

tolerable. The subject is Telemachus being knighted by Minerva in some

gardens, the name of which escapes me. In short, where the Roman ladies

repaired on one single night. What shall I say to you? I have Romans,

and Roman ladies [here occurs an illegible word], and the whole train.

Madam Magloire has cleaned it all off; this summer she is going to have

some small injuries repaired, and the whole revarnished, and my chamber

will be a regular museum. She has also found in a corner of the attic

two wooden pier-tables of ancient fashion. They asked us two crowns of

six francs each to regild them, but it is much better to give the money

to the poor; and they are very ugly besides, and I should much prefer a

round table of mahogany.

I am always very happy. My brother is so good. He gives all he has to

the poor and sick. We are very much cramped. The country is trying in

the winter, and we really must do something for those who are in need.

We are almost comfortably lighted and warmed. You see that these are

great treats.

My brother has ways of his own. When he talks, he says that a bishop

ought to be so. Just imagine! the door of our house is never fastened.

Whoever chooses to enter finds himself at once in my brother’s room. He

fears nothing, even at night. That is his sort of bravery, he says.

He does not wish me or Madame Magloire feel any fear for him. He

exposes himself to all sorts of dangers, and he does not like to have

us even seem to notice it. One must know how to understand him.

He goes out in the rain, he walks in the water, he travels in winter.

He fears neither suspicious roads nor dangerous encounters, nor night.

Last year he went quite alone into a country of robbers. He would not

take us. He was absent for a fortnight. On his return nothing had

happened to him; he was thought to be dead, but was perfectly well, and

said, “This is the way I have been robbed!” And then he opened a trunk

full of jewels, all the jewels of the cathedral of Embrun, which the

thieves had given him.

When he returned on that occasion, I could not refrain from scolding

him a little, taking care, however, not to speak except when the

carriage was making a noise, so that no one might hear me.

At first I used to say to myself, “There are no dangers which will stop

him; he is terrible.” Now I have ended by getting used to it. I make a

sign to Madam Magloire that she is not to oppose him. He risks himself

as he sees fit. I carry off Madam Magloire, I enter my chamber, I pray

for him and fall asleep. I am at ease, because I know that if anything

were to happen to him, it would be the end of me. I should go to the

good God with my brother and my bishop. It has cost Madam Magloire more

trouble than it did me to accustom herself to what she terms his

imprudences. But now the habit has been acquired. We pray together, we

tremble together, and we fall asleep. If the devil were to enter this

house, he would be allowed to do so. After all, what is there for us to

fear in this house? There is always some one with us who is stronger

than we. The devil may pass through it, but the good God dwells here.

This suffices me. My brother has no longer any need of saying a word to

me. I understand him without his speaking, and we abandon ourselves to

the care of Providence. That is the way one has to do with a man who

possesses grandeur of soul.

I have interrogated my brother with regard to the information which you

desire on the subject of the Faux family. You are aware that he knows

everything, and that he has memories, because he is still a very good

royalist. They really are a very ancient Norman family of the

generalship of Caen. Five hundred years ago there was a Raoul de Faux,

a Jean de Faux, and a Thomas de Faux, who were gentlemen, and one of

whom was a seigneur de Rochefort. The last was Guy-Étienne-Alexandre,

and was commander of a regiment, and something in the light horse of

Bretagne. His daughter, Marie-Louise, married Adrien-Charles de

Gramont, son of the Duke Louis de Gramont, peer of France, colonel of

the French guards, and lieutenant-general of the army. It is written

Faux, Fauq, and Faoucq.

Good Madame, recommend us to the prayers of your sainted relative,

Monsieur the Cardinal. As for your dear Sylvanie, she has done well in

not wasting the few moments which she passes with you in writing to me.

She is well, works as you would wish, and loves me.

That is all that I desire. The souvenir which she sent through you

reached me safely, and it makes me very happy. My health is not so very

bad, and yet I grow thinner every day. Farewell; my paper is at an end,

and this forces me to leave you. A thousand good wishes.

BAPTISTINE.

P.S. Your grand nephew is charming. Do you know that he will soon be

five years old? Yesterday he saw some one riding by on horseback who

had on knee-caps, and he said, “What has he got on his knees?” He is a

charming child! His little brother is dragging an old broom about the

room, like a carriage, and saying, “Hu!”

As will be perceived from this letter, these two women understood how

to mould themselves to the Bishop’s ways with that special feminine

genius which comprehends the man better than he comprehends himself.

The Bishop of D——, in spite of the gentle and candid air which never

deserted him, sometimes did things that were grand, bold, and

magnificent, without seeming to have even a suspicion of the fact. They

trembled, but they let him alone. Sometimes Madame Magloire essayed a

remonstrance in advance, but never at the time, nor afterwards. They

never interfered with him by so much as a word or sign, in any action

once entered upon. At certain moments, without his having occasion to

mention it, when he was not even conscious of it himself in all

probability, so perfect was his simplicity, they vaguely felt that he

was acting as a bishop; then they were nothing more than two shadows in

the house. They served him passively; and if obedience consisted in

disappearing, they disappeared. They understood, with an admirable

delicacy of instinct, that certain cares may be put under constraint.

Thus, even when believing him to be in peril, they understood, I will

not say his thought, but his nature, to such a degree that they no

longer watched over him. They confided him to God.

Moreover, Baptistine said, as we have just read, that her brother’s end

would prove her own. Madame Magloire did not say this, but she knew it.

CHAPTER X—THE BISHOP IN THE PRESENCE OF AN UNKNOWN LIGHT

At an epoch a little later than the date of the letter cited in the

preceding pages, he did a thing which, if the whole town was to be

believed, was even more hazardous than his trip across the mountains

infested with bandits.

In the country near D—— a man lived quite alone. This man, we will

state at once, was a former member of the Convention. His name was G——

Member of the Convention, G—— was mentioned with a sort of horror in

the little world of D—— A member of the Convention—can you imagine such

a thing? That existed from the time when people called each other

\_thou\_, and when they said “citizen.” This man was almost a monster. He

had not voted for the death of the king, but almost. He was a

quasi-regicide. He had been a terrible man. How did it happen that such

a man had not been brought before a provost’s court, on the return of

the legitimate princes? They need not have cut off his head, if you

please; clemency must be exercised, agreed; but a good banishment for

life. An example, in short, etc. Besides, he was an atheist, like all

the rest of those people. Gossip of the geese about the vulture.

Was G—— a vulture after all? Yes; if he were to be judged by the

element of ferocity in this solitude of his. As he had not voted for

the death of the king, he had not been included in the decrees of

exile, and had been able to remain in France.

He dwelt at a distance of three-quarters of an hour from the city, far

from any hamlet, far from any road, in some hidden turn of a very wild

valley, no one knew exactly where. He had there, it was said, a sort of

field, a hole, a lair. There were no neighbors, not even passers-by.

Since he had dwelt in that valley, the path which led thither had

disappeared under a growth of grass. The locality was spoken of as

though it had been the dwelling of a hangman.

Nevertheless, the Bishop meditated on the subject, and from time to

time he gazed at the horizon at a point where a clump of trees marked

the valley of the former member of the Convention, and he said, “There

is a soul yonder which is lonely.”

And he added, deep in his own mind, “I owe him a visit.”

But, let us avow it, this idea, which seemed natural at the first

blush, appeared to him after a moment’s reflection, as strange,

impossible, and almost repulsive. For, at bottom, he shared the general

impression, and the old member of the Convention inspired him, without

his being clearly conscious of the fact himself, with that sentiment

which borders on hate, and which is so well expressed by the word

estrangement.

Still, should the scab of the sheep cause the shepherd to recoil? No.

But what a sheep!

The good Bishop was perplexed. Sometimes he set out in that direction;

then he returned.

Finally, the rumor one day spread through the town that a sort of young

shepherd, who served the member of the Convention in his hovel, had

come in quest of a doctor; that the old wretch was dying, that

paralysis was gaining on him, and that he would not live over

night.—“Thank God!” some added.

The Bishop took his staff, put on his cloak, on account of his too

threadbare cassock, as we have mentioned, and because of the evening

breeze which was sure to rise soon, and set out.

The sun was setting, and had almost touched the horizon when the Bishop

arrived at the excommunicated spot. With a certain beating of the

heart, he recognized the fact that he was near the lair. He strode over

a ditch, leaped a hedge, made his way through a fence of dead boughs,

entered a neglected paddock, took a few steps with a good deal of

boldness, and suddenly, at the extremity of the waste land, and behind

lofty brambles, he caught sight of the cavern.

It was a very low hut, poor, small, and clean, with a vine nailed

against the outside.

Near the door, in an old wheel-chair, the armchair of the peasants,

there was a white-haired man, smiling at the sun.

Near the seated man stood a young boy, the shepherd lad. He was

offering the old man a jar of milk.

While the Bishop was watching him, the old man spoke: “Thank you,” he

said, “I need nothing.” And his smile quitted the sun to rest upon the

child.

The Bishop stepped forward. At the sound which he made in walking, the

old man turned his head, and his face expressed the sum total of the

surprise which a man can still feel after a long life.

“This is the first time since I have been here,” said he, “that any one

has entered here. Who are you, sir?”

The Bishop answered:—

“My name is Bienvenu Myriel.”

“Bienvenu Myriel? I have heard that name. Are you the man whom the

people call Monseigneur Welcome?”

“I am.”

The old man resumed with a half-smile

“In that case, you are my bishop?”

“Something of that sort.”

“Enter, sir.”

The member of the Convention extended his hand to the Bishop, but the

Bishop did not take it. The Bishop confined himself to the remark:—

“I am pleased to see that I have been misinformed. You certainly do not

seem to me to be ill.”

“Monsieur,” replied the old man, “I am going to recover.”

He paused, and then said:—

“I shall die three hours hence.”

Then he continued:—

“I am something of a doctor; I know in what fashion the last hour draws

on. Yesterday, only my feet were cold; to-day, the chill has ascended

to my knees; now I feel it mounting to my waist; when it reaches the

heart, I shall stop. The sun is beautiful, is it not? I had myself

wheeled out here to take a last look at things. You can talk to me; it

does not fatigue me. You have done well to come and look at a man who

is on the point of death. It is well that there should be witnesses at

that moment. One has one’s caprices; I should have liked to last until

the dawn, but I know that I shall hardly live three hours. It will be

night then. What does it matter, after all? Dying is a simple affair.

One has no need of the light for that. So be it. I shall die by

starlight.”

The old man turned to the shepherd lad:—

“Go to thy bed; thou wert awake all last night; thou art tired.”

The child entered the hut.

The old man followed him with his eyes, and added, as though speaking

to himself:—

“I shall die while he sleeps. The two slumbers may be good neighbors.”

The Bishop was not touched as it seems that he should have been. He did

not think he discerned God in this manner of dying; let us say the

whole, for these petty contradictions of great hearts must be indicated

like the rest: he, who on occasion, was so fond of laughing at “His

Grace,” was rather shocked at not being addressed as Monseigneur, and

he was almost tempted to retort “citizen.” He was assailed by a fancy

for peevish familiarity, common enough to doctors and priests, but

which was not habitual with him. This man, after all, this member of

the Convention, this representative of the people, had been one of the

powerful ones of the earth; for the first time in his life, probably,

the Bishop felt in a mood to be severe.

Meanwhile, the member of the Convention had been surveying him with a

modest cordiality, in which one could have distinguished, possibly,

that humility which is so fitting when one is on the verge of returning

to dust.

The Bishop, on his side, although he generally restrained his

curiosity, which, in his opinion, bordered on a fault, could not

refrain from examining the member of the Convention with an attention

which, as it did not have its course in sympathy, would have served his

conscience as a matter of reproach, in connection with any other man. A

member of the Convention produced on him somewhat the effect of being

outside the pale of the law, even of the law of charity. G——, calm, his

body almost upright, his voice vibrating, was one of those

octogenarians who form the subject of astonishment to the physiologist.

The Revolution had many of these men, proportioned to the epoch. In

this old man one was conscious of a man put to the proof. Though so

near to his end, he preserved all the gestures of health. In his clear

glance, in his firm tone, in the robust movement of his shoulders,

there was something calculated to disconcert death. Azrael, the

Mohammedan angel of the sepulchre, would have turned back, and thought

that he had mistaken the door. G—— seemed to be dying because he willed

it so. There was freedom in his agony. His legs alone were motionless.

It was there that the shadows held him fast. His feet were cold and

dead, but his head survived with all the power of life, and seemed full

of light. G——, at this solemn moment, resembled the king in that tale

of the Orient who was flesh above and marble below.

There was a stone there. The Bishop sat down. The exordium was abrupt.

“I congratulate you,” said he, in the tone which one uses for a

reprimand. “You did not vote for the death of the king, after all.”

The old member of the Convention did not appear to notice the bitter

meaning underlying the words “after all.” He replied. The smile had

quite disappeared from his face.

“Do not congratulate me too much, sir. I did vote for the death of the

tyrant.”

It was the tone of austerity answering the tone of severity.

“What do you mean to say?” resumed the Bishop.

“I mean to say that man has a tyrant,—ignorance. I voted for the death

of that tyrant. That tyrant engendered royalty, which is authority

falsely understood, while science is authority rightly understood. Man

should be governed only by science.”

“And conscience,” added the Bishop.

“It is the same thing. Conscience is the quantity of innate science

which we have within us.”

Monseigneur Bienvenu listened in some astonishment to this language,

which was very new to him.

The member of the Convention resumed:—

“So far as Louis XVI. was concerned, I said ‘no.’ I did not think that

I had the right to kill a man; but I felt it my duty to exterminate

evil. I voted the end of the tyrant, that is to say, the end of

prostitution for woman, the end of slavery for man, the end of night

for the child. In voting for the Republic, I voted for that. I voted

for fraternity, concord, the dawn. I have aided in the overthrow of

prejudices and errors. The crumbling away of prejudices and errors

causes light. We have caused the fall of the old world, and the old

world, that vase of miseries, has become, through its upsetting upon

the human race, an urn of joy.”

“Mixed joy,” said the Bishop.

“You may say troubled joy, and to-day, after that fatal return of the

past, which is called 1814, joy which has disappeared! Alas! The work

was incomplete, I admit: we demolished the ancient regime in deeds; we

were not able to suppress it entirely in ideas. To destroy abuses is

not sufficient; customs must be modified. The mill is there no longer;

the wind is still there.”

“You have demolished. It may be of use to demolish, but I distrust a

demolition complicated with wrath.”

“Right has its wrath, Bishop; and the wrath of right is an element of

progress. In any case, and in spite of whatever may be said, the French

Revolution is the most important step of the human race since the

advent of Christ. Incomplete, it may be, but sublime. It set free all

the unknown social quantities; it softened spirits, it calmed,

appeased, enlightened; it caused the waves of civilization to flow over

the earth. It was a good thing. The French Revolution is the

consecration of humanity.”

The Bishop could not refrain from murmuring:—

“Yes? ’93!”

The member of the Convention straightened himself up in his chair with

an almost lugubrious solemnity, and exclaimed, so far as a dying man is

capable of exclamation:—

“Ah, there you go; ’93! I was expecting that word. A cloud had been

forming for the space of fifteen hundred years; at the end of fifteen

hundred years it burst. You are putting the thunderbolt on its trial.”

The Bishop felt, without, perhaps, confessing it, that something within

him had suffered extinction. Nevertheless, he put a good face on the

matter. He replied:—

“The judge speaks in the name of justice; the priest speaks in the name

of pity, which is nothing but a more lofty justice. A thunderbolt

should commit no error.” And he added, regarding the member of the

Convention steadily the while, “Louis XVII.?”

The conventionary stretched forth his hand and grasped the Bishop’s

arm.

“Louis XVII.! let us see. For whom do you mourn? is it for the innocent

child? very good; in that case I mourn with you. Is it for the royal

child? I demand time for reflection. To me, the brother of Cartouche,

an innocent child who was hung up by the armpits in the Place de Grève,

until death ensued, for the sole crime of having been the brother of

Cartouche, is no less painful than the grandson of Louis XV., an

innocent child, martyred in the tower of the Temple, for the sole crime

of having been grandson of Louis XV.”

“Monsieur,” said the Bishop, “I like not this conjunction of names.”

“Cartouche? Louis XV.? To which of the two do you object?”

A momentary silence ensued. The Bishop almost regretted having come,

and yet he felt vaguely and strangely shaken.

The conventionary resumed:—

“Ah, Monsieur Priest, you love not the crudities of the true. Christ

loved them. He seized a rod and cleared out the Temple. His scourge,

full of lightnings, was a harsh speaker of truths. When he cried,

\_‘Sinite parvulos,’\_ he made no distinction between the little

children. It would not have embarrassed him to bring together the

Dauphin of Barabbas and the Dauphin of Herod. Innocence, Monsieur, is

its own crown. Innocence has no need to be a highness. It is as august

in rags as in fleurs de lys.”

“That is true,” said the Bishop in a low voice.

“I persist,” continued the conventionary G—— “You have mentioned Louis

XVII. to me. Let us come to an understanding. Shall we weep for all the

innocent, all martyrs, all children, the lowly as well as the exalted?

I agree to that. But in that case, as I have told you, we must go back

further than ’93, and our tears must begin before Louis XVII. I will

weep with you over the children of kings, provided that you will weep

with me over the children of the people.”

“I weep for all,” said the Bishop.

“Equally!” exclaimed conventionary G——; “and if the balance must

incline, let it be on the side of the people. They have been suffering

longer.”

Another silence ensued. The conventionary was the first to break it. He

raised himself on one elbow, took a bit of his cheek between his thumb

and his forefinger, as one does mechanically when one interrogates and

judges, and appealed to the Bishop with a gaze full of all the forces

of the death agony. It was almost an explosion.

“Yes, sir, the people have been suffering a long while. And hold! that

is not all, either; why have you just questioned me and talked to me

about Louis XVII.? I know you not. Ever since I have been in these

parts I have dwelt in this enclosure alone, never setting foot outside,

and seeing no one but that child who helps me. Your name has reached me

in a confused manner, it is true, and very badly pronounced, I must

admit; but that signifies nothing: clever men have so many ways of

imposing on that honest goodman, the people. By the way, I did not hear

the sound of your carriage; you have left it yonder, behind the coppice

at the fork of the roads, no doubt. I do not know you, I tell you. You

have told me that you are the Bishop; but that affords me no

information as to your moral personality. In short, I repeat my

question. Who are you? You are a bishop; that is to say, a prince of

the church, one of those gilded men with heraldic bearings and

revenues, who have vast prebends,—the bishopric of D—— fifteen thousand

francs settled income, ten thousand in perquisites; total, twenty-five

thousand francs,—who have kitchens, who have liveries, who make good

cheer, who eat moor-hens on Friday, who strut about, a lackey before, a

lackey behind, in a gala coach, and who have palaces, and who roll in

their carriages in the name of Jesus Christ who went barefoot! You are

a prelate,—revenues, palace, horses, servants, good table, all the

sensualities of life; you have this like the rest, and like the rest,

you enjoy it; it is well; but this says either too much or too little;

this does not enlighten me upon the intrinsic and essential value of

the man who comes with the probable intention of bringing wisdom to me.

To whom do I speak? Who are you?”

The Bishop hung his head and replied, \_“Vermis sum\_—I am a worm.”

“A worm of the earth in a carriage?” growled the conventionary.

It was the conventionary’s turn to be arrogant, and the Bishop’s to be

humble.

The Bishop resumed mildly:—

“So be it, sir. But explain to me how my carriage, which is a few paces

off behind the trees yonder, how my good table and the moor-hens which

I eat on Friday, how my twenty-five thousand francs income, how my

palace and my lackeys prove that clemency is not a duty, and that ’93

was not inexorable.”

The conventionary passed his hand across his brow, as though to sweep

away a cloud.

“Before replying to you,” he said, “I beseech you to pardon me. I have

just committed a wrong, sir. You are at my house, you are my guest, I

owe you courtesy. You discuss my ideas, and it becomes me to confine

myself to combating your arguments. Your riches and your pleasures are

advantages which I hold over you in the debate; but good taste dictates

that I shall not make use of them. I promise you to make no use of them

in the future.”

“I thank you,” said the Bishop.

G—— resumed.

“Let us return to the explanation which you have asked of me. Where

were we? What were you saying to me? That ’93 was inexorable?”

“Inexorable; yes,” said the Bishop. “What think you of Marat clapping

his hands at the guillotine?”

“What think you of Bossuet chanting the \_Te Deum\_ over the

dragonnades?”

The retort was a harsh one, but it attained its mark with the

directness of a point of steel. The Bishop quivered under it; no reply

occurred to him; but he was offended by this mode of alluding to

Bossuet. The best of minds will have their fetiches, and they sometimes

feel vaguely wounded by the want of respect of logic.

The conventionary began to pant; the asthma of the agony which is

mingled with the last breaths interrupted his voice; still, there was a

perfect lucidity of soul in his eyes. He went on:—

“Let me say a few words more in this and that direction; I am willing.

Apart from the Revolution, which, taken as a whole, is an immense human

affirmation, ’93 is, alas! a rejoinder. You think it inexorable, sir;

but what of the whole monarchy, sir? Carrier is a bandit; but what name

do you give to Montrevel? Fouquier-Tainville is a rascal; but what is

your opinion as to Lamoignon-Bâville? Maillard is terrible; but

Saulx-Tavannes, if you please? Duchêne senior is ferocious; but what

epithet will you allow me for the elder Letellier? Jourdan-Coupe-Tetê

is a monster; but not so great a one as M. the Marquis de Louvois. Sir,

sir, I am sorry for Marie Antoinette, archduchess and queen; but I am

also sorry for that poor Huguenot woman, who, in 1685, under Louis the

Great, sir, while with a nursing infant, was bound, naked to the waist,

to a stake, and the child kept at a distance; her breast swelled with

milk and her heart with anguish; the little one, hungry and pale,

beheld that breast and cried and agonized; the executioner said to the

woman, a mother and a nurse, ‘Abjure!’ giving her her choice between

the death of her infant and the death of her conscience. What say you

to that torture of Tantalus as applied to a mother? Bear this well in

mind sir: the French Revolution had its reasons for existence; its

wrath will be absolved by the future; its result is the world made

better. From its most terrible blows there comes forth a caress for the

human race. I abridge, I stop, I have too much the advantage; moreover,

I am dying.”

And ceasing to gaze at the Bishop, the conventionary concluded his

thoughts in these tranquil words:—

“Yes, the brutalities of progress are called revolutions. When they are

over, this fact is recognized,—that the human race has been treated

harshly, but that it has progressed.”

The conventionary doubted not that he had successively conquered all

the inmost intrenchments of the Bishop. One remained, however, and from

this intrenchment, the last resource of Monseigneur Bienvenu’s

resistance, came forth this reply, wherein appeared nearly all the

harshness of the beginning:—

“Progress should believe in God. Good cannot have an impious servitor.

He who is an atheist is but a bad leader for the human race.”

The former representative of the people made no reply. He was seized

with a fit of trembling. He looked towards heaven, and in his glance a

tear gathered slowly. When the eyelid was full, the tear trickled down

his livid cheek, and he said, almost in a stammer, quite low, and to

himself, while his eyes were plunged in the depths:—

“O thou! O ideal! Thou alone existest!”

The Bishop experienced an indescribable shock.

After a pause, the old man raised a finger heavenward and said:—

“The infinite is. He is there. If the infinite had no person, person

would be without limit; it would not be infinite; in other words, it

would not exist. There is, then, an \_I\_. That \_I\_ of the infinite is

God.”

The dying man had pronounced these last words in a loud voice, and with

the shiver of ecstasy, as though he beheld some one. When he had

spoken, his eyes closed. The effort had exhausted him. It was evident

that he had just lived through in a moment the few hours which had been

left to him. That which he had said brought him nearer to him who is in

death. The supreme moment was approaching.

The Bishop understood this; time pressed; it was as a priest that he

had come: from extreme coldness he had passed by degrees to extreme

emotion; he gazed at those closed eyes, he took that wrinkled, aged and

ice-cold hand in his, and bent over the dying man.

“This hour is the hour of God. Do you not think that it would be

regrettable if we had met in vain?”

The conventionary opened his eyes again. A gravity mingled with gloom

was imprinted on his countenance.

“Bishop,” said he, with a slowness which probably arose more from his

dignity of soul than from the failing of his strength, “I have passed

my life in meditation, study, and contemplation. I was sixty years of

age when my country called me and commanded me to concern myself with

its affairs. I obeyed. Abuses existed, I combated them; tyrannies

existed, I destroyed them; rights and principles existed, I proclaimed

and confessed them. Our territory was invaded, I defended it; France

was menaced, I offered my breast. I was not rich; I am poor. I have

been one of the masters of the state; the vaults of the treasury were

encumbered with specie to such a degree that we were forced to shore up

the walls, which were on the point of bursting beneath the weight of

gold and silver; I dined in Dead Tree Street, at twenty-two sous. I

have succored the oppressed, I have comforted the suffering. I tore the

cloth from the altar, it is true; but it was to bind up the wounds of

my country. I have always upheld the march forward of the human race,

forward towards the light, and I have sometimes resisted progress

without pity. I have, when the occasion offered, protected my own

adversaries, men of your profession. And there is at Peteghem, in

Flanders, at the very spot where the Merovingian kings had their summer

palace, a convent of Urbanists, the Abbey of Sainte Claire en Beaulieu,

which I saved in 1793. I have done my duty according to my powers, and

all the good that I was able. After which, I was hunted down, pursued,

persecuted, blackened, jeered at, scorned, cursed, proscribed. For many

years past, I with my white hair have been conscious that many people

think they have the right to despise me; to the poor ignorant masses I

present the visage of one damned. And I accept this isolation of

hatred, without hating any one myself. Now I am eighty-six years old; I

am on the point of death. What is it that you have come to ask of me?”

\_“Your blessing,”\_ said the Bishop.

And he knelt down.

When the Bishop raised his head again, the face of the conventionary

had become august. He had just expired.

The Bishop returned home, deeply absorbed in thoughts which cannot be

known to us. He passed the whole night in prayer. On the following

morning some bold and curious persons attempted to speak to him about

member of the Convention G——; he contented himself with pointing

heavenward.

From that moment he redoubled his tenderness and brotherly feeling

towards all children and sufferers.

Any allusion to “that old wretch of a G——” caused him to fall into a

singular preoccupation. No one could say that the passage of that soul

before his, and the reflection of that grand conscience upon his, did

not count for something in his approach to perfection.

This “pastoral visit” naturally furnished an occasion for a murmur of

comment in all the little local coteries.

“Was the bedside of such a dying man as that the proper place for a

bishop? There was evidently no conversion to be expected. All those

revolutionists are backsliders. Then why go there? What was there to be

seen there? He must have been very curious indeed to see a soul carried

off by the devil.”

One day a dowager of the impertinent variety who thinks herself

spiritual, addressed this sally to him, “Monseigneur, people are

inquiring when Your Greatness will receive the red cap!”—“Oh! oh!

that’s a coarse color,” replied the Bishop. “It is lucky that those who

despise it in a cap revere it in a hat.”

CHAPTER XI—A RESTRICTION

We should incur a great risk of deceiving ourselves, were we to

conclude from this that Monseigneur Welcome was “a philosophical

bishop,” or a “patriotic curé.” His meeting, which may almost be

designated as his union, with conventionary G——, left behind it in his

mind a sort of astonishment, which rendered him still more gentle. That

is all.

Although Monseigneur Bienvenu was far from being a politician, this is,

perhaps, the place to indicate very briefly what his attitude was in

the events of that epoch, supposing that Monseigneur Bienvenu ever

dreamed of having an attitude.

Let us, then, go back a few years.

Some time after the elevation of M. Myriel to the episcopate, the

Emperor had made him a baron of the Empire, in company with many other

bishops. The arrest of the Pope took place, as every one knows, on the

night of the 5th to the 6th of July, 1809; on this occasion, M. Myriel

was summoned by Napoleon to the synod of the bishops of France and

Italy convened at Paris. This synod was held at Notre-Dame, and

assembled for the first time on the 15th of June, 1811, under the

presidency of Cardinal Fesch. M. Myriel was one of the ninety-five

bishops who attended it. But he was present only at one sitting and at

three or four private conferences. Bishop of a mountain diocese, living

so very close to nature, in rusticity and deprivation, it appeared that

he imported among these eminent personages, ideas which altered the

temperature of the assembly. He very soon returned to D—— He was

interrogated as to this speedy return, and he replied: \_“I embarrassed

them. The outside air penetrated to them through me. I produced on them

the effect of an open door.”\_

On another occasion he said, \_“What would you have? Those gentlemen are

princes. I am only a poor peasant bishop.”\_

The fact is that he displeased them. Among other strange things, it is

said that he chanced to remark one evening, when he found himself at

the house of one of his most notable colleagues: “What beautiful

clocks! What beautiful carpets! What beautiful liveries! They must be a

great trouble. I would not have all those superfluities, crying

incessantly in my ears: ‘There are people who are hungry! There are

people who are cold! There are poor people! There are poor people!’”

Let us remark, by the way, that the hatred of luxury is not an

intelligent hatred. This hatred would involve the hatred of the arts.

Nevertheless, in churchmen, luxury is wrong, except in connection with

representations and ceremonies. It seems to reveal habits which have

very little that is charitable about them. An opulent priest is a

contradiction. The priest must keep close to the poor. Now, can one

come in contact incessantly night and day with all this distress, all

these misfortunes, and this poverty, without having about one’s own

person a little of that misery, like the dust of labor? Is it possible

to imagine a man near a brazier who is not warm? Can one imagine a

workman who is working near a furnace, and who has neither a singed

hair, nor blackened nails, nor a drop of sweat, nor a speck of ashes on

his face? The first proof of charity in the priest, in the bishop

especially, is poverty.

This is, no doubt, what the Bishop of D—— thought.

It must not be supposed, however, that he shared what we call the

“ideas of the century” on certain delicate points. He took very little

part in the theological quarrels of the moment, and maintained silence

on questions in which Church and State were implicated; but if he had

been strongly pressed, it seems that he would have been found to be an

ultramontane rather than a gallican. Since we are making a portrait,

and since we do not wish to conceal anything, we are forced to add that

he was glacial towards Napoleon in his decline. Beginning with 1813, he

gave in his adherence to or applauded all hostile manifestations. He

refused to see him, as he passed through on his return from the island

of Elba, and he abstained from ordering public prayers for the Emperor

in his diocese during the Hundred Days.

Besides his sister, Mademoiselle Baptistine, he had two brothers, one a

general, the other a prefect. He wrote to both with tolerable

frequency. He was harsh for a time towards the former, because, holding

a command in Provence at the epoch of the disembarkation at Cannes, the

general had put himself at the head of twelve hundred men and had

pursued the Emperor as though the latter had been a person whom one is

desirous of allowing to escape. His correspondence with the other

brother, the ex-prefect, a fine, worthy man who lived in retirement at

Paris, Rue Cassette, remained more affectionate.

Thus Monseigneur Bienvenu also had his hour of party spirit, his hour

of bitterness, his cloud. The shadow of the passions of the moment

traversed this grand and gentle spirit occupied with eternal things.

Certainly, such a man would have done well not to entertain any

political opinions. Let there be no mistake as to our meaning: we are

not confounding what is called “political opinions” with the grand

aspiration for progress, with the sublime faith, patriotic, democratic,

humane, which in our day should be the very foundation of every

generous intellect. Without going deeply into questions which are only

indirectly connected with the subject of this book, we will simply say

this: It would have been well if Monseigneur Bienvenu had not been a

Royalist, and if his glance had never been, for a single instant,

turned away from that serene contemplation in which is distinctly

discernible, above the fictions and the hatreds of this world, above

the stormy vicissitudes of human things, the beaming of those three

pure radiances, truth, justice, and charity.

While admitting that it was not for a political office that God created

Monseigneur Welcome, we should have understood and admired his protest

in the name of right and liberty, his proud opposition, his just but

perilous resistance to the all-powerful Napoleon. But that which

pleases us in people who are rising pleases us less in the case of

people who are falling. We only love the fray so long as there is

danger, and in any case, the combatants of the first hour have alone

the right to be the exterminators of the last. He who has not been a

stubborn accuser in prosperity should hold his peace in the face of

ruin. The denunciator of success is the only legitimate executioner of

the fall. As for us, when Providence intervenes and strikes, we let it

work. 1812 commenced to disarm us. In 1813 the cowardly breach of

silence of that taciturn legislative body, emboldened by catastrophe,

possessed only traits which aroused indignation. And it was a crime to

applaud, in 1814, in the presence of those marshals who betrayed; in

the presence of that senate which passed from one dunghill to another,

insulting after having deified; in the presence of that idolatry which

was loosing its footing and spitting on its idol,—it was a duty to turn

aside the head. In 1815, when the supreme disasters filled the air,

when France was seized with a shiver at their sinister approach, when

Waterloo could be dimly discerned opening before Napoleon, the mournful

acclamation of the army and the people to the condemned of destiny had

nothing laughable in it, and, after making all allowance for the

despot, a heart like that of the Bishop of D——, ought not perhaps to

have failed to recognize the august and touching features presented by

the embrace of a great nation and a great man on the brink of the

abyss.

With this exception, he was in all things just, true, equitable,

intelligent, humble and dignified, beneficent and kindly, which is only

another sort of benevolence. He was a priest, a sage, and a man. It

must be admitted, that even in the political views with which we have

just reproached him, and which we are disposed to judge almost with

severity, he was tolerant and easy, more so, perhaps, than we who are

speaking here. The porter of the town-hall had been placed there by the

Emperor. He was an old non-commissioned officer of the old guard, a

member of the Legion of Honor at Austerlitz, as much of a Bonapartist

as the eagle. This poor fellow occasionally let slip inconsiderate

remarks, which the law then stigmatized as \_seditious speeches\_. After

the imperial profile disappeared from the Legion of Honor, he never

dressed himself in his regimentals, as he said, so that he should not

be obliged to wear his cross. He had himself devoutly removed the

imperial effigy from the cross which Napoleon had given him; this made

a hole, and he would not put anything in its place. \_“I will die,”\_ he

said, \_“rather than wear the three frogs upon my heart!”\_ He liked to

scoff aloud at Louis XVIII. “The gouty old creature in English

gaiters!” he said; \_“let him take himself off to Prussia with that

queue of his.”\_ He was happy to combine in the same imprecation the two

things which he most detested, Prussia and England. He did it so often

that he lost his place. There he was, turned out of the house, with his

wife and children, and without bread. The Bishop sent for him, reproved

him gently, and appointed him beadle in the cathedral.

In the course of nine years Monseigneur Bienvenu had, by dint of holy

deeds and gentle manners, filled the town of D——with a sort of tender

and filial reverence. Even his conduct towards Napoleon had been

accepted and tacitly pardoned, as it were, by the people, the good and

weakly flock who adored their emperor, but loved their bishop.

CHAPTER XII—THE SOLITUDE OF MONSEIGNEUR WELCOME

A bishop is almost always surrounded by a full squadron of little

abbés, just as a general is by a covey of young officers. This is what

that charming Saint François de Sales calls somewhere “les prêtres

blancs-becs,” callow priests. Every career has its aspirants, who form

a train for those who have attained eminence in it. There is no power

which has not its dependents. There is no fortune which has not its

court. The seekers of the future eddy around the splendid present.

Every metropolis has its staff of officials. Every bishop who possesses

the least influence has about him his patrol of cherubim from the

seminary, which goes the round, and maintains good order in the

episcopal palace, and mounts guard over monseigneur’s smile. To please

a bishop is equivalent to getting one’s foot in the stirrup for a

sub-diaconate. It is necessary to walk one’s path discreetly; the

apostleship does not disdain the canonship.

Just as there are bigwigs elsewhere, there are big mitres in the

Church. These are the bishops who stand well at Court, who are rich,

well endowed, skilful, accepted by the world, who know how to pray, no

doubt, but who know also how to beg, who feel little scruple at making

a whole diocese dance attendance in their person, who are connecting

links between the sacristy and diplomacy, who are abbés rather than

priests, prelates rather than bishops. Happy those who approach them!

Being persons of influence, they create a shower about them, upon the

assiduous and the favored, and upon all the young men who understand

the art of pleasing, of large parishes, prebends, archidiaconates,

chaplaincies, and cathedral posts, while awaiting episcopal honors. As

they advance themselves, they cause their satellites to progress also;

it is a whole solar system on the march. Their radiance casts a gleam

of purple over their suite. Their prosperity is crumbled up behind the

scenes, into nice little promotions. The larger the diocese of the

patron, the fatter the curacy for the favorite. And then, there is

Rome. A bishop who understands how to become an archbishop, an

archbishop who knows how to become a cardinal, carries you with him as

conclavist; you enter a court of papal jurisdiction, you receive the

pallium, and behold! you are an auditor, then a papal chamberlain, then

monsignor, and from a Grace to an Eminence is only a step, and between

the Eminence and the Holiness there is but the smoke of a ballot. Every

skull-cap may dream of the tiara. The priest is nowadays the only man

who can become a king in a regular manner; and what a king! the supreme

king. Then what a nursery of aspirations is a seminary! How many

blushing choristers, how many youthful abbés bear on their heads

Perrette’s pot of milk! Who knows how easy it is for ambition to call

itself vocation? in good faith, perchance, and deceiving itself,

devotee that it is.

Monseigneur Bienvenu, poor, humble, retiring, was not accounted among

the big mitres. This was plain from the complete absence of young

priests about him. We have seen that he “did not take” in Paris. Not a

single future dreamed of engrafting itself on this solitary old man.

Not a single sprouting ambition committed the folly of putting forth

its foliage in his shadow. His canons and grand-vicars were good old

men, rather vulgar like himself, walled up like him in this diocese,

without exit to a cardinalship, and who resembled their bishop, with

this difference, that they were finished and he was completed. The

impossibility of growing great under Monseigneur Bienvenu was so well

understood, that no sooner had the young men whom he ordained left the

seminary than they got themselves recommended to the archbishops of Aix

or of Auch, and went off in a great hurry. For, in short, we repeat it,

men wish to be pushed. A saint who dwells in a paroxysm of abnegation

is a dangerous neighbor; he might communicate to you, by contagion, an

incurable poverty, an anchylosis of the joints, which are useful in

advancement, and in short, more renunciation than you desire; and this

infectious virtue is avoided. Hence the isolation of Monseigneur

Bienvenu. We live in the midst of a gloomy society. Success; that is

the lesson which falls drop by drop from the slope of corruption.

Be it said in passing, that success is a very hideous thing. Its false

resemblance to merit deceives men. For the masses, success has almost

the same profile as supremacy. Success, that Menæchmus of talent, has

one dupe,—history. Juvenal and Tacitus alone grumble at it. In our day,

a philosophy which is almost official has entered into its service,

wears the livery of success, and performs the service of its

antechamber. Succeed: theory. Prosperity argues capacity. Win in the

lottery, and behold! you are a clever man. He who triumphs is

venerated. Be born with a silver spoon in your mouth! everything lies

in that. Be lucky, and you will have all the rest; be happy, and people

will think you great. Outside of five or six immense exceptions, which

compose the splendor of a century, contemporary admiration is nothing

but short-sightedness. Gilding is gold. It does no harm to be the first

arrival by pure chance, so long as you do arrive. The common herd is an

old Narcissus who adores himself, and who applauds the vulgar herd.

That enormous ability by virtue of which one is Moses, Æschylus, Dante,

Michael Angelo, or Napoleon, the multitude awards on the spot, and by

acclamation, to whomsoever attains his object, in whatsoever it may

consist. Let a notary transfigure himself into a deputy: let a false

Corneille compose \_Tiridate;\_ let a eunuch come to possess a harem; let

a military Prudhomme accidentally win the decisive battle of an epoch;

let an apothecary invent cardboard shoe-soles for the army of the

Sambre-and-Meuse, and construct for himself, out of this cardboard,

sold as leather, four hundred thousand francs of income; let a

pork-packer espouse usury, and cause it to bring forth seven or eight

millions, of which he is the father and of which it is the mother; let

a preacher become a bishop by force of his nasal drawl; let the steward

of a fine family be so rich on retiring from service that he is made

minister of finances,—and men call that Genius, just as they call the

face of Mousqueton \_Beauty\_, and the mien of Claude \_Majesty\_. With the

constellations of space they confound the stars of the abyss which are

made in the soft mire of the puddle by the feet of ducks.

CHAPTER XIII—WHAT HE BELIEVED

We are not obliged to sound the Bishop of D—— on the score of

orthodoxy. In the presence of such a soul we feel ourselves in no mood

but respect. The conscience of the just man should be accepted on his

word. Moreover, certain natures being given, we admit the possible

development of all beauties of human virtue in a belief that differs

from our own.

What did he think of this dogma, or of that mystery? These secrets of

the inner tribunal of the conscience are known only to the tomb, where

souls enter naked. The point on which we are certain is, that the

difficulties of faith never resolved themselves into hypocrisy in his

case. No decay is possible to the diamond. He believed to the extent of

his powers. \_“Credo in Patrem,”\_ he often exclaimed. Moreover, he drew

from good works that amount of satisfaction which suffices to the

conscience, and which whispers to a man, “Thou art with God!”

The point which we consider it our duty to note is, that outside of and

beyond his faith, as it were, the Bishop possessed an excess of love.

It was in that quarter, \_quia multum amavit\_,—because he loved

much—that he was regarded as vulnerable by “serious men,” “grave

persons” and “reasonable people”; favorite locutions of our sad world

where egotism takes its word of command from pedantry. What was this

excess of love? It was a serene benevolence which overflowed men, as we

have already pointed out, and which, on occasion, extended even to

things. He lived without disdain. He was indulgent towards God’s

creation. Every man, even the best, has within him a thoughtless

harshness which he reserves for animals. The Bishop of D—— had none of

that harshness, which is peculiar to many priests, nevertheless. He did

not go as far as the Brahmin, but he seemed to have weighed this saying

of Ecclesiastes: “Who knoweth whither the soul of the animal goeth?”

Hideousness of aspect, deformity of instinct, troubled him not, and did

not arouse his indignation. He was touched, almost softened by them. It

seemed as though he went thoughtfully away to seek beyond the bounds of

life which is apparent, the cause, the explanation, or the excuse for

them. He seemed at times to be asking God to commute these penalties.

He examined without wrath, and with the eye of a linguist who is

deciphering a palimpsest, that portion of chaos which still exists in

nature. This reverie sometimes caused him to utter odd sayings. One

morning he was in his garden, and thought himself alone, but his sister

was walking behind him, unseen by him: suddenly he paused and gazed at

something on the ground; it was a large, black, hairy, frightful

spider. His sister heard him say:—

“Poor beast! It is not its fault!”

Why not mention these almost divinely childish sayings of kindness?

Puerile they may be; but these sublime puerilities were peculiar to

Saint Francis d’Assisi and of Marcus Aurelius. One day he sprained his

ankle in his effort to avoid stepping on an ant. Thus lived this just

man. Sometimes he fell asleep in his garden, and then there was nothing

more venerable possible.

Monseigneur Bienvenu had formerly been, if the stories anent his youth,

and even in regard to his manhood, were to be believed, a passionate,

and, possibly, a violent man. His universal suavity was less an

instinct of nature than the result of a grand conviction which had

filtered into his heart through the medium of life, and had trickled

there slowly, thought by thought; for, in a character, as in a rock,

there may exist apertures made by drops of water. These hollows are

uneffaceable; these formations are indestructible.

In 1815, as we think we have already said, he reached his seventy-fifth

birthday, but he did not appear to be more than sixty. He was not tall;

he was rather plump; and, in order to combat this tendency, he was fond

of taking long strolls on foot; his step was firm, and his form was but

slightly bent, a detail from which we do not pretend to draw any

conclusion. Gregory XVI., at the age of eighty, held himself erect and

smiling, which did not prevent him from being a bad bishop. Monseigneur

Welcome had what the people term a “fine head,” but so amiable was he

that they forgot that it was fine.

When he conversed with that infantile gayety which was one of his

charms, and of which we have already spoken, people felt at their ease

with him, and joy seemed to radiate from his whole person. His fresh

and ruddy complexion, his very white teeth, all of which he had

preserved, and which were displayed by his smile, gave him that open

and easy air which cause the remark to be made of a man, “He’s a good

fellow”; and of an old man, “He is a fine man.” That, it will be

recalled, was the effect which he produced upon Napoleon. On the first

encounter, and to one who saw him for the first time, he was nothing,

in fact, but a fine man. But if one remained near him for a few hours,

and beheld him in the least degree pensive, the fine man became

gradually transfigured, and took on some imposing quality, I know not

what; his broad and serious brow, rendered august by his white locks,

became august also by virtue of meditation; majesty radiated from his

goodness, though his goodness ceased not to be radiant; one experienced

something of the emotion which one would feel on beholding a smiling

angel slowly unfold his wings, without ceasing to smile. Respect, an

unutterable respect, penetrated you by degrees and mounted to your

heart, and one felt that one had before him one of those strong,

thoroughly tried, and indulgent souls where thought is so grand that it

can no longer be anything but gentle.

As we have seen, prayer, the celebration of the offices of religion,

alms-giving, the consolation of the afflicted, the cultivation of a bit

of land, fraternity, frugality, hospitality, renunciation, confidence,

study, work, filled every day of his life. \_Filled\_ is exactly the

word; certainly the Bishop’s day was quite full to the brim, of good

words and good deeds. Nevertheless, it was not complete if cold or

rainy weather prevented his passing an hour or two in his garden before

going to bed, and after the two women had retired. It seemed to be a

sort of rite with him, to prepare himself for slumber by meditation in

the presence of the grand spectacles of the nocturnal heavens.

Sometimes, if the two old women were not asleep, they heard him pacing

slowly along the walks at a very advanced hour of the night. He was

there alone, communing with himself, peaceful, adoring, comparing the

serenity of his heart with the serenity of the ether, moved amid the

darkness by the visible splendor of the constellations and the

invisible splendor of God, opening his heart to the thoughts which fall

from the Unknown. At such moments, while he offered his heart at the

hour when nocturnal flowers offer their perfume, illuminated like a

lamp amid the starry night, as he poured himself out in ecstasy in the

midst of the universal radiance of creation, he could not have told

himself, probably, what was passing in his spirit; he felt something

take its flight from him, and something descend into him. Mysterious

exchange of the abysses of the soul with the abysses of the universe!

He thought of the grandeur and presence of God; of the future eternity,

that strange mystery; of the eternity past, a mystery still more

strange; of all the infinities, which pierced their way into all his

senses, beneath his eyes; and, without seeking to comprehend the

incomprehensible, he gazed upon it. He did not study God; he was

dazzled by him. He considered those magnificent conjunctions of atoms,

which communicate aspects to matter, reveal forces by verifying them,

create individualities in unity, proportions in extent, the innumerable

in the infinite, and, through light, produce beauty. These conjunctions

are formed and dissolved incessantly; hence life and death.

He seated himself on a wooden bench, with his back against a decrepit

vine; he gazed at the stars, past the puny and stunted silhouettes of

his fruit-trees. This quarter of an acre, so poorly planted, so

encumbered with mean buildings and sheds, was dear to him, and

satisfied his wants.

What more was needed by this old man, who divided the leisure of his

life, where there was so little leisure, between gardening in the

daytime and contemplation at night? Was not this narrow enclosure, with

the heavens for a ceiling, sufficient to enable him to adore God in his

most divine works, in turn? Does not this comprehend all, in fact? and

what is there left to desire beyond it? A little garden in which to

walk, and immensity in which to dream. At one’s feet that which can be

cultivated and plucked; over head that which one can study and meditate

upon: some flowers on earth, and all the stars in the sky.

CHAPTER XIV—WHAT HE THOUGHT

One last word.

Since this sort of details might, particularly at the present moment,

and to use an expression now in fashion, give to the Bishop of D—— a

certain “pantheistical” physiognomy, and induce the belief, either to

his credit or discredit, that he entertained one of those personal

philosophies which are peculiar to our century, which sometimes spring

up in solitary spirits, and there take on a form and grow until they

usurp the place of religion, we insist upon it, that not one of those

persons who knew Monseigneur Welcome would have thought himself

authorized to think anything of the sort. That which enlightened this

man was his heart. His wisdom was made of the light which comes from

there.

No systems; many works. Abstruse speculations contain vertigo; no,

there is nothing to indicate that he risked his mind in apocalypses.

The apostle may be daring, but the bishop must be timid. He would

probably have felt a scruple at sounding too far in advance certain

problems which are, in a manner, reserved for terrible great minds.

There is a sacred horror beneath the porches of the enigma; those

gloomy openings stand yawning there, but something tells you, you, a

passer-by in life, that you must not enter. Woe to him who penetrates

thither!

Geniuses in the impenetrable depths of abstraction and pure

speculation, situated, so to speak, above all dogmas, propose their

ideas to God. Their prayer audaciously offers discussion. Their

adoration interrogates. This is direct religion, which is full of

anxiety and responsibility for him who attempts its steep cliffs.

Human meditation has no limits. At his own risk and peril, it analyzes

and digs deep into its own bedazzlement. One might almost say, that by

a sort of splendid reaction, it with it dazzles nature; the mysterious

world which surrounds us renders back what it has received; it is

probable that the contemplators are contemplated. However that may be,

there are on earth men who—are they men?—perceive distinctly at the

verge of the horizons of reverie the heights of the absolute, and who

have the terrible vision of the infinite mountain. Monseigneur Welcome

was one of these men; Monseigneur Welcome was not a genius. He would

have feared those sublimities whence some very great men even, like

Swedenborg and Pascal, have slipped into insanity. Certainly, these

powerful reveries have their moral utility, and by these arduous paths

one approaches to ideal perfection. As for him, he took the path which

shortens,—the Gospel’s.

He did not attempt to impart to his chasuble the folds of Elijah’s

mantle; he projected no ray of future upon the dark groundswell of

events; he did not see to condense in flame the light of things; he had

nothing of the prophet and nothing of the magician about him. This

humble soul loved, and that was all.

That he carried prayer to the pitch of a superhuman aspiration is

probable: but one can no more pray too much than one can love too much;

and if it is a heresy to pray beyond the texts, Saint Theresa and Saint

Jerome would be heretics.

He inclined towards all that groans and all that expiates. The universe

appeared to him like an immense malady; everywhere he felt fever,

everywhere he heard the sound of suffering, and, without seeking to

solve the enigma, he strove to dress the wound. The terrible spectacle

of created things developed tenderness in him; he was occupied only in

finding for himself, and in inspiring others with the best way to

compassionate and relieve. That which exists was for this good and rare

priest a permanent subject of sadness which sought consolation.

There are men who toil at extracting gold; he toiled at the extraction

of pity. Universal misery was his mine. The sadness which reigned

everywhere was but an excuse for unfailing kindness. \_Love each other;\_

he declared this to be complete, desired nothing further, and that was

the whole of his doctrine. One day, that man who believed himself to be

a “philosopher,” the senator who has already been alluded to, said to

the Bishop: “Just survey the spectacle of the world: all war against

all; the strongest has the most wit. Your \_love each other\_ is

nonsense.”—\_“Well,”\_ replied Monseigneur Welcome, without contesting

the point, \_“if it is nonsense, the soul should shut itself up in it,

as the pearl in the oyster.”\_ Thus he shut himself up, he lived there,

he was absolutely satisfied with it, leaving on one side the prodigious

questions which attract and terrify, the fathomless perspectives of

abstraction, the precipices of metaphysics—all those profundities which

converge, for the apostle in God, for the atheist in nothingness;

destiny, good and evil, the way of being against being, the conscience

of man, the thoughtful somnambulism of the animal, the transformation

in death, the recapitulation of existences which the tomb contains, the

incomprehensible grafting of successive loves on the persistent \_I\_,

the essence, the substance, the Nile, and the Ens, the soul, nature,

liberty, necessity; perpendicular problems, sinister obscurities, where

lean the gigantic archangels of the human mind; formidable abysses,

which Lucretius, Manou, Saint Paul, Dante, contemplate with eyes

flashing lightning, which seems by its steady gaze on the infinite to

cause stars to blaze forth there.

Monseigneur Bienvenu was simply a man who took note of the exterior of

mysterious questions without scrutinizing them, and without troubling

his own mind with them, and who cherished in his own soul a grave

respect for darkness.

BOOK SECOND—THE FALL

CHAPTER I—THE EVENING OF A DAY OF WALKING

Early in the month of October, 1815, about an hour before sunset, a man

who was travelling on foot entered the little town of D—— The few

inhabitants who were at their windows or on their thresholds at the

moment stared at this traveller with a sort of uneasiness. It was

difficult to encounter a wayfarer of more wretched appearance. He was a

man of medium stature, thickset and robust, in the prime of life. He

might have been forty-six or forty-eight years old. A cap with a

drooping leather visor partly concealed his face, burned and tanned by

sun and wind, and dripping with perspiration. His shirt of coarse

yellow linen, fastened at the neck by a small silver anchor, permitted

a view of his hairy breast: he had a cravat twisted into a string;

trousers of blue drilling, worn and threadbare, white on one knee and

torn on the other; an old gray, tattered blouse, patched on one of the

elbows with a bit of green cloth sewed on with twine; a tightly packed

soldier knapsack, well buckled and perfectly new, on his back; an

enormous, knotty stick in his hand; iron-shod shoes on his stockingless

feet; a shaved head and a long beard.

The sweat, the heat, the journey on foot, the dust, added I know not

what sordid quality to this dilapidated whole. His hair was closely

cut, yet bristling, for it had begun to grow a little, and did not seem

to have been cut for some time.

No one knew him. He was evidently only a chance passer-by. Whence came

he? From the south; from the seashore, perhaps, for he made his

entrance into D—— by the same street which, seven months previously,

had witnessed the passage of the Emperor Napoleon on his way from

Cannes to Paris. This man must have been walking all day. He seemed

very much fatigued. Some women of the ancient market town which is

situated below the city had seen him pause beneath the trees of the

boulevard Gassendi, and drink at the fountain which stands at the end

of the promenade. He must have been very thirsty: for the children who

followed him saw him stop again for a drink, two hundred paces further

on, at the fountain in the market-place.

On arriving at the corner of the Rue Poichevert, he turned to the left,

and directed his steps toward the town-hall. He entered, then came out

a quarter of an hour later. A gendarme was seated near the door, on the

stone bench which General Drouot had mounted on the 4th of March to

read to the frightened throng of the inhabitants of D—— the

proclamation of the Gulf Juan. The man pulled off his cap and humbly

saluted the gendarme.

The gendarme, without replying to his salute, stared attentively at

him, followed him for a while with his eyes, and then entered the

town-hall.

There then existed at D—— a fine inn at the sign of the \_Cross of

Colbas\_. This inn had for a landlord a certain Jacquin Labarre, a man

of consideration in the town on account of his relationship to another

Labarre, who kept the inn of the \_Three Dauphins\_ in Grenoble, and had

served in the Guides. At the time of the Emperor’s landing, many rumors

had circulated throughout the country with regard to this inn of the

\_Three Dauphins\_. It was said that General Bertrand, disguised as a

carter, had made frequent trips thither in the month of January, and

that he had distributed crosses of honor to the soldiers and handfuls

of gold to the citizens. The truth is, that when the Emperor entered

Grenoble he had refused to install himself at the hotel of the

prefecture; he had thanked the mayor, saying, \_“I am going to the house

of a brave man of my acquaintance”;\_ and he had betaken himself to the

\_Three Dauphins\_. This glory of the Labarre of the \_Three Dauphins\_ was

reflected upon the Labarre of the \_Cross of Colbas\_, at a distance of

five and twenty leagues. It was said of him in the town, \_“That is the

cousin of the man of Grenoble.”\_

The man bent his steps towards this inn, which was the best in the

country-side. He entered the kitchen, which opened on a level with the

street. All the stoves were lighted; a huge fire blazed gayly in the

fireplace. The host, who was also the chief cook, was going from one

stew-pan to another, very busily superintending an excellent dinner

designed for the wagoners, whose loud talking, conversation, and

laughter were audible from an adjoining apartment. Any one who has

travelled knows that there is no one who indulges in better cheer than

wagoners. A fat marmot, flanked by white partridges and heather-cocks,

was turning on a long spit before the fire; on the stove, two huge

carps from Lake Lauzet and a trout from Lake Alloz were cooking.

The host, hearing the door open and seeing a newcomer enter, said,

without raising his eyes from his stoves:—

“What do you wish, sir?”

“Food and lodging,” said the man.

“Nothing easier,” replied the host. At that moment he turned his head,

took in the traveller’s appearance with a single glance, and added, “By

paying for it.”

The man drew a large leather purse from the pocket of his blouse, and

answered, “I have money.”

“In that case, we are at your service,” said the host.

The man put his purse back in his pocket, removed his knapsack from his

back, put it on the ground near the door, retained his stick in his

hand, and seated himself on a low stool close to the fire. D—— is in

the mountains. The evenings are cold there in October.

But as the host went back and forth, he scrutinized the traveller.

“Will dinner be ready soon?” said the man.

“Immediately,” replied the landlord.

While the newcomer was warming himself before the fire, with his back

turned, the worthy host, Jacquin Labarre, drew a pencil from his

pocket, then tore off the corner of an old newspaper which was lying on

a small table near the window. On the white margin he wrote a line or

two, folded it without sealing, and then intrusted this scrap of paper

to a child who seemed to serve him in the capacity both of scullion and

lackey. The landlord whispered a word in the scullion’s ear, and the

child set off on a run in the direction of the town-hall.

The traveller saw nothing of all this.

Once more he inquired, “Will dinner be ready soon?”

“Immediately,” responded the host.

The child returned. He brought back the paper. The host unfolded it

eagerly, like a person who is expecting a reply. He seemed to read it

attentively, then tossed his head, and remained thoughtful for a

moment. Then he took a step in the direction of the traveller, who

appeared to be immersed in reflections which were not very serene.

“I cannot receive you, sir,” said he.

The man half rose.

“What! Are you afraid that I will not pay you? Do you want me to pay

you in advance? I have money, I tell you.”

“It is not that.”

“What then?”

“You have money—”

“Yes,” said the man.

“And I,” said the host, “have no room.”

The man resumed tranquilly, “Put me in the stable.”

“I cannot.”

“Why?”

“The horses take up all the space.”

“Very well!” retorted the man; “a corner of the loft then, a truss of

straw. We will see about that after dinner.”

“I cannot give you any dinner.”

This declaration, made in a measured but firm tone, struck the stranger

as grave. He rose.

“Ah! bah! But I am dying of hunger. I have been walking since sunrise.

I have travelled twelve leagues. I pay. I wish to eat.”

“I have nothing,” said the landlord.

The man burst out laughing, and turned towards the fireplace and the

stoves: “Nothing! and all that?”

“All that is engaged.”

“By whom?”

“By messieurs the wagoners.”

“How many are there of them?”

“Twelve.”

“There is enough food there for twenty.”

“They have engaged the whole of it and paid for it in advance.”

The man seated himself again, and said, without raising his voice, “I

am at an inn; I am hungry, and I shall remain.”

Then the host bent down to his ear, and said in a tone which made him

start, “Go away!”

At that moment the traveller was bending forward and thrusting some

brands into the fire with the iron-shod tip of his staff; he turned

quickly round, and as he opened his mouth to reply, the host gazed

steadily at him and added, still in a low voice: “Stop! there’s enough

of that sort of talk. Do you want me to tell you your name? Your name

is Jean Valjean. Now do you want me to tell you who you are? When I saw

you come in I suspected something; I sent to the town-hall, and this

was the reply that was sent to me. Can you read?”

So saying, he held out to the stranger, fully unfolded, the paper which

had just travelled from the inn to the town-hall, and from the

town-hall to the inn. The man cast a glance upon it. The landlord

resumed after a pause.

“I am in the habit of being polite to every one. Go away!”

The man dropped his head, picked up the knapsack which he had deposited

on the ground, and took his departure.

He chose the principal street. He walked straight on at a venture,

keeping close to the houses like a sad and humiliated man. He did not

turn round a single time. Had he done so, he would have seen the host

of the \_Cross of Colbas\_ standing on his threshold, surrounded by all

the guests of his inn, and all the passers-by in the street, talking

vivaciously, and pointing him out with his finger; and, from the

glances of terror and distrust cast by the group, he might have divined

that his arrival would speedily become an event for the whole town.

He saw nothing of all this. People who are crushed do not look behind

them. They know but too well the evil fate which follows them.

Thus he proceeded for some time, walking on without ceasing, traversing

at random streets of which he knew nothing, forgetful of his fatigue,

as is often the case when a man is sad. All at once he felt the pangs

of hunger sharply. Night was drawing near. He glanced about him, to see

whether he could not discover some shelter.

The fine hostelry was closed to him; he was seeking some very humble

public house, some hovel, however lowly.

Just then a light flashed up at the end of the streets; a pine branch

suspended from a cross-beam of iron was outlined against the white sky

of the twilight. He proceeded thither.

It proved to be, in fact, a public house. The public house which is in

the Rue de Chaffaut.

The wayfarer halted for a moment, and peeped through the window into

the interior of the low-studded room of the public house, illuminated

by a small lamp on a table and by a large fire on the hearth. Some men

were engaged in drinking there. The landlord was warming himself. An

iron pot, suspended from a crane, bubbled over the flame.

The entrance to this public house, which is also a sort of an inn, is

by two doors. One opens on the street, the other upon a small yard

filled with manure. The traveller dare not enter by the street door. He

slipped into the yard, halted again, then raised the latch timidly and

opened the door.

“Who goes there?” said the master.

“Some one who wants supper and bed.”

“Good. We furnish supper and bed here.”

He entered. All the men who were drinking turned round. The lamp

illuminated him on one side, the firelight on the other. They examined

him for some time while he was taking off his knapsack.

The host said to him, “There is the fire. The supper is cooking in the

pot. Come and warm yourself, comrade.”

He approached and seated himself near the hearth. He stretched out his

feet, which were exhausted with fatigue, to the fire; a fine odor was

emitted by the pot. All that could be distinguished of his face,

beneath his cap, which was well pulled down, assumed a vague appearance

of comfort, mingled with that other poignant aspect which habitual

suffering bestows.

It was, moreover, a firm, energetic, and melancholy profile. This

physiognomy was strangely composed; it began by seeming humble, and

ended by seeming severe. The eye shone beneath its lashes like a fire

beneath brushwood.

One of the men seated at the table, however, was a fishmonger who,

before entering the public house of the Rue de Chaffaut, had been to

stable his horse at Labarre’s. It chanced that he had that very morning

encountered this unprepossessing stranger on the road between Bras

d’Asse and—I have forgotten the name. I think it was Escoublon. Now,

when he met him, the man, who then seemed already extremely weary, had

requested him to take him on his crupper; to which the fishmonger had

made no reply except by redoubling his gait. This fishmonger had been a

member half an hour previously of the group which surrounded Jacquin

Labarre, and had himself related his disagreeable encounter of the

morning to the people at the \_Cross of Colbas\_. From where he sat he

made an imperceptible sign to the tavern-keeper. The tavern-keeper went

to him. They exchanged a few words in a low tone. The man had again

become absorbed in his reflections.

The tavern-keeper returned to the fireplace, laid his hand abruptly on

the shoulder of the man, and said to him:—

“You are going to get out of here.”

The stranger turned round and replied gently, “Ah! You know?—”

“Yes.”

“I was sent away from the other inn.”

“And you are to be turned out of this one.”

“Where would you have me go?”

“Elsewhere.”

The man took his stick and his knapsack and departed.

As he went out, some children who had followed him from the \_Cross of

Colbas\_, and who seemed to be lying in wait for him, threw stones at

him. He retraced his steps in anger, and threatened them with his

stick: the children dispersed like a flock of birds.

He passed before the prison. At the door hung an iron chain attached to

a bell. He rang.

The wicket opened.

“Turnkey,” said he, removing his cap politely, “will you have the

kindness to admit me, and give me a lodging for the night?”

A voice replied:—

“The prison is not an inn. Get yourself arrested, and you will be

admitted.”

The wicket closed again.

He entered a little street in which there were many gardens. Some of

them are enclosed only by hedges, which lends a cheerful aspect to the

street. In the midst of these gardens and hedges he caught sight of a

small house of a single story, the window of which was lighted up. He

peered through the pane as he had done at the public house. Within was

a large whitewashed room, with a bed draped in printed cotton stuff,

and a cradle in one corner, a few wooden chairs, and a double-barrelled

gun hanging on the wall. A table was spread in the centre of the room.

A copper lamp illuminated the tablecloth of coarse white linen, the

pewter jug shining like silver, and filled with wine, and the brown,

smoking soup-tureen. At this table sat a man of about forty, with a

merry and open countenance, who was dandling a little child on his

knees. Close by a very young woman was nursing another child. The

father was laughing, the child was laughing, the mother was smiling.

The stranger paused a moment in reverie before this tender and calming

spectacle. What was taking place within him? He alone could have told.

It is probable that he thought that this joyous house would be

hospitable, and that, in a place where he beheld so much happiness, he

would find perhaps a little pity.

He tapped on the pane with a very small and feeble knock.

They did not hear him.

He tapped again.

He heard the woman say, “It seems to me, husband, that some one is

knocking.”

“No,” replied the husband.

He tapped a third time.

The husband rose, took the lamp, and went to the door, which he opened.

He was a man of lofty stature, half peasant, half artisan. He wore a

huge leather apron, which reached to his left shoulder, and which a

hammer, a red handkerchief, a powder-horn, and all sorts of objects

which were upheld by the girdle, as in a pocket, caused to bulge out.

He carried his head thrown backwards; his shirt, widely opened and

turned back, displayed his bull neck, white and bare. He had thick

eyelashes, enormous black whiskers, prominent eyes, the lower part of

his face like a snout; and besides all this, that air of being on his

own ground, which is indescribable.

“Pardon me, sir,” said the wayfarer, “Could you, in consideration of

payment, give me a plate of soup and a corner of that shed yonder in

the garden, in which to sleep? Tell me; can you? For money?”

“Who are you?” demanded the master of the house.

The man replied: “I have just come from Puy-Moisson. I have walked all

day long. I have travelled twelve leagues. Can you?—if I pay?”

“I would not refuse,” said the peasant, “to lodge any respectable man

who would pay me. But why do you not go to the inn?”

“There is no room.”

“Bah! Impossible. This is neither a fair nor a market day. Have you

been to Labarre?”

“Yes.”

“Well?”

The traveller replied with embarrassment: “I do not know. He did not

receive me.”

“Have you been to What’s-his-name’s, in the Rue Chaffaut?”

The stranger’s embarrassment increased; he stammered, “He did not

receive me either.”

The peasant’s countenance assumed an expression of distrust; he

surveyed the newcomer from head to feet, and suddenly exclaimed, with a

sort of shudder:—

“Are you the man?—”

He cast a fresh glance upon the stranger, took three steps backwards,

placed the lamp on the table, and took his gun down from the wall.

Meanwhile, at the words, \_Are you the man?\_ the woman had risen, had

clasped her two children in her arms, and had taken refuge

precipitately behind her husband, staring in terror at the stranger,

with her bosom uncovered, and with frightened eyes, as she murmured in

a low tone, \_“Tso-maraude.”\_1

All this took place in less time than it requires to picture it to

one’s self. After having scrutinized the man for several moments, as

one scrutinizes a viper, the master of the house returned to the door

and said:—

“Clear out!”

“For pity’s sake, a glass of water,” said the man.

“A shot from my gun!” said the peasant.

Then he closed the door violently, and the man heard him shoot two

large bolts. A moment later, the window-shutter was closed, and the

sound of a bar of iron which was placed against it was audible outside.

Night continued to fall. A cold wind from the Alps was blowing. By the

light of the expiring day the stranger perceived, in one of the gardens

which bordered the street, a sort of hut, which seemed to him to be

built of sods. He climbed over the wooden fence resolutely, and found

himself in the garden. He approached the hut; its door consisted of a

very low and narrow aperture, and it resembled those buildings which

road-laborers construct for themselves along the roads. He thought

without doubt, that it was, in fact, the dwelling of a road-laborer; he

was suffering from cold and hunger, but this was, at least, a shelter

from the cold. This sort of dwelling is not usually occupied at night.

He threw himself flat on his face, and crawled into the hut. It was

warm there, and he found a tolerably good bed of straw. He lay, for a

moment, stretched out on this bed, without the power to make a

movement, so fatigued was he. Then, as the knapsack on his back was in

his way, and as it furnished, moreover, a pillow ready to his hand, he

set about unbuckling one of the straps. At that moment, a ferocious

growl became audible. He raised his eyes. The head of an enormous dog

was outlined in the darkness at the entrance of the hut.

It was a dog’s kennel.

He was himself vigorous and formidable; he armed himself with his

staff, made a shield of his knapsack, and made his way out of the

kennel in the best way he could, not without enlarging the rents in his

rags.

He left the garden in the same manner, but backwards, being obliged, in

order to keep the dog respectful, to have recourse to that manœuvre

with his stick which masters in that sort of fencing designate as \_la

rose couverte\_.

When he had, not without difficulty, repassed the fence, and found

himself once more in the street, alone, without refuge, without

shelter, without a roof over his head, chased even from that bed of

straw and from that miserable kennel, he dropped rather than seated

himself on a stone, and it appears that a passer-by heard him exclaim,

“I am not even a dog!”

He soon rose again and resumed his march. He went out of the town,

hoping to find some tree or haystack in the fields which would afford

him shelter.

He walked thus for some time, with his head still drooping. When he

felt himself far from every human habitation, he raised his eyes and

gazed searchingly about him. He was in a field. Before him was one of

those low hills covered with close-cut stubble, which, after the

harvest, resemble shaved heads.

The horizon was perfectly black. This was not alone the obscurity of

night; it was caused by very low-hanging clouds which seemed to rest

upon the hill itself, and which were mounting and filling the whole

sky. Meanwhile, as the moon was about to rise, and as there was still

floating in the zenith a remnant of the brightness of twilight, these

clouds formed at the summit of the sky a sort of whitish arch, whence a

gleam of light fell upon the earth.

The earth was thus better lighted than the sky, which produces a

particularly sinister effect, and the hill, whose contour was poor and

mean, was outlined vague and wan against the gloomy horizon. The whole

effect was hideous, petty, lugubrious, and narrow.

There was nothing in the field or on the hill except a deformed tree,

which writhed and shivered a few paces distant from the wayfarer.

This man was evidently very far from having those delicate habits of

intelligence and spirit which render one sensible to the mysterious

aspects of things; nevertheless, there was something in that sky, in

that hill, in that plain, in that tree, which was so profoundly

desolate, that after a moment of immobility and reverie he turned back

abruptly. There are instants when nature seems hostile.

He retraced his steps; the gates of D—— were closed. D——, which had

sustained sieges during the wars of religion, was still surrounded in

1815 by ancient walls flanked by square towers which have been

demolished since. He passed through a breach and entered the town

again.

It might have been eight o’clock in the evening. As he was not

acquainted with the streets, he recommenced his walk at random.

In this way he came to the prefecture, then to the seminary. As he

passed through the Cathedral Square, he shook his fist at the church.

At the corner of this square there is a printing establishment. It is

there that the proclamations of the Emperor and of the Imperial Guard

to the army, brought from the Island of Elba and dictated by Napoleon

himself, were printed for the first time.

Worn out with fatigue, and no longer entertaining any hope, he lay down

on a stone bench which stands at the doorway of this printing office.

At that moment an old woman came out of the church. She saw the man

stretched out in the shadow. “What are you doing there, my friend?”

said she.

He answered harshly and angrily: “As you see, my good woman, I am

sleeping.” The good woman, who was well worthy the name, in fact, was

the Marquise de R——

“On this bench?” she went on.

“I have had a mattress of wood for nineteen years,” said the man;

“to-day I have a mattress of stone.”

“You have been a soldier?”

“Yes, my good woman, a soldier.”

“Why do you not go to the inn?”

“Because I have no money.”

“Alas!” said Madame de R——, “I have only four sous in my purse.”

“Give it to me all the same.”

The man took the four sous. Madame de R—— continued: “You cannot obtain

lodgings in an inn for so small a sum. But have you tried? It is

impossible for you to pass the night thus. You are cold and hungry, no

doubt. Some one might have given you a lodging out of charity.”

“I have knocked at all doors.”

“Well?”

“I have been driven away everywhere.”

The “good woman” touched the man’s arm, and pointed out to him on the

other side of the street a small, low house, which stood beside the

Bishop’s palace.

“You have knocked at all doors?”

“Yes.”

“Have you knocked at that one?”

“No.”

“Knock there.”

CHAPTER II—PRUDENCE COUNSELLED TO WISDOM.

That evening, the Bishop of D——, after his promenade through the town,

remained shut up rather late in his room. He was busy over a great work

on \_Duties\_, which was never completed, unfortunately. He was carefully

compiling everything that the Fathers and the doctors have said on this

important subject. His book was divided into two parts: firstly, the

duties of all; secondly, the duties of each individual, according to

the class to which he belongs. The duties of all are the great duties.

There are four of these. Saint Matthew points them out: duties towards

God (\_Matt.\_ vi.); duties towards one’s self (\_Matt.\_ v. 29, 30);

duties towards one’s neighbor (\_Matt.\_ vii. 12); duties towards animals

(\_Matt.\_ vi. 20, 25). As for the other duties the Bishop found them

pointed out and prescribed elsewhere: to sovereigns and subjects, in

the Epistle to the Romans; to magistrates, to wives, to mothers, to

young men, by Saint Peter; to husbands, fathers, children and servants,

in the Epistle to the Ephesians; to the faithful, in the Epistle to the

Hebrews; to virgins, in the Epistle to the Corinthians. Out of these

precepts he was laboriously constructing a harmonious whole, which he

desired to present to souls.

At eight o’clock he was still at work, writing with a good deal of

inconvenience upon little squares of paper, with a big book open on his

knees, when Madame Magloire entered, according to her wont, to get the

silver-ware from the cupboard near his bed. A moment later, the Bishop,

knowing that the table was set, and that his sister was probably

waiting for him, shut his book, rose from his table, and entered the

dining-room.

The dining-room was an oblong apartment, with a fireplace, which had a

door opening on the street (as we have said), and a window opening on

the garden.

Madame Magloire was, in fact, just putting the last touches to the

table.

As she performed this service, she was conversing with Mademoiselle

Baptistine.

A lamp stood on the table; the table was near the fireplace. A wood

fire was burning there.

One can easily picture to one’s self these two women, both of whom were

over sixty years of age. Madame Magloire small, plump, vivacious;

Mademoiselle Baptistine gentle, slender, frail, somewhat taller than

her brother, dressed in a gown of puce-colored silk, of the fashion of

1806, which she had purchased at that date in Paris, and which had

lasted ever since. To borrow vulgar phrases, which possess the merit of

giving utterance in a single word to an idea which a whole page would

hardly suffice to express, Madame Magloire had the air of a \_peasant\_,

and Mademoiselle Baptistine that of a \_lady\_. Madame Magloire wore a

white quilted cap, a gold Jeannette cross on a velvet ribbon upon her

neck, the only bit of feminine jewelry that there was in the house, a

very white fichu puffing out from a gown of coarse black woollen stuff,

with large, short sleeves, an apron of cotton cloth in red and green

checks, knotted round the waist with a green ribbon, with a stomacher

of the same attached by two pins at the upper corners, coarse shoes on

her feet, and yellow stockings, like the women of Marseilles.

Mademoiselle Baptistine’s gown was cut on the patterns of 1806, with a

short waist, a narrow, sheath-like skirt, puffed sleeves, with flaps

and buttons. She concealed her gray hair under a frizzed wig known as

the \_baby\_ wig. Madame Magloire had an intelligent, vivacious, and

kindly air; the two corners of her mouth unequally raised, and her

upper lip, which was larger than the lower, imparted to her a rather

crabbed and imperious look. So long as Monseigneur held his peace, she

talked to him resolutely with a mixture of respect and freedom; but as

soon as Monseigneur began to speak, as we have seen, she obeyed

passively like her mistress. Mademoiselle Baptistine did not even

speak. She confined herself to obeying and pleasing him. She had never

been pretty, even when she was young; she had large, blue, prominent

eyes, and a long arched nose; but her whole visage, her whole person,

breathed forth an ineffable goodness, as we stated in the beginning.

She had always been predestined to gentleness; but faith, charity,

hope, those three virtues which mildly warm the soul, had gradually

elevated that gentleness to sanctity. Nature had made her a lamb,

religion had made her an angel. Poor sainted virgin! Sweet memory which

has vanished!

Mademoiselle Baptistine has so often narrated what passed at the

episcopal residence that evening, that there are many people now living

who still recall the most minute details.

At the moment when the Bishop entered, Madame Magloire was talking with

considerable vivacity. She was haranguing Mademoiselle Baptistine on a

subject which was familiar to her and to which the Bishop was also

accustomed. The question concerned the lock upon the entrance door.

It appears that while procuring some provisions for supper, Madame

Magloire had heard things in divers places. People had spoken of a

prowler of evil appearance; a suspicious vagabond had arrived who must

be somewhere about the town, and those who should take it into their

heads to return home late that night might be subjected to unpleasant

encounters. The police was very badly organized, moreover, because

there was no love lost between the Prefect and the Mayor, who sought to

injure each other by making things happen. It behooved wise people to

play the part of their own police, and to guard themselves well, and

care must be taken to duly close, bar and barricade their houses, and

to \_fasten the doors well\_.

Madame Magloire emphasized these last words; but the Bishop had just

come from his room, where it was rather cold. He seated himself in

front of the fire, and warmed himself, and then fell to thinking of

other things. He did not take up the remark dropped with design by

Madame Magloire. She repeated it. Then Mademoiselle Baptistine,

desirous of satisfying Madame Magloire without displeasing her brother,

ventured to say timidly:—

“Did you hear what Madame Magloire is saying, brother?”

“I have heard something of it in a vague way,” replied the Bishop. Then

half-turning in his chair, placing his hands on his knees, and raising

towards the old servant woman his cordial face, which so easily grew

joyous, and which was illuminated from below by the firelight,—“Come,

what is the matter? What is the matter? Are we in any great danger?”

Then Madame Magloire began the whole story afresh, exaggerating it a

little without being aware of the fact. It appeared that a Bohemian, a

bare-footed vagabond, a sort of dangerous mendicant, was at that moment

in the town. He had presented himself at Jacquin Labarre’s to obtain

lodgings, but the latter had not been willing to take him in. He had

been seen to arrive by the way of the boulevard Gassendi and roam about

the streets in the gloaming. A gallows-bird with a terrible face.

“Really!” said the Bishop.

This willingness to interrogate encouraged Madame Magloire; it seemed

to her to indicate that the Bishop was on the point of becoming

alarmed; she pursued triumphantly:—

“Yes, Monseigneur. That is how it is. There will be some sort of

catastrophe in this town to-night. Every one says so. And withal, the

police is so badly regulated” (a useful repetition). “The idea of

living in a mountainous country, and not even having lights in the

streets at night! One goes out. Black as ovens, indeed! And I say,

Monseigneur, and Mademoiselle there says with me—”

“I,” interrupted his sister, “say nothing. What my brother does is well

done.”

Madame Magloire continued as though there had been no protest:—

“We say that this house is not safe at all; that if Monseigneur will

permit, I will go and tell Paulin Musebois, the locksmith, to come and

replace the ancient locks on the doors; we have them, and it is only

the work of a moment; for I say that nothing is more terrible than a

door which can be opened from the outside with a latch by the first

passer-by; and I say that we need bolts, Monseigneur, if only for this

night; moreover, Monseigneur has the habit of always saying ‘come in’;

and besides, even in the middle of the night, O mon Dieu! there is no

need to ask permission.”

At that moment there came a tolerably violent knock on the door.

“Come in,” said the Bishop.

CHAPTER III—THE HEROISM OF PASSIVE OBEDIENCE.

The door opened.

It opened wide with a rapid movement, as though some one had given it

an energetic and resolute push.

A man entered.

We already know the man. It was the wayfarer whom we have seen

wandering about in search of shelter.

He entered, advanced a step, and halted, leaving the door open behind

him. He had his knapsack on his shoulders, his cudgel in his hand, a

rough, audacious, weary, and violent expression in his eyes. The fire

on the hearth lighted him up. He was hideous. It was a sinister

apparition.

Madame Magloire had not even the strength to utter a cry. She trembled,

and stood with her mouth wide open.

Mademoiselle Baptistine turned round, beheld the man entering, and half

started up in terror; then, turning her head by degrees towards the

fireplace again, she began to observe her brother, and her face became

once more profoundly calm and serene.

The Bishop fixed a tranquil eye on the man.

As he opened his mouth, doubtless to ask the newcomer what he desired,

the man rested both hands on his staff, directed his gaze at the old

man and the two women, and without waiting for the Bishop to speak, he

said, in a loud voice:—

“See here. My name is Jean Valjean. I am a convict from the galleys. I

have passed nineteen years in the galleys. I was liberated four days

ago, and am on my way to Pontarlier, which is my destination. I have

been walking for four days since I left Toulon. I have travelled a

dozen leagues to-day on foot. This evening, when I arrived in these

parts, I went to an inn, and they turned me out, because of my yellow

passport, which I had shown at the town-hall. I had to do it. I went to

an inn. They said to me, ‘Be off,’ at both places. No one would take

me. I went to the prison; the jailer would not admit me. I went into a

dog’s kennel; the dog bit me and chased me off, as though he had been a

man. One would have said that he knew who I was. I went into the

fields, intending to sleep in the open air, beneath the stars. There

were no stars. I thought it was going to rain, and I re-entered the

town, to seek the recess of a doorway. Yonder, in the square, I meant

to sleep on a stone bench. A good woman pointed out your house to me,

and said to me, ‘Knock there!’ I have knocked. What is this place? Do

you keep an inn? I have money—savings. One hundred and nine francs

fifteen sous, which I earned in the galleys by my labor, in the course

of nineteen years. I will pay. What is that to me? I have money. I am

very weary; twelve leagues on foot; I am very hungry. Are you willing

that I should remain?”

“Madame Magloire,” said the Bishop, “you will set another place.”

The man advanced three paces, and approached the lamp which was on the

table. “Stop,” he resumed, as though he had not quite understood;

“that’s not it. Did you hear? I am a galley-slave; a convict. I come

from the galleys.” He drew from his pocket a large sheet of yellow

paper, which he unfolded. “Here’s my passport. Yellow, as you see. This

serves to expel me from every place where I go. Will you read it? I

know how to read. I learned in the galleys. There is a school there for

those who choose to learn. Hold, this is what they put on this

passport: ‘Jean Valjean, discharged convict, native of’—that is nothing

to you—‘has been nineteen years in the galleys: five years for

house-breaking and burglary; fourteen years for having attempted to

escape on four occasions. He is a very dangerous man.’ There! Every one

has cast me out. Are you willing to receive me? Is this an inn? Will

you give me something to eat and a bed? Have you a stable?”

“Madame Magloire,” said the Bishop, “you will put white sheets on the

bed in the alcove.” We have already explained the character of the two

women’s obedience.

Madame Magloire retired to execute these orders.

The Bishop turned to the man.

“Sit down, sir, and warm yourself. We are going to sup in a few

moments, and your bed will be prepared while you are supping.”

At this point the man suddenly comprehended. The expression of his

face, up to that time sombre and harsh, bore the imprint of

stupefaction, of doubt, of joy, and became extraordinary. He began

stammering like a crazy man:—

“Really? What! You will keep me? You do not drive me forth? A convict!

You call me \_sir!\_ You do not address me as \_thou?\_ ‘Get out of here,

you dog!’ is what people always say to me. I felt sure that you would

expel me, so I told you at once who I am. Oh, what a good woman that

was who directed me hither! I am going to sup! A bed with a mattress

and sheets, like the rest of the world! a bed! It is nineteen years

since I have slept in a bed! You actually do not want me to go! You are

good people. Besides, I have money. I will pay well. Pardon me,

monsieur the inn-keeper, but what is your name? I will pay anything you

ask. You are a fine man. You are an inn-keeper, are you not?”

“I am,” replied the Bishop, “a priest who lives here.”

“A priest!” said the man. “Oh, what a fine priest! Then you are not

going to demand any money of me? You are the curé, are you not? the

curé of this big church? Well! I am a fool, truly! I had not perceived

your skull-cap.”

As he spoke, he deposited his knapsack and his cudgel in a corner,

replaced his passport in his pocket, and seated himself. Mademoiselle

Baptistine gazed mildly at him. He continued:

“You are humane, Monsieur le Curé; you have not scorned me. A good

priest is a very good thing. Then you do not require me to pay?”

“No,” said the Bishop; “keep your money. How much have you? Did you not

tell me one hundred and nine francs?”

“And fifteen sous,” added the man.

“One hundred and nine francs fifteen sous. And how long did it take you

to earn that?”

“Nineteen years.”

“Nineteen years!”

The Bishop sighed deeply.

The man continued: “I have still the whole of my money. In four days I

have spent only twenty-five sous, which I earned by helping unload some

wagons at Grasse. Since you are an abbé, I will tell you that we had a

chaplain in the galleys. And one day I saw a bishop there. Monseigneur

is what they call him. He was the Bishop of Majore at Marseilles. He is

the curé who rules over the other curés, you understand. Pardon me, I

say that very badly; but it is such a far-off thing to me! You

understand what we are! He said mass in the middle of the galleys, on

an altar. He had a pointed thing, made of gold, on his head; it

glittered in the bright light of midday. We were all ranged in lines on

the three sides, with cannons with lighted matches facing us. We could

not see very well. He spoke; but he was too far off, and we did not

hear. That is what a bishop is like.”

While he was speaking, the Bishop had gone and shut the door, which had

remained wide open.

Madame Magloire returned. She brought a silver fork and spoon, which

she placed on the table.

“Madame Magloire,” said the Bishop, “place those things as near the

fire as possible.” And turning to his guest: “The night wind is harsh

on the Alps. You must be cold, sir.”

Each time that he uttered the word \_sir\_, in his voice which was so

gently grave and polished, the man’s face lighted up. \_Monsieur\_ to a

convict is like a glass of water to one of the shipwrecked of the

\_Medusa\_. Ignominy thirsts for consideration.

“This lamp gives a very bad light,” said the Bishop.

Madame Magloire understood him, and went to get the two silver

candlesticks from the chimney-piece in Monseigneur’s bed-chamber, and

placed them, lighted, on the table.

“Monsieur le Curé,” said the man, “you are good; you do not despise me.

You receive me into your house. You light your candles for me. Yet I

have not concealed from you whence I come and that I am an unfortunate

man.”

The Bishop, who was sitting close to him, gently touched his hand. “You

could not help telling me who you were. This is not my house; it is the

house of Jesus Christ. This door does not demand of him who enters

whether he has a name, but whether he has a grief. You suffer, you are

hungry and thirsty; you are welcome. And do not thank me; do not say

that I receive you in my house. No one is at home here, except the man

who needs a refuge. I say to you, who are passing by, that you are much

more at home here than I am myself. Everything here is yours. What need

have I to know your name? Besides, before you told me you had one which

I knew.”

The man opened his eyes in astonishment.

“Really? You knew what I was called?”

“Yes,” replied the Bishop, “you are called my brother.”

“Stop, Monsieur le Curé,” exclaimed the man. “I was very hungry when I

entered here; but you are so good, that I no longer know what has

happened to me.”

The Bishop looked at him, and said,—

“You have suffered much?”

“Oh, the red coat, the ball on the ankle, a plank to sleep on, heat,

cold, toil, the convicts, the thrashings, the double chain for nothing,

the cell for one word; even sick and in bed, still the chain! Dogs,

dogs are happier! Nineteen years! I am forty-six. Now there is the

yellow passport. That is what it is like.”

“Yes,” resumed the Bishop, “you have come from a very sad place.

Listen. There will be more joy in heaven over the tear-bathed face of a

repentant sinner than over the white robes of a hundred just men. If

you emerge from that sad place with thoughts of hatred and of wrath

against mankind, you are deserving of pity; if you emerge with thoughts

of good-will and of peace, you are more worthy than any one of us.”

In the meantime, Madame Magloire had served supper: soup, made with

water, oil, bread, and salt; a little bacon, a bit of mutton, figs, a

fresh cheese, and a large loaf of rye bread. She had, of her own

accord, added to the Bishop’s ordinary fare a bottle of his old Mauves

wine.

The Bishop’s face at once assumed that expression of gayety which is

peculiar to hospitable natures. “To table!” he cried vivaciously. As

was his custom when a stranger supped with him, he made the man sit on

his right. Mademoiselle Baptistine, perfectly peaceable and natural,

took her seat at his left.

The Bishop asked a blessing; then helped the soup himself, according to

his custom. The man began to eat with avidity.

All at once the Bishop said: “It strikes me there is something missing

on this table.”

Madame Magloire had, in fact, only placed the three sets of forks and

spoons which were absolutely necessary. Now, it was the usage of the

house, when the Bishop had any one to supper, to lay out the whole six

sets of silver on the table-cloth—an innocent ostentation. This

graceful semblance of luxury was a kind of child’s play, which was full

of charm in that gentle and severe household, which raised poverty into

dignity.

Madame Magloire understood the remark, went out without saying a word,

and a moment later the three sets of silver forks and spoons demanded

by the Bishop were glittering upon the cloth, symmetrically arranged

before the three persons seated at the table.

CHAPTER IV—DETAILS CONCERNING THE CHEESE-DAIRIES OF PONTARLIER.

Now, in order to convey an idea of what passed at that table, we cannot

do better than to transcribe here a passage from one of Mademoiselle

Baptistine’s letters to Madame Boischevron, wherein the conversation

between the convict and the Bishop is described with ingenious

minuteness.

“. . . This man paid no attention to any one. He ate with the voracity

of a starving man. However, after supper he said:

“‘Monsieur le Curé of the good God, all this is far too good for me;

but I must say that the carters who would not allow me to eat with them

keep a better table than you do.’

“Between ourselves, the remark rather shocked me. My brother replied:—

“‘They are more fatigued than I.’

“‘No,’ returned the man, ‘they have more money. You are poor; I see

that plainly. You cannot be even a curate. Are you really a curé? Ah,

if the good God were but just, you certainly ought to be a curé!’

“‘The good God is more than just,’ said my brother.

“A moment later he added:—

“‘Monsieur Jean Valjean, is it to Pontarlier that you are going?’

“‘With my road marked out for me.’

“I think that is what the man said. Then he went on:—

“‘I must be on my way by daybreak to-morrow. Travelling is hard. If the

nights are cold, the days are hot.’

“‘You are going to a good country,’ said my brother. ‘During the

Revolution my family was ruined. I took refuge in Franche-Comté at

first, and there I lived for some time by the toil of my hands. My will

was good. I found plenty to occupy me. One has only to choose. There

are paper mills, tanneries, distilleries, oil factories, watch

factories on a large scale, steel mills, copper works, twenty iron

foundries at least, four of which, situated at Lods, at Châtillon, at

Audincourt, and at Beure, are tolerably large.’

“I think I am not mistaken in saying that those are the names which my

brother mentioned. Then he interrupted himself and addressed me:—

“‘Have we not some relatives in those parts, my dear sister?’

“I replied,—

“‘We did have some; among others, M. de Lucenet, who was captain of the

gates at Pontarlier under the old régime.’

“‘Yes,’ resumed my brother; ‘but in ’93, one had no longer any

relatives, one had only one’s arms. I worked. They have, in the country

of Pontarlier, whither you are going, Monsieur Valjean, a truly

patriarchal and truly charming industry, my sister. It is their

cheese-dairies, which they call \_fruitières\_.’

“Then my brother, while urging the man to eat, explained to him, with

great minuteness, what these \_fruitières\_ of Pontarlier were; that they

were divided into two classes: the \_big barns\_ which belong to the

rich, and where there are forty or fifty cows which produce from seven

to eight thousand cheeses each summer, and the \_associated fruitières\_,

which belong to the poor; these are the peasants of mid-mountain, who

hold their cows in common, and share the proceeds. ‘They engage the

services of a cheese-maker, whom they call the \_grurin\_; the \_grurin\_

receives the milk of the associates three times a day, and marks the

quantity on a double tally. It is towards the end of April that the

work of the cheese-dairies begins; it is towards the middle of June

that the cheese-makers drive their cows to the mountains.’

“The man recovered his animation as he ate. My brother made him drink

that good Mauves wine, which he does not drink himself, because he says

that wine is expensive. My brother imparted all these details with that

easy gayety of his with which you are acquainted, interspersing his

words with graceful attentions to me. He recurred frequently to that

comfortable trade of \_grurin\_, as though he wished the man to

understand, without advising him directly and harshly, that this would

afford him a refuge. One thing struck me. This man was what I have told

you. Well, neither during supper, nor during the entire evening, did my

brother utter a single word, with the exception of a few words about

Jesus when he entered, which could remind the man of what he was, nor

of what my brother was. To all appearances, it was an occasion for

preaching him a little sermon, and of impressing the Bishop on the

convict, so that a mark of the passage might remain behind. This might

have appeared to any one else who had this, unfortunate man in his

hands to afford a chance to nourish his soul as well as his body, and

to bestow upon him some reproach, seasoned with moralizing and advice,

or a little commiseration, with an exhortation to conduct himself

better in the future. My brother did not even ask him from what country

he came, nor what was his history. For in his history there is a fault,

and my brother seemed to avoid everything which could remind him of it.

To such a point did he carry it, that at one time, when my brother was

speaking of the mountaineers of Pontarlier, \_who exercise a gentle

labor near heaven, and who\_, he added, \_are happy because they are

innocent\_, he stopped short, fearing lest in this remark there might

have escaped him something which might wound the man. By dint of

reflection, I think I have comprehended what was passing in my

brother’s heart. He was thinking, no doubt, that this man, whose name

is Jean Valjean, had his misfortune only too vividly present in his

mind; that the best thing was to divert him from it, and to make him

believe, if only momentarily, that he was a person like any other, by

treating him just in his ordinary way. Is not this indeed, to

understand charity well? Is there not, dear Madame, something truly

evangelical in this delicacy which abstains from sermon, from

moralizing, from allusions? and is not the truest pity, when a man has

a sore point, not to touch it at all? It has seemed to me that this

might have been my brother’s private thought. In any case, what I can

say is that, if he entertained all these ideas, he gave no sign of

them; from beginning to end, even to me he was the same as he is every

evening, and he supped with this Jean Valjean with the same air and in

the same manner in which he would have supped with M. Gédéon le

Prévost, or with the curate of the parish.

“Towards the end, when he had reached the figs, there came a knock at

the door. It was Mother Gerbaud, with her little one in her arms. My

brother kissed the child on the brow, and borrowed fifteen sous which I

had about me to give to Mother Gerbaud. The man was not paying much

heed to anything then. He was no longer talking, and he seemed very

much fatigued. After poor old Gerbaud had taken her departure, my

brother said grace; then he turned to the man and said to him, ‘You

must be in great need of your bed.’ Madame Magloire cleared the table

very promptly. I understood that we must retire, in order to allow this

traveller to go to sleep, and we both went upstairs. Nevertheless, I

sent Madame Magloire down a moment later, to carry to the man’s bed a

goat skin from the Black Forest, which was in my room. The nights are

frigid, and that keeps one warm. It is a pity that this skin is old;

all the hair is falling out. My brother bought it while he was in

Germany, at Tottlingen, near the sources of the Danube, as well as the

little ivory-handled knife which I use at table.

“Madame Magloire returned immediately. We said our prayers in the

drawing-room, where we hang up the linen, and then we each retired to

our own chambers, without saying a word to each other.”

CHAPTER V—TRANQUILLITY

After bidding his sister good night, Monseigneur Bienvenu took one of

the two silver candlesticks from the table, handed the other to his

guest, and said to him,—

“Monsieur, I will conduct you to your room.”

The man followed him.

As might have been observed from what has been said above, the house

was so arranged that in order to pass into the oratory where the alcove

was situated, or to get out of it, it was necessary to traverse the

Bishop’s bedroom.

At the moment when he was crossing this apartment, Madame Magloire was

putting away the silverware in the cupboard near the head of the bed.

This was her last care every evening before she went to bed.

The Bishop installed his guest in the alcove. A fresh white bed had

been prepared there. The man set the candle down on a small table.

“Well,” said the Bishop, “may you pass a good night. To-morrow morning,

before you set out, you shall drink a cup of warm milk from our cows.”

“Thanks, Monsieur l’Abbé,” said the man.

Hardly had he pronounced these words full of peace, when all of a

sudden, and without transition, he made a strange movement, which would

have frozen the two sainted women with horror, had they witnessed it.

Even at this day it is difficult for us to explain what inspired him at

that moment. Did he intend to convey a warning or to throw out a

menace? Was he simply obeying a sort of instinctive impulse which was

obscure even to himself? He turned abruptly to the old man, folded his

arms, and bending upon his host a savage gaze, he exclaimed in a hoarse

voice:—

“Ah! really! You lodge me in your house, close to yourself like this?”

He broke off, and added with a laugh in which there lurked something

monstrous:—

“Have you really reflected well? How do you know that I have not been

an assassin?”

The Bishop replied:—

“That is the concern of the good God.”

Then gravely, and moving his lips like one who is praying or talking to

himself, he raised two fingers of his right hand and bestowed his

benediction on the man, who did not bow, and without turning his head

or looking behind him, he returned to his bedroom.

When the alcove was in use, a large serge curtain drawn from wall to

wall concealed the altar. The Bishop knelt before this curtain as he

passed and said a brief prayer. A moment later he was in his garden,

walking, meditating, contemplating, his heart and soul wholly absorbed

in those grand and mysterious things which God shows at night to the

eyes which remain open.

As for the man, he was actually so fatigued that he did not even profit

by the nice white sheets. Snuffing out his candle with his nostrils

after the manner of convicts, he dropped, all dressed as he was, upon

the bed, where he immediately fell into a profound sleep.

Midnight struck as the Bishop returned from his garden to his

apartment.

A few minutes later all were asleep in the little house.

CHAPTER VI—JEAN VALJEAN

Towards the middle of the night Jean Valjean woke.

Jean Valjean came from a poor peasant family of Brie. He had not

learned to read in his childhood. When he reached man’s estate, he

became a tree-pruner at Faverolles. His mother was named Jeanne

Mathieu; his father was called Jean Valjean or Vlajean, probably a

sobriquet, and a contraction of \_voilà\_ Jean, “here’s Jean.”

Jean Valjean was of that thoughtful but not gloomy disposition which

constitutes the peculiarity of affectionate natures. On the whole,

however, there was something decidedly sluggish and insignificant about

Jean Valjean in appearance, at least. He had lost his father and mother

at a very early age. His mother had died of a milk fever, which had not

been properly attended to. His father, a tree-pruner, like himself, had

been killed by a fall from a tree. All that remained to Jean Valjean

was a sister older than himself,—a widow with seven children, boys and

girls. This sister had brought up Jean Valjean, and so long as she had

a husband she lodged and fed her young brother.

The husband died. The eldest of the seven children was eight years old.

The youngest, one.

Jean Valjean had just attained his twenty-fifth year. He took the

father’s place, and, in his turn, supported the sister who had brought

him up. This was done simply as a duty and even a little churlishly on

the part of Jean Valjean. Thus his youth had been spent in rude and

ill-paid toil. He had never known a “kind woman friend” in his native

parts. He had not had the time to fall in love.

He returned at night weary, and ate his broth without uttering a word.

His sister, mother Jeanne, often took the best part of his repast from

his bowl while he was eating,—a bit of meat, a slice of bacon, the

heart of the cabbage,—to give to one of her children. As he went on

eating, with his head bent over the table and almost into his soup, his

long hair falling about his bowl and concealing his eyes, he had the

air of perceiving nothing and allowing it. There was at Faverolles, not

far from the Valjean thatched cottage, on the other side of the lane, a

farmer’s wife named Marie-Claude; the Valjean children, habitually

famished, sometimes went to borrow from Marie-Claude a pint of milk, in

their mother’s name, which they drank behind a hedge or in some alley

corner, snatching the jug from each other so hastily that the little

girls spilled it on their aprons and down their necks. If their mother

had known of this marauding, she would have punished the delinquents

severely. Jean Valjean gruffly and grumblingly paid Marie-Claude for

the pint of milk behind their mother’s back, and the children were not

punished.

In pruning season he earned eighteen sous a day; then he hired out as a

hay-maker, as laborer, as neat-herd on a farm, as a drudge. He did

whatever he could. His sister worked also but what could she do with

seven little children? It was a sad group enveloped in misery, which

was being gradually annihilated. A very hard winter came. Jean had no

work. The family had no bread. No bread literally. Seven children!

One Sunday evening, Maubert Isabeau, the baker on the Church Square at

Faverolles, was preparing to go to bed, when he heard a violent blow on

the grated front of his shop. He arrived in time to see an arm passed

through a hole made by a blow from a fist, through the grating and the

glass. The arm seized a loaf of bread and carried it off. Isabeau ran

out in haste; the robber fled at the full speed of his legs. Isabeau

ran after him and stopped him. The thief had flung away the loaf, but

his arm was still bleeding. It was Jean Valjean.

This took place in 1795. Jean Valjean was taken before the tribunals of

the time for theft and breaking and entering an inhabited house at

night. He had a gun which he used better than any one else in the

world, he was a bit of a poacher, and this injured his case. There

exists a legitimate prejudice against poachers. The poacher, like the

smuggler, smacks too strongly of the brigand. Nevertheless, we will

remark cursorily, there is still an abyss between these races of men

and the hideous assassin of the towns. The poacher lives in the forest,

the smuggler lives in the mountains or on the sea. The cities make

ferocious men because they make corrupt men. The mountain, the sea, the

forest, make savage men; they develop the fierce side, but often

without destroying the humane side.

Jean Valjean was pronounced guilty. The terms of the Code were

explicit. There occur formidable hours in our civilization; there are

moments when the penal laws decree a shipwreck. What an ominous minute

is that in which society draws back and consummates the irreparable

abandonment of a sentient being! Jean Valjean was condemned to five

years in the galleys.

On the 22d of April, 1796, the victory of Montenotte, won by the

general-in-chief of the army of Italy, whom the message of the

Directory to the Five Hundred, of the 2d of Floréal, year IV., calls

Buona-Parte, was announced in Paris; on that same day a great gang of

galley-slaves was put in chains at Bicêtre. Jean Valjean formed a part

of that gang. An old turnkey of the prison, who is now nearly eighty

years old, still recalls perfectly that unfortunate wretch who was

chained to the end of the fourth line, in the north angle of the

courtyard. He was seated on the ground like the others. He did not seem

to comprehend his position, except that it was horrible. It is probable

that he, also, was disentangling from amid the vague ideas of a poor

man, ignorant of everything, something excessive. While the bolt of his

iron collar was being riveted behind his head with heavy blows from the

hammer, he wept, his tears stifled him, they impeded his speech; he

only managed to say from time to time, “I was a tree-pruner at

Faverolles.” Then still sobbing, he raised his right hand and lowered

it gradually seven times, as though he were touching in succession

seven heads of unequal heights, and from this gesture it was divined

that the thing which he had done, whatever it was, he had done for the

sake of clothing and nourishing seven little children.

He set out for Toulon. He arrived there, after a journey of

twenty-seven days, on a cart, with a chain on his neck. At Toulon he

was clothed in the red cassock. All that had constituted his life, even

to his name, was effaced; he was no longer even Jean Valjean; he was

number 24,601. What became of his sister? What became of the seven

children? Who troubled himself about that? What becomes of the handful

of leaves from the young tree which is sawed off at the root?

It is always the same story. These poor living beings, these creatures

of God, henceforth without support, without guide, without refuge,

wandered away at random,—who even knows?—each in his own direction

perhaps, and little by little buried themselves in that cold mist which

engulfs solitary destinies; gloomy shades, into which disappear in

succession so many unlucky heads, in the sombre march of the human

race. They quitted the country. The clock-tower of what had been their

village forgot them; the boundary line of what had been their field

forgot them; after a few years’ residence in the galleys, Jean Valjean

himself forgot them. In that heart, where there had been a wound, there

was a scar. That is all. Only once, during all the time which he spent

at Toulon, did he hear his sister mentioned. This happened, I think,

towards the end of the fourth year of his captivity. I know not through

what channels the news reached him. Some one who had known them in

their own country had seen his sister. She was in Paris. She lived in a

poor street near Saint-Sulpice, in the Rue du Gindre. She had with her

only one child, a little boy, the youngest. Where were the other six?

Perhaps she did not know herself. Every morning she went to a printing

office, No. 3 Rue du Sabot, where she was a folder and stitcher. She

was obliged to be there at six o’clock in the morning—long before

daylight in winter. In the same building with the printing office there

was a school, and to this school she took her little boy, who was seven

years old. But as she entered the printing office at six, and the

school only opened at seven, the child had to wait in the courtyard,

for the school to open, for an hour—one hour of a winter night in the

open air! They would not allow the child to come into the printing

office, because he was in the way, they said. When the workmen passed

in the morning, they beheld this poor little being seated on the

pavement, overcome with drowsiness, and often fast asleep in the

shadow, crouched down and doubled up over his basket. When it rained,

an old woman, the portress, took pity on him; she took him into her

den, where there was a pallet, a spinning-wheel, and two wooden chairs,

and the little one slumbered in a corner, pressing himself close to the

cat that he might suffer less from cold. At seven o’clock the school

opened, and he entered. That is what was told to Jean Valjean.

They talked to him about it for one day; it was a moment, a flash, as

though a window had suddenly been opened upon the destiny of those

things whom he had loved; then all closed again. He heard nothing more

forever. Nothing from them ever reached him again; he never beheld

them; he never met them again; and in the continuation of this mournful

history they will not be met with any more.

Towards the end of this fourth year Jean Valjean’s turn to escape

arrived. His comrades assisted him, as is the custom in that sad place.

He escaped. He wandered for two days in the fields at liberty, if being

at liberty is to be hunted, to turn the head every instant, to quake at

the slightest noise, to be afraid of everything,—of a smoking roof, of

a passing man, of a barking dog, of a galloping horse, of a striking

clock, of the day because one can see, of the night because one cannot

see, of the highway, of the path, of a bush, of sleep. On the evening

of the second day he was captured. He had neither eaten nor slept for

thirty-six hours. The maritime tribunal condemned him, for this crime,

to a prolongation of his term for three years, which made eight years.

In the sixth year his turn to escape occurred again; he availed himself

of it, but could not accomplish his flight fully. He was missing at

roll-call. The cannon were fired, and at night the patrol found him

hidden under the keel of a vessel in process of construction; he

resisted the galley guards who seized him. Escape and rebellion. This

case, provided for by a special code, was punished by an addition of

five years, two of them in the double chain. Thirteen years. In the

tenth year his turn came round again; he again profited by it; he

succeeded no better. Three years for this fresh attempt. Sixteen years.

Finally, I think it was during his thirteenth year, he made a last

attempt, and only succeeded in getting retaken at the end of four hours

of absence. Three years for those four hours. Nineteen years. In

October, 1815, he was released; he had entered there in 1796, for

having broken a pane of glass and taken a loaf of bread.

Room for a brief parenthesis. This is the second time, during his

studies on the penal question and damnation by law, that the author of

this book has come across the theft of a loaf of bread as the point of

departure for the disaster of a destiny. Claude Gaux had stolen a loaf;

Jean Valjean had stolen a loaf. English statistics prove the fact that

four thefts out of five in London have hunger for their immediate

cause.

Jean Valjean had entered the galleys sobbing and shuddering; he emerged

impassive. He had entered in despair; he emerged gloomy.

What had taken place in that soul?

CHAPTER VII—THE INTERIOR OF DESPAIR

Let us try to say it.

It is necessary that society should look at these things, because it is

itself which creates them.

He was, as we have said, an ignorant man, but he was not a fool. The

light of nature was ignited in him. Unhappiness, which also possesses a

clearness of vision of its own, augmented the small amount of daylight

which existed in this mind. Beneath the cudgel, beneath the chain, in

the cell, in hardship, beneath the burning sun of the galleys, upon the

plank bed of the convict, he withdrew into his own consciousness and

meditated.

He constituted himself the tribunal.

He began by putting himself on trial.

He recognized the fact that he was not an innocent man unjustly

punished. He admitted that he had committed an extreme and blameworthy

act; that that loaf of bread would probably not have been refused to

him had he asked for it; that, in any case, it would have been better

to wait until he could get it through compassion or through work; that

it is not an unanswerable argument to say, “Can one wait when one is

hungry?” That, in the first place, it is very rare for any one to die

of hunger, literally; and next, that, fortunately or unfortunately, man

is so constituted that he can suffer long and much, both morally and

physically, without dying; that it is therefore necessary to have

patience; that that would even have been better for those poor little

children; that it had been an act of madness for him, a miserable,

unfortunate wretch, to take society at large violently by the collar,

and to imagine that one can escape from misery through theft; that that

is in any case a poor door through which to escape from misery through

which infamy enters; in short, that he was in the wrong.

Then he asked himself:—

Whether he had been the only one in fault in his fatal history. Whether

it was not a serious thing, that he, a laborer, out of work, that he,

an industrious man, should have lacked bread. And whether, the fault

once committed and confessed, the chastisement had not been ferocious

and disproportioned. Whether there had not been more abuse on the part

of the law, in respect to the penalty, than there had been on the part

of the culprit in respect to his fault. Whether there had not been an

excess of weights in one balance of the scale, in the one which

contains expiation. Whether the over-weight of the penalty was not

equivalent to the annihilation of the crime, and did not result in

reversing the situation, of replacing the fault of the delinquent by

the fault of the repression, of converting the guilty man into the

victim, and the debtor into the creditor, and of ranging the law

definitely on the side of the man who had violated it.

Whether this penalty, complicated by successive aggravations for

attempts at escape, had not ended in becoming a sort of outrage

perpetrated by the stronger upon the feebler, a crime of society

against the individual, a crime which was being committed afresh every

day, a crime which had lasted nineteen years.

He asked himself whether human society could have the right to force

its members to suffer equally in one case for its own unreasonable lack

of foresight, and in the other case for its pitiless foresight; and to

seize a poor man forever between a defect and an excess, a default of

work and an excess of punishment.

Whether it was not outrageous for society to treat thus precisely those

of its members who were the least well endowed in the division of goods

made by chance, and consequently the most deserving of consideration.

These questions put and answered, he judged society and condemned it.

He condemned it to his hatred.

He made it responsible for the fate which he was suffering, and he said

to himself that it might be that one day he should not hesitate to call

it to account. He declared to himself that there was no equilibrium

between the harm which he had caused and the harm which was being done

to him; he finally arrived at the conclusion that his punishment was

not, in truth, unjust, but that it most assuredly was iniquitous.

Anger may be both foolish and absurd; one can be irritated wrongfully;

one is exasperated only when there is some show of right on one’s side

at bottom. Jean Valjean felt himself exasperated.

And besides, human society had done him nothing but harm; he had never

seen anything of it save that angry face which it calls Justice, and

which it shows to those whom it strikes. Men had only touched him to

bruise him. Every contact with them had been a blow. Never, since his

infancy, since the days of his mother, of his sister, had he ever

encountered a friendly word and a kindly glance. From suffering to

suffering, he had gradually arrived at the conviction that life is a

war; and that in this war he was the conquered. He had no other weapon

than his hate. He resolved to whet it in the galleys and to bear it

away with him when he departed.

There was at Toulon a school for the convicts, kept by the Ignorantin

friars, where the most necessary branches were taught to those of the

unfortunate men who had a mind for them. He was of the number who had a

mind. He went to school at the age of forty, and learned to read, to

write, to cipher. He felt that to fortify his intelligence was to

fortify his hate. In certain cases, education and enlightenment can

serve to eke out evil.

This is a sad thing to say; after having judged society, which had

caused his unhappiness, he judged Providence, which had made society,

and he condemned it also.

Thus during nineteen years of torture and slavery, this soul mounted

and at the same time fell. Light entered it on one side, and darkness

on the other.

Jean Valjean had not, as we have seen, an evil nature. He was still

good when he arrived at the galleys. He there condemned society, and

felt that he was becoming wicked; he there condemned Providence, and

was conscious that he was becoming impious.

It is difficult not to indulge in meditation at this point.

Does human nature thus change utterly and from top to bottom? Can the

man created good by God be rendered wicked by man? Can the soul be

completely made over by fate, and become evil, fate being evil? Can the

heart become misshapen and contract incurable deformities and

infirmities under the oppression of a disproportionate unhappiness, as

the vertebral column beneath too low a vault? Is there not in every

human soul, was there not in the soul of Jean Valjean in particular, a

first spark, a divine element, incorruptible in this world, immortal in

the other, which good can develop, fan, ignite, and make to glow with

splendor, and which evil can never wholly extinguish?

Grave and obscure questions, to the last of which every physiologist

would probably have responded no, and that without hesitation, had he

beheld at Toulon, during the hours of repose, which were for Jean

Valjean hours of reverie, this gloomy galley-slave, seated with folded

arms upon the bar of some capstan, with the end of his chain thrust

into his pocket to prevent its dragging, serious, silent, and

thoughtful, a pariah of the laws which regarded the man with wrath,

condemned by civilization, and regarding heaven with severity.

Certainly,—and we make no attempt to dissimulate the fact,—the

observing physiologist would have beheld an irremediable misery; he

would, perchance, have pitied this sick man, of the law’s making; but

he would not have even essayed any treatment; he would have turned

aside his gaze from the caverns of which he would have caught a glimpse

within this soul, and, like Dante at the portals of hell, he would have

effaced from this existence the word which the finger of God has,

nevertheless, inscribed upon the brow of every man,—hope.

Was this state of his soul, which we have attempted to analyze, as

perfectly clear to Jean Valjean as we have tried to render it for those

who read us? Did Jean Valjean distinctly perceive, after their

formation, and had he seen distinctly during the process of their

formation, all the elements of which his moral misery was composed? Had

this rough and unlettered man gathered a perfectly clear perception of

the succession of ideas through which he had, by degrees, mounted and

descended to the lugubrious aspects which had, for so many years,

formed the inner horizon of his spirit? Was he conscious of all that

passed within him, and of all that was working there? That is something

which we do not presume to state; it is something which we do not even

believe. There was too much ignorance in Jean Valjean, even after his

misfortune, to prevent much vagueness from still lingering there. At

times he did not rightly know himself what he felt. Jean Valjean was in

the shadows; he suffered in the shadows; he hated in the shadows; one

might have said that he hated in advance of himself. He dwelt

habitually in this shadow, feeling his way like a blind man and a

dreamer. Only, at intervals, there suddenly came to him, from without

and from within, an access of wrath, a surcharge of suffering, a livid

and rapid flash which illuminated his whole soul, and caused to appear

abruptly all around him, in front, behind, amid the gleams of a

frightful light, the hideous precipices and the sombre perspective of

his destiny.

The flash passed, the night closed in again; and where was he? He no

longer knew. The peculiarity of pains of this nature, in which that

which is pitiless—that is to say, that which is

brutalizing—predominates, is to transform a man, little by little, by a

sort of stupid transfiguration, into a wild beast; sometimes into a

ferocious beast.

Jean Valjean’s successive and obstinate attempts at escape would alone

suffice to prove this strange working of the law upon the human soul.

Jean Valjean would have renewed these attempts, utterly useless and

foolish as they were, as often as the opportunity had presented itself,

without reflecting for an instant on the result, nor on the experiences

which he had already gone through. He escaped impetuously, like the

wolf who finds his cage open. Instinct said to him, “Flee!” Reason

would have said, “Remain!” But in the presence of so violent a

temptation, reason vanished; nothing remained but instinct. The beast

alone acted. When he was recaptured, the fresh severities inflicted on

him only served to render him still more wild.

One detail, which we must not omit, is that he possessed a physical

strength which was not approached by a single one of the denizens of

the galleys. At work, at paying out a cable or winding up a capstan,

Jean Valjean was worth four men. He sometimes lifted and sustained

enormous weights on his back; and when the occasion demanded it, he

replaced that implement which is called a jack-screw, and was formerly

called \_orgueil\_ [pride], whence, we may remark in passing, is derived

the name of the Rue Montorgueil, near the Halles [Fishmarket] in Paris.

His comrades had nicknamed him Jean the Jack-screw. Once, when they

were repairing the balcony of the town-hall at Toulon, one of those

admirable caryatids of Puget, which support the balcony, became

loosened, and was on the point of falling. Jean Valjean, who was

present, supported the caryatid with his shoulder, and gave the workmen

time to arrive.

His suppleness even exceeded his strength. Certain convicts who were

forever dreaming of escape, ended by making a veritable science of

force and skill combined. It is the science of muscles. An entire

system of mysterious statics is daily practised by prisoners, men who

are forever envious of the flies and birds. To climb a vertical

surface, and to find points of support where hardly a projection was

visible, was play to Jean Valjean. An angle of the wall being given,

with the tension of his back and legs, with his elbows and his heels

fitted into the unevenness of the stone, he raised himself as if by

magic to the third story. He sometimes mounted thus even to the roof of

the galley prison.

He spoke but little. He laughed not at all. An excessive emotion was

required to wring from him, once or twice a year, that lugubrious laugh

of the convict, which is like the echo of the laugh of a demon. To all

appearance, he seemed to be occupied in the constant contemplation of

something terrible.

He was absorbed, in fact.

Athwart the unhealthy perceptions of an incomplete nature and a crushed

intelligence, he was confusedly conscious that some monstrous thing was

resting on him. In that obscure and wan shadow within which he crawled,

each time that he turned his neck and essayed to raise his glance, he

perceived with terror, mingled with rage, a sort of frightful

accumulation of things, collecting and mounting above him, beyond the

range of his vision,—laws, prejudices, men, and deeds,—whose outlines

escaped him, whose mass terrified him, and which was nothing else than

that prodigious pyramid which we call civilization. He distinguished,

here and there in that swarming and formless mass, now near him, now

afar off and on inaccessible table-lands, some group, some detail,

vividly illuminated; here the galley-sergeant and his cudgel; there the

gendarme and his sword; yonder the mitred archbishop; away at the top,

like a sort of sun, the Emperor, crowned and dazzling. It seemed to him

that these distant splendors, far from dissipating his night, rendered

it more funereal and more black. All this—laws, prejudices, deeds, men,

things—went and came above him, over his head, in accordance with the

complicated and mysterious movement which God imparts to civilization,

walking over him and crushing him with I know not what peacefulness in

its cruelty and inexorability in its indifference. Souls which have

fallen to the bottom of all possible misfortune, unhappy men lost in

the lowest of those limbos at which no one any longer looks, the

reproved of the law, feel the whole weight of this human society, so

formidable for him who is without, so frightful for him who is beneath,

resting upon their heads.

In this situation Jean Valjean meditated; and what could be the nature

of his meditation?

If the grain of millet beneath the millstone had thoughts, it would,

doubtless, think that same thing which Jean Valjean thought.

All these things, realities full of spectres, phantasmagories full of

realities, had eventually created for him a sort of interior state

which is almost indescribable.

At times, amid his convict toil, he paused. He fell to thinking. His

reason, at one and the same time riper and more troubled than of yore,

rose in revolt. Everything which had happened to him seemed to him

absurd; everything that surrounded him seemed to him impossible. He

said to himself, “It is a dream.” He gazed at the galley-sergeant

standing a few paces from him; the galley-sergeant seemed a phantom to

him. All of a sudden the phantom dealt him a blow with his cudgel.

Visible nature hardly existed for him. It would almost be true to say

that there existed for Jean Valjean neither sun, nor fine summer days,

nor radiant sky, nor fresh April dawns. I know not what vent-hole

daylight habitually illumined his soul.

To sum up, in conclusion, that which can be summed up and translated

into positive results in all that we have just pointed out, we will

confine ourselves to the statement that, in the course of nineteen

years, Jean Valjean, the inoffensive tree-pruner of Faverolles, the

formidable convict of Toulon, had become capable, thanks to the manner

in which the galleys had moulded him, of two sorts of evil action:

firstly, of evil action which was rapid, unpremeditated, dashing,

entirely instinctive, in the nature of reprisals for the evil which he

had undergone; secondly, of evil action which was serious, grave,

consciously argued out and premeditated, with the false ideas which

such a misfortune can furnish. His deliberate deeds passed through

three successive phases, which natures of a certain stamp can alone

traverse,—reasoning, will, perseverance. He had for moving causes his

habitual wrath, bitterness of soul, a profound sense of indignities

suffered, the reaction even against the good, the innocent, and the

just, if there are any such. The point of departure, like the point of

arrival, for all his thoughts, was hatred of human law; that hatred

which, if it be not arrested in its development by some providential

incident, becomes, within a given time, the hatred of society, then the

hatred of the human race, then the hatred of creation, and which

manifests itself by a vague, incessant, and brutal desire to do harm to

some living being, no matter whom. It will be perceived that it was not

without reason that Jean Valjean’s passport described him as \_a very

dangerous man\_.

From year to year this soul had dried away slowly, but with fatal

sureness. When the heart is dry, the eye is dry. On his departure from

the galleys it had been nineteen years since he had shed a tear.

CHAPTER VIII—BILLOWS AND SHADOWS

A man overboard!

What matters it? The vessel does not halt. The wind blows. That sombre

ship has a path which it is forced to pursue. It passes on.

The man disappears, then reappears; he plunges, he rises again to the

surface; he calls, he stretches out his arms; he is not heard. The

vessel, trembling under the hurricane, is wholly absorbed in its own

workings; the passengers and sailors do not even see the drowning man;

his miserable head is but a speck amid the immensity of the waves. He

gives vent to desperate cries from out of the depths. What a spectre is

that retreating sail! He gazes and gazes at it frantically. It

retreats, it grows dim, it diminishes in size. He was there but just

now, he was one of the crew, he went and came along the deck with the

rest, he had his part of breath and of sunlight, he was a living man.

Now, what has taken place? He has slipped, he has fallen; all is at an

end.

He is in the tremendous sea. Under foot he has nothing but what flees

and crumbles. The billows, torn and lashed by the wind, encompass him

hideously; the tossings of the abyss bear him away; all the tongues of

water dash over his head; a populace of waves spits upon him; confused

openings half devour him; every time that he sinks, he catches glimpses

of precipices filled with night; frightful and unknown vegetations

seize him, knot about his feet, draw him to them; he is conscious that

he is becoming an abyss, that he forms part of the foam; the waves toss

him from one to another; he drinks in the bitterness; the cowardly

ocean attacks him furiously, to drown him; the enormity plays with his

agony. It seems as though all that water were hate.

Nevertheless, he struggles.

He tries to defend himself; he tries to sustain himself; he makes an

effort; he swims. He, his petty strength all exhausted instantly,

combats the inexhaustible.

Where, then, is the ship? Yonder. Barely visible in the pale shadows of

the horizon.

The wind blows in gusts; all the foam overwhelms him. He raises his

eyes and beholds only the lividness of the clouds. He witnesses, amid

his death-pangs, the immense madness of the sea. He is tortured by this

madness; he hears noises strange to man, which seem to come from beyond

the limits of the earth, and from one knows not what frightful region

beyond.

There are birds in the clouds, just as there are angels above human

distresses; but what can they do for him? They sing and fly and float,

and he, he rattles in the death agony.

He feels himself buried in those two infinities, the ocean and the sky,

at one and the same time: the one is a tomb; the other is a shroud.

Night descends; he has been swimming for hours; his strength is

exhausted; that ship, that distant thing in which there were men, has

vanished; he is alone in the formidable twilight gulf; he sinks, he

stiffens himself, he twists himself; he feels under him the monstrous

billows of the invisible; he shouts.

There are no more men. Where is God?

He shouts. Help! Help! He still shouts on.

Nothing on the horizon; nothing in heaven.

He implores the expanse, the waves, the seaweed, the reef; they are

deaf. He beseeches the tempest; the imperturbable tempest obeys only

the infinite.

Around him darkness, fog, solitude, the stormy and nonsentient tumult,

the undefined curling of those wild waters. In him horror and fatigue.

Beneath him the depths. Not a point of support. He thinks of the gloomy

adventures of the corpse in the limitless shadow. The bottomless cold

paralyzes him. His hands contract convulsively; they close, and grasp

nothingness. Winds, clouds, whirlwinds, gusts, useless stars! What is

to be done? The desperate man gives up; he is weary, he chooses the

alternative of death; he resists not; he lets himself go; he abandons

his grip; and then he tosses forevermore in the lugubrious dreary

depths of engulfment.

Oh, implacable march of human societies! Oh, losses of men and of souls

on the way! Ocean into which falls all that the law lets slip!

Disastrous absence of help! Oh, moral death!

The sea is the inexorable social night into which the penal laws fling

their condemned. The sea is the immensity of wretchedness.

The soul, going downstream in this gulf, may become a corpse. Who shall

resuscitate it?

CHAPTER IX—NEW TROUBLES

When the hour came for him to take his departure from the galleys, when

Jean Valjean heard in his ear the strange words, \_Thou art free!\_ the

moment seemed improbable and unprecedented; a ray of vivid light, a ray

of the true light of the living, suddenly penetrated within him. But it

was not long before this ray paled. Jean Valjean had been dazzled by

the idea of liberty. He had believed in a new life. He very speedily

perceived what sort of liberty it is to which a yellow passport is

provided.

And this was encompassed with much bitterness. He had calculated that

his earnings, during his sojourn in the galleys, ought to amount to a

hundred and seventy-one francs. It is but just to add that he had

forgotten to include in his calculations the forced repose of Sundays

and festival days during nineteen years, which entailed a diminution of

about eighty francs. At all events, his hoard had been reduced by

various local levies to the sum of one hundred and nine francs fifteen

sous, which had been counted out to him on his departure. He had

understood nothing of this, and had thought himself wronged. Let us say

the word—robbed.

On the day following his liberation, he saw, at Grasse, in front of an

orange-flower distillery, some men engaged in unloading bales. He

offered his services. Business was pressing; they were accepted. He set

to work. He was intelligent, robust, adroit; he did his best; the

master seemed pleased. While he was at work, a gendarme passed,

observed him, and demanded his papers. It was necessary to show him the

yellow passport. That done, Jean Valjean resumed his labor. A little

while before he had questioned one of the workmen as to the amount

which they earned each day at this occupation; he had been told \_thirty

sous\_. When evening arrived, as he was forced to set out again on the

following day, he presented himself to the owner of the distillery and

requested to be paid. The owner did not utter a word, but handed him

fifteen sous. He objected. He was told, \_“That is enough for thee.”\_ He

persisted. The master looked him straight between the eyes, and said to

him \_“Beware of the prison.”\_

There, again, he considered that he had been robbed.

Society, the State, by diminishing his hoard, had robbed him wholesale.

Now it was the individual who was robbing him at retail.

Liberation is not deliverance. One gets free from the galleys, but not

from the sentence.

That is what happened to him at Grasse. We have seen in what manner he

was received at D——

CHAPTER X—THE MAN AROUSED

As the Cathedral clock struck two in the morning, Jean Valjean awoke.

What woke him was that his bed was too good. It was nearly twenty years

since he had slept in a bed, and, although he had not undressed, the

sensation was too novel not to disturb his slumbers.

He had slept more than four hours. His fatigue had passed away. He was

accustomed not to devote many hours to repose.

He opened his eyes and stared into the gloom which surrounded him; then

he closed them again, with the intention of going to sleep once more.

When many varied sensations have agitated the day, when various matters

preoccupy the mind, one falls asleep once, but not a second time. Sleep

comes more easily than it returns. This is what happened to Jean

Valjean. He could not get to sleep again, and he fell to thinking.

He was at one of those moments when the thoughts which one has in one’s

mind are troubled. There was a sort of dark confusion in his brain. His

memories of the olden time and of the immediate present floated there

pell-mell and mingled confusedly, losing their proper forms, becoming

disproportionately large, then suddenly disappearing, as in a muddy and

perturbed pool. Many thoughts occurred to him; but there was one which

kept constantly presenting itself afresh, and which drove away all

others. We will mention this thought at once: he had observed the six

sets of silver forks and spoons and the ladle which Madame Magloire had

placed on the table.

Those six sets of silver haunted him.—They were there.—A few paces

distant.—Just as he was traversing the adjoining room to reach the one

in which he then was, the old servant-woman had been in the act of

placing them in a little cupboard near the head of the bed.—He had

taken careful note of this cupboard.—On the right, as you entered from

the dining-room.—They were solid.—And old silver.—From the ladle one

could get at least two hundred francs.—Double what he had earned in

nineteen years.—It is true that he would have earned more if “the

\_administration\_ had not \_robbed him\_.”

His mind wavered for a whole hour in fluctuations with which there was

certainly mingled some struggle. Three o’clock struck. He opened his

eyes again, drew himself up abruptly into a sitting posture, stretched

out his arm and felt of his knapsack, which he had thrown down on a

corner of the alcove; then he hung his legs over the edge of the bed,

and placed his feet on the floor, and thus found himself, almost

without knowing it, seated on his bed.

He remained for a time thoughtfully in this attitude, which would have

been suggestive of something sinister for any one who had seen him thus

in the dark, the only person awake in that house where all were

sleeping. All of a sudden he stooped down, removed his shoes and placed

them softly on the mat beside the bed; then he resumed his thoughtful

attitude, and became motionless once more.

Throughout this hideous meditation, the thoughts which we have above

indicated moved incessantly through his brain; entered, withdrew,

re-entered, and in a manner oppressed him; and then he thought, also,

without knowing why, and with the mechanical persistence of reverie, of

a convict named Brevet, whom he had known in the galleys, and whose

trousers had been upheld by a single suspender of knitted cotton. The

checkered pattern of that suspender recurred incessantly to his mind.

He remained in this situation, and would have so remained indefinitely,

even until daybreak, had not the clock struck one—the half or quarter

hour. It seemed to him that that stroke said to him, “Come on!”

He rose to his feet, hesitated still another moment, and listened; all

was quiet in the house; then he walked straight ahead, with short

steps, to the window, of which he caught a glimpse. The night was not

very dark; there was a full moon, across which coursed large clouds

driven by the wind. This created, outdoors, alternate shadow and gleams

of light, eclipses, then bright openings of the clouds; and indoors a

sort of twilight. This twilight, sufficient to enable a person to see

his way, intermittent on account of the clouds, resembled the sort of

livid light which falls through an air-hole in a cellar, before which

the passers-by come and go. On arriving at the window, Jean Valjean

examined it. It had no grating; it opened in the garden and was

fastened, according to the fashion of the country, only by a small pin.

He opened it; but as a rush of cold and piercing air penetrated the

room abruptly, he closed it again immediately. He scrutinized the

garden with that attentive gaze which studies rather than looks. The

garden was enclosed by a tolerably low white wall, easy to climb. Far

away, at the extremity, he perceived tops of trees, spaced at regular

intervals, which indicated that the wall separated the garden from an

avenue or lane planted with trees.

Having taken this survey, he executed a movement like that of a man who

has made up his mind, strode to his alcove, grasped his knapsack,

opened it, fumbled in it, pulled out of it something which he placed on

the bed, put his shoes into one of his pockets, shut the whole thing up

again, threw the knapsack on his shoulders, put on his cap, drew the

visor down over his eyes, felt for his cudgel, went and placed it in

the angle of the window; then returned to the bed, and resolutely

seized the object which he had deposited there. It resembled a short

bar of iron, pointed like a pike at one end. It would have been

difficult to distinguish in that darkness for what employment that bit

of iron could have been designed. Perhaps it was a lever; possibly it

was a club.

In the daytime it would have been possible to recognize it as nothing

more than a miner’s candlestick. Convicts were, at that period,

sometimes employed in quarrying stone from the lofty hills which

environ Toulon, and it was not rare for them to have miners’ tools at

their command. These miners’ candlesticks are of massive iron,

terminated at the lower extremity by a point, by means of which they

are stuck into the rock.

He took the candlestick in his right hand; holding his breath and

trying to deaden the sound of his tread, he directed his steps to the

door of the adjoining room, occupied by the Bishop, as we already know.

On arriving at this door, he found it ajar. The Bishop had not closed

it.

CHAPTER XI—WHAT HE DOES

Jean Valjean listened. Not a sound.

He gave the door a push.

He pushed it gently with the tip of his finger, lightly, with the

furtive and uneasy gentleness of a cat which is desirous of entering.

The door yielded to this pressure, and made an imperceptible and silent

movement, which enlarged the opening a little.

He waited a moment; then gave the door a second and a bolder push.

It continued to yield in silence. The opening was now large enough to

allow him to pass. But near the door there stood a little table, which

formed an embarrassing angle with it, and barred the entrance.

Jean Valjean recognized the difficulty. It was necessary, at any cost,

to enlarge the aperture still further.

He decided on his course of action, and gave the door a third push,

more energetic than the two preceding. This time a badly oiled hinge

suddenly emitted amid the silence a hoarse and prolonged cry.

Jean Valjean shuddered. The noise of the hinge rang in his ears with

something of the piercing and formidable sound of the trump of the Day

of Judgment.

In the fantastic exaggerations of the first moment he almost imagined

that that hinge had just become animated, and had suddenly assumed a

terrible life, and that it was barking like a dog to arouse every one,

and warn and to wake those who were asleep. He halted, shuddering,

bewildered, and fell back from the tips of his toes upon his heels. He

heard the arteries in his temples beating like two forge hammers, and

it seemed to him that his breath issued from his breast with the roar

of the wind issuing from a cavern. It seemed impossible to him that the

horrible clamor of that irritated hinge should not have disturbed the

entire household, like the shock of an earthquake; the door, pushed by

him, had taken the alarm, and had shouted; the old man would rise at

once; the two old women would shriek out; people would come to their

assistance; in less than a quarter of an hour the town would be in an

uproar, and the gendarmerie on hand. For a moment he thought himself

lost.

He remained where he was, petrified like the statue of salt, not daring

to make a movement. Several minutes elapsed. The door had fallen wide

open. He ventured to peep into the next room. Nothing had stirred

there. He lent an ear. Nothing was moving in the house. The noise made

by the rusty hinge had not awakened any one.

This first danger was past; but there still reigned a frightful tumult

within him. Nevertheless, he did not retreat. Even when he had thought

himself lost, he had not drawn back. His only thought now was to finish

as soon as possible. He took a step and entered the room.

This room was in a state of perfect calm. Here and there vague and

confused forms were distinguishable, which in the daylight were papers

scattered on a table, open folios, volumes piled upon a stool, an

armchair heaped with clothing, a prie-Dieu, and which at that hour were

only shadowy corners and whitish spots. Jean Valjean advanced with

precaution, taking care not to knock against the furniture. He could

hear, at the extremity of the room, the even and tranquil breathing of

the sleeping Bishop.

He suddenly came to a halt. He was near the bed. He had arrived there

sooner than he had thought for.

Nature sometimes mingles her effects and her spectacles with our

actions with sombre and intelligent appropriateness, as though she

desired to make us reflect. For the last half-hour a large cloud had

covered the heavens. At the moment when Jean Valjean paused in front of

the bed, this cloud parted, as though on purpose, and a ray of light,

traversing the long window, suddenly illuminated the Bishop’s pale

face. He was sleeping peacefully. He lay in his bed almost completely

dressed, on account of the cold of the Basses-Alps, in a garment of

brown wool, which covered his arms to the wrists. His head was thrown

back on the pillow, in the careless attitude of repose; his hand,

adorned with the pastoral ring, and whence had fallen so many good

deeds and so many holy actions, was hanging over the edge of the bed.

His whole face was illumined with a vague expression of satisfaction,

of hope, and of felicity. It was more than a smile, and almost a

radiance. He bore upon his brow the indescribable reflection of a light

which was invisible. The soul of the just contemplates in sleep a

mysterious heaven.

A reflection of that heaven rested on the Bishop.

It was, at the same time, a luminous transparency, for that heaven was

within him. That heaven was his conscience.

[Illustration: The Fall]

At the moment when the ray of moonlight superposed itself, so to speak,

upon that inward radiance, the sleeping Bishop seemed as in a glory. It

remained, however, gentle and veiled in an ineffable half-light. That

moon in the sky, that slumbering nature, that garden without a quiver,

that house which was so calm, the hour, the moment, the silence, added

some solemn and unspeakable quality to the venerable repose of this

man, and enveloped in a sort of serene and majestic aureole that white

hair, those closed eyes, that face in which all was hope and all was

confidence, that head of an old man, and that slumber of an infant.

There was something almost divine in this man, who was thus august,

without being himself aware of it.

Jean Valjean was in the shadow, and stood motionless, with his iron

candlestick in his hand, frightened by this luminous old man. Never had

he beheld anything like this. This confidence terrified him. The moral

world has no grander spectacle than this: a troubled and uneasy

conscience, which has arrived on the brink of an evil action,

contemplating the slumber of the just.

That slumber in that isolation, and with a neighbor like himself, had

about it something sublime, of which he was vaguely but imperiously

conscious.

No one could have told what was passing within him, not even himself.

In order to attempt to form an idea of it, it is necessary to think of

the most violent of things in the presence of the most gentle. Even on

his visage it would have been impossible to distinguish anything with

certainty. It was a sort of haggard astonishment. He gazed at it, and

that was all. But what was his thought? It would have been impossible

to divine it. What was evident was, that he was touched and astounded.

But what was the nature of this emotion?

His eye never quitted the old man. The only thing which was clearly to

be inferred from his attitude and his physiognomy was a strange

indecision. One would have said that he was hesitating between the two

abysses,—the one in which one loses one’s self and that in which one

saves one’s self. He seemed prepared to crush that skull or to kiss

that hand.

At the expiration of a few minutes his left arm rose slowly towards his

brow, and he took off his cap; then his arm fell back with the same

deliberation, and Jean Valjean fell to meditating once more, his cap in

his left hand, his club in his right hand, his hair bristling all over

his savage head.

The Bishop continued to sleep in profound peace beneath that terrifying

gaze.

The gleam of the moon rendered confusedly visible the crucifix over the

chimney-piece, which seemed to be extending its arms to both of them,

with a benediction for one and pardon for the other.

Suddenly Jean Valjean replaced his cap on his brow; then stepped

rapidly past the bed, without glancing at the Bishop, straight to the

cupboard, which he saw near the head; he raised his iron candlestick as

though to force the lock; the key was there; he opened it; the first

thing which presented itself to him was the basket of silverware; he

seized it, traversed the chamber with long strides, without taking any

precautions and without troubling himself about the noise, gained the

door, re-entered the oratory, opened the window, seized his cudgel,

bestrode the window-sill of the ground floor, put the silver into his

knapsack, threw away the basket, crossed the garden, leaped over the

wall like a tiger, and fled.

CHAPTER XII—THE BISHOP WORKS

The next morning at sunrise Monseigneur Bienvenu was strolling in his

garden. Madame Magloire ran up to him in utter consternation.

“Monseigneur, Monseigneur!” she exclaimed, “does your Grace know where

the basket of silver is?”

“Yes,” replied the Bishop.

“Jesus the Lord be blessed!” she resumed; “I did not know what had

become of it.”

The Bishop had just picked up the basket in a flower-bed. He presented

it to Madame Magloire.

“Here it is.”

“Well!” said she. “Nothing in it! And the silver?”

“Ah,” returned the Bishop, “so it is the silver which troubles you? I

don’t know where it is.”

“Great, good God! It is stolen! That man who was here last night has

stolen it.”

In a twinkling, with all the vivacity of an alert old woman, Madame

Magloire had rushed to the oratory, entered the alcove, and returned to

the Bishop. The Bishop had just bent down, and was sighing as he

examined a plant of cochlearia des Guillons, which the basket had

broken as it fell across the bed. He rose up at Madame Magloire’s cry.

“Monseigneur, the man is gone! The silver has been stolen!”

As she uttered this exclamation, her eyes fell upon a corner of the

garden, where traces of the wall having been scaled were visible. The

coping of the wall had been torn away.

“Stay! yonder is the way he went. He jumped over into Cochefilet Lane.

Ah, the abomination! He has stolen our silver!”

The Bishop remained silent for a moment; then he raised his grave eyes,

and said gently to Madame Magloire:—

“And, in the first place, was that silver ours?”

Madame Magloire was speechless. Another silence ensued; then the Bishop

went on:—

“Madame Magloire, I have for a long time detained that silver

wrongfully. It belonged to the poor. Who was that man? A poor man,

evidently.”

“Alas! Jesus!” returned Madame Magloire. “It is not for my sake, nor

for Mademoiselle’s. It makes no difference to us. But it is for the

sake of Monseigneur. What is Monseigneur to eat with now?”

The Bishop gazed at her with an air of amazement.

“Ah, come! Are there no such things as pewter forks and spoons?”

Madame Magloire shrugged her shoulders.

“Pewter has an odor.”

“Iron forks and spoons, then.”

Madame Magloire made an expressive grimace.

“Iron has a taste.”

“Very well,” said the Bishop; “wooden ones then.”

A few moments later he was breakfasting at the very table at which Jean

Valjean had sat on the previous evening. As he ate his breakfast,

Monseigneur Welcome remarked gayly to his sister, who said nothing, and

to Madame Magloire, who was grumbling under her breath, that one really

does not need either fork or spoon, even of wood, in order to dip a bit

of bread in a cup of milk.

“A pretty idea, truly,” said Madame Magloire to herself, as she went

and came, “to take in a man like that! and to lodge him close to one’s

self! And how fortunate that he did nothing but steal! Ah, mon Dieu! it

makes one shudder to think of it!”

As the brother and sister were about to rise from the table, there came

a knock at the door.

“Come in,” said the Bishop.

The door opened. A singular and violent group made its appearance on

the threshold. Three men were holding a fourth man by the collar. The

three men were gendarmes; the other was Jean Valjean.

A brigadier of gendarmes, who seemed to be in command of the group, was

standing near the door. He entered and advanced to the Bishop, making a

military salute.

“Monseigneur—” said he.

At this word, Jean Valjean, who was dejected and seemed overwhelmed,

raised his head with an air of stupefaction.

“Monseigneur!” he murmured. “So he is not the curé?”

“Silence!” said the gendarme. “He is Monseigneur the Bishop.”

In the meantime, Monseigneur Bienvenu had advanced as quickly as his

great age permitted.

“Ah! here you are!” he exclaimed, looking at Jean Valjean. “I am glad

to see you. Well, but how is this? I gave you the candlesticks too,

which are of silver like the rest, and for which you can certainly get

two hundred francs. Why did you not carry them away with your forks and

spoons?”

Jean Valjean opened his eyes wide, and stared at the venerable Bishop

with an expression which no human tongue can render any account of.

“Monseigneur,” said the brigadier of gendarmes, “so what this man said

is true, then? We came across him. He was walking like a man who is

running away. We stopped him to look into the matter. He had this

silver—”

“And he told you,” interposed the Bishop with a smile, “that it had

been given to him by a kind old fellow of a priest with whom he had

passed the night? I see how the matter stands. And you have brought him

back here? It is a mistake.”

“In that case,” replied the brigadier, “we can let him go?”

“Certainly,” replied the Bishop.

The gendarmes released Jean Valjean, who recoiled.

“Is it true that I am to be released?” he said, in an almost

inarticulate voice, and as though he were talking in his sleep.

“Yes, thou art released; dost thou not understand?” said one of the

gendarmes.

“My friend,” resumed the Bishop, “before you go, here are your

candlesticks. Take them.”

He stepped to the chimney-piece, took the two silver candlesticks, and

brought them to Jean Valjean. The two women looked on without uttering

a word, without a gesture, without a look which could disconcert the

Bishop.

Jean Valjean was trembling in every limb. He took the two candlesticks

mechanically, and with a bewildered air.

“Now,” said the Bishop, “go in peace. By the way, when you return, my

friend, it is not necessary to pass through the garden. You can always

enter and depart through the street door. It is never fastened with

anything but a latch, either by day or by night.”

Then, turning to the gendarmes:—

“You may retire, gentlemen.”

The gendarmes retired.

Jean Valjean was like a man on the point of fainting.

The Bishop drew near to him, and said in a low voice:—

“Do not forget, never forget, that you have promised to use this money

in becoming an honest man.”

Jean Valjean, who had no recollection of ever having promised anything,

remained speechless. The Bishop had emphasized the words when he

uttered them. He resumed with solemnity:—

“Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good.

It is your soul that I buy from you; I withdraw it from black thoughts

and the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God.”

CHAPTER XIII—LITTLE GERVAIS

Jean Valjean left the town as though he were fleeing from it. He set

out at a very hasty pace through the fields, taking whatever roads and

paths presented themselves to him, without perceiving that he was

incessantly retracing his steps. He wandered thus the whole morning,

without having eaten anything and without feeling hungry. He was the

prey of a throng of novel sensations. He was conscious of a sort of

rage; he did not know against whom it was directed. He could not have

told whether he was touched or humiliated. There came over him at

moments a strange emotion which he resisted and to which he opposed the

hardness acquired during the last twenty years of his life. This state

of mind fatigued him. He perceived with dismay that the sort of

frightful calm which the injustice of his misfortune had conferred upon

him was giving way within him. He asked himself what would replace

this. At times he would have actually preferred to be in prison with

the gendarmes, and that things should not have happened in this way; it

would have agitated him less. Although the season was tolerably far

advanced, there were still a few late flowers in the hedge-rows here

and there, whose odor as he passed through them in his march recalled

to him memories of his childhood. These memories were almost

intolerable to him, it was so long since they had recurred to him.

Unutterable thoughts assembled within him in this manner all day long.

As the sun declined to its setting, casting long shadows athwart the

soil from every pebble, Jean Valjean sat down behind a bush upon a

large ruddy plain, which was absolutely deserted. There was nothing on

the horizon except the Alps. Not even the spire of a distant village.

Jean Valjean might have been three leagues distant from D—— A path

which intersected the plain passed a few paces from the bush.

In the middle of this meditation, which would have contributed not a

little to render his rags terrifying to any one who might have

encountered him, a joyous sound became audible.

He turned his head and saw a little Savoyard, about ten years of age,

coming up the path and singing, his hurdy-gurdy on his hip, and his

marmot-box on his back.

One of those gay and gentle children, who go from land to land

affording a view of their knees through the holes in their trousers.

Without stopping his song, the lad halted in his march from time to

time, and played at knuckle-bones with some coins which he had in his

hand—his whole fortune, probably.

Among this money there was one forty-sou piece.

The child halted beside the bush, without perceiving Jean Valjean, and

tossed up his handful of sous, which, up to that time, he had caught

with a good deal of adroitness on the back of his hand.

This time the forty-sou piece escaped him, and went rolling towards the

brushwood until it reached Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean set his foot upon it.

In the meantime, the child had looked after his coin and had caught

sight of him.

He showed no astonishment, but walked straight up to the man.

The spot was absolutely solitary. As far as the eye could see there was

not a person on the plain or on the path. The only sound was the tiny,

feeble cries of a flock of birds of passage, which was traversing the

heavens at an immense height. The child was standing with his back to

the sun, which cast threads of gold in his hair and empurpled with its

blood-red gleam the savage face of Jean Valjean.

“Sir,” said the little Savoyard, with that childish confidence which is

composed of ignorance and innocence, “my money.”

“What is your name?” said Jean Valjean.

“Little Gervais, sir.”

“Go away,” said Jean Valjean.

“Sir,” resumed the child, “give me back my money.”

Jean Valjean dropped his head, and made no reply.

The child began again, “My money, sir.”

Jean Valjean’s eyes remained fixed on the earth.

“My piece of money!” cried the child, “my white piece! my silver!”

It seemed as though Jean Valjean did not hear him. The child grasped

him by the collar of his blouse and shook him. At the same time he made

an effort to displace the big iron-shod shoe which rested on his

treasure.

“I want my piece of money! my piece of forty sous!”

The child wept. Jean Valjean raised his head. He still remained seated.

His eyes were troubled. He gazed at the child, in a sort of amazement,

then he stretched out his hand towards his cudgel and cried in a

terrible voice, “Who’s there?”

“I, sir,” replied the child. “Little Gervais! I! Give me back my forty

sous, if you please! Take your foot away, sir, if you please!”

Then irritated, though he was so small, and becoming almost menacing:—

“Come now, will you take your foot away? Take your foot away, or we’ll

see!”

“Ah! It’s still you!” said Jean Valjean, and rising abruptly to his

feet, his foot still resting on the silver piece, he added:—

“Will you take yourself off!”

The frightened child looked at him, then began to tremble from head to

foot, and after a few moments of stupor he set out, running at the top

of his speed, without daring to turn his neck or to utter a cry.

Nevertheless, lack of breath forced him to halt after a certain

distance, and Jean Valjean heard him sobbing, in the midst of his own

reverie.

At the end of a few moments the child had disappeared.

The sun had set.

The shadows were descending around Jean Valjean. He had eaten nothing

all day; it is probable that he was feverish.

He had remained standing and had not changed his attitude after the

child’s flight. The breath heaved his chest at long and irregular

intervals. His gaze, fixed ten or twelve paces in front of him, seemed

to be scrutinizing with profound attention the shape of an ancient

fragment of blue earthenware which had fallen in the grass. All at once

he shivered; he had just begun to feel the chill of evening.

He settled his cap more firmly on his brow, sought mechanically to

cross and button his blouse, advanced a step and stopped to pick up his

cudgel.

At that moment he caught sight of the forty-sou piece, which his foot

had half ground into the earth, and which was shining among the

pebbles. It was as though he had received a galvanic shock. “What is

this?” he muttered between his teeth. He recoiled three paces, then

halted, without being able to detach his gaze from the spot which his

foot had trodden but an instant before, as though the thing which lay

glittering there in the gloom had been an open eye riveted upon him.

At the expiration of a few moments he darted convulsively towards the

silver coin, seized it, and straightened himself up again and began to

gaze afar off over the plain, at the same time casting his eyes towards

all points of the horizon, as he stood there erect and shivering, like

a terrified wild animal which is seeking refuge.

He saw nothing. Night was falling, the plain was cold and vague, great

banks of violet haze were rising in the gleam of the twilight.

He said, “Ah!” and set out rapidly in the direction in which the child

had disappeared. After about thirty paces he paused, looked about him

and saw nothing.

Then he shouted with all his might:—

“Little Gervais! Little Gervais!”

He paused and waited.

There was no reply.

The landscape was gloomy and deserted. He was encompassed by space.

There was nothing around him but an obscurity in which his gaze was

lost, and a silence which engulfed his voice.

An icy north wind was blowing, and imparted to things around him a sort

of lugubrious life. The bushes shook their thin little arms with

incredible fury. One would have said that they were threatening and

pursuing some one.

He set out on his march again, then he began to run; and from time to

time he halted and shouted into that solitude, with a voice which was

the most formidable and the most disconsolate that it was possible to

hear, “Little Gervais! Little Gervais!”

Assuredly, if the child had heard him, he would have been alarmed and

would have taken good care not to show himself. But the child was no

doubt already far away.

He encountered a priest on horseback. He stepped up to him and said:—

“Monsieur le Curé, have you seen a child pass?”

“No,” said the priest.

“One named Little Gervais?”

“I have seen no one.”

He drew two five-franc pieces from his money-bag and handed them to the

priest.

“Monsieur le Curé, this is for your poor people. Monsieur le Curé, he

was a little lad, about ten years old, with a marmot, I think, and a

hurdy-gurdy. One of those Savoyards, you know?”

“I have not seen him.”

“Little Gervais? There are no villages here? Can you tell me?”

“If he is like what you say, my friend, he is a little stranger. Such

persons pass through these parts. We know nothing of them.”

Jean Valjean seized two more coins of five francs each with violence,

and gave them to the priest.

“For your poor,” he said.

Then he added, wildly:—

“Monsieur l’Abbé, have me arrested. I am a thief.”

The priest put spurs to his horse and fled in haste, much alarmed.

Jean Valjean set out on a run, in the direction which he had first

taken.

In this way he traversed a tolerably long distance, gazing, calling,

shouting, but he met no one. Two or three times he ran across the plain

towards something which conveyed to him the effect of a human being

reclining or crouching down; it turned out to be nothing but brushwood

or rocks nearly on a level with the earth. At length, at a spot where

three paths intersected each other, he stopped. The moon had risen. He

sent his gaze into the distance and shouted for the last time, “Little

Gervais! Little Gervais! Little Gervais!” His shout died away in the

mist, without even awakening an echo. He murmured yet once more,

“Little Gervais!” but in a feeble and almost inarticulate voice. It was

his last effort; his legs gave way abruptly under him, as though an

invisible power had suddenly overwhelmed him with the weight of his

evil conscience; he fell exhausted, on a large stone, his fists

clenched in his hair and his face on his knees, and he cried, “I am a

wretch!”

Then his heart burst, and he began to cry. It was the first time that

he had wept in nineteen years.

When Jean Valjean left the Bishop’s house, he was, as we have seen,

quite thrown out of everything that had been his thought hitherto. He

could not yield to the evidence of what was going on within him. He

hardened himself against the angelic action and the gentle words of the

old man. “You have promised me to become an honest man. I buy your

soul. I take it away from the spirit of perversity; I give it to the

good God.”

This recurred to his mind unceasingly. To this celestial kindness he

opposed pride, which is the fortress of evil within us. He was

indistinctly conscious that the pardon of this priest was the greatest

assault and the most formidable attack which had moved him yet; that

his obduracy was finally settled if he resisted this clemency; that if

he yielded, he should be obliged to renounce that hatred with which the

actions of other men had filled his soul through so many years, and

which pleased him; that this time it was necessary to conquer or to be

conquered; and that a struggle, a colossal and final struggle, had been

begun between his viciousness and the goodness of that man.

In the presence of these lights, he proceeded like a man who is

intoxicated. As he walked thus with haggard eyes, did he have a

distinct perception of what might result to him from his adventure at

D——? Did he understand all those mysterious murmurs which warn or

importune the spirit at certain moments of life? Did a voice whisper in

his ear that he had just passed the solemn hour of his destiny; that

there no longer remained a middle course for him; that if he were not

henceforth the best of men, he would be the worst; that it behooved him

now, so to speak, to mount higher than the Bishop, or fall lower than

the convict; that if he wished to become good he must become an angel;

that if he wished to remain evil, he must become a monster?

Here, again, some questions must be put, which we have already put to

ourselves elsewhere: did he catch some shadow of all this in his

thought, in a confused way? Misfortune certainly, as we have said, does

form the education of the intelligence; nevertheless, it is doubtful

whether Jean Valjean was in a condition to disentangle all that we have

here indicated. If these ideas occurred to him, he but caught glimpses

of, rather than saw them, and they only succeeded in throwing him into

an unutterable and almost painful state of emotion. On emerging from

that black and deformed thing which is called the galleys, the Bishop

had hurt his soul, as too vivid a light would have hurt his eyes on

emerging from the dark. The future life, the possible life which

offered itself to him henceforth, all pure and radiant, filled him with

tremors and anxiety. He no longer knew where he really was. Like an

owl, who should suddenly see the sun rise, the convict had been dazzled

and blinded, as it were, by virtue.

That which was certain, that which he did not doubt, was that he was no

longer the same man, that everything about him was changed, that it was

no longer in his power to make it as though the Bishop had not spoken

to him and had not touched him.

In this state of mind he had encountered little Gervais, and had robbed

him of his forty sous. Why? He certainly could not have explained it;

was this the last effect and the supreme effort, as it were, of the

evil thoughts which he had brought away from the galleys,—a remnant of

impulse, a result of what is called in statics, \_acquired force?\_ It

was that, and it was also, perhaps, even less than that. Let us say it

simply, it was not he who stole; it was not the man; it was the beast,

who, by habit and instinct, had simply placed his foot upon that money,

while the intelligence was struggling amid so many novel and hitherto

unheard-of thoughts besetting it.

When intelligence reawakened and beheld that action of the brute, Jean

Valjean recoiled with anguish and uttered a cry of terror.

[Illustration: Awakened]

It was because,—strange phenomenon, and one which was possible only in

the situation in which he found himself,—in stealing the money from

that child, he had done a thing of which he was no longer capable.

However that may be, this last evil action had a decisive effect on

him; it abruptly traversed that chaos which he bore in his mind, and

dispersed it, placed on one side the thick obscurity, and on the other

the light, and acted on his soul, in the state in which it then was, as

certain chemical reagents act upon a troubled mixture by precipitating

one element and clarifying the other.

First of all, even before examining himself and reflecting, all

bewildered, like one who seeks to save himself, he tried to find the

child in order to return his money to him; then, when he recognized the

fact that this was impossible, he halted in despair. At the moment when

he exclaimed “I am a wretch!” he had just perceived what he was, and he

was already separated from himself to such a degree, that he seemed to

himself to be no longer anything more than a phantom, and as if he had,

there before him, in flesh and blood, the hideous galley-convict, Jean

Valjean, cudgel in hand, his blouse on his hips, his knapsack filled

with stolen objects on his back, with his resolute and gloomy visage,

with his thoughts filled with abominable projects.

Excess of unhappiness had, as we have remarked, made him in some sort a

visionary. This, then, was in the nature of a vision. He actually saw

that Jean Valjean, that sinister face, before him. He had almost

reached the point of asking himself who that man was, and he was

horrified by him.

His brain was going through one of those violent and yet perfectly calm

moments in which reverie is so profound that it absorbs reality. One no

longer beholds the object which one has before one, and one sees, as

though apart from one’s self, the figures which one has in one’s own

mind.

Thus he contemplated himself, so to speak, face to face, and at the

same time, athwart this hallucination, he perceived in a mysterious

depth a sort of light which he at first took for a torch. On

scrutinizing this light which appeared to his conscience with more

attention, he recognized the fact that it possessed a human form and

that this torch was the Bishop.

His conscience weighed in turn these two men thus placed before it,—the

Bishop and Jean Valjean. Nothing less than the first was required to

soften the second. By one of those singular effects, which are peculiar

to this sort of ecstasies, in proportion as his reverie continued, as

the Bishop grew great and resplendent in his eyes, so did Jean Valjean

grow less and vanish. After a certain time he was no longer anything

more than a shade. All at once he disappeared. The Bishop alone

remained; he filled the whole soul of this wretched man with a

magnificent radiance.

Jean Valjean wept for a long time. He wept burning tears, he sobbed

with more weakness than a woman, with more fright than a child.

As he wept, daylight penetrated more and more clearly into his soul; an

extraordinary light; a light at once ravishing and terrible. His past

life, his first fault, his long expiation, his external brutishness,

his internal hardness, his dismissal to liberty, rejoicing in manifold

plans of vengeance, what had happened to him at the Bishop’s, the last

thing that he had done, that theft of forty sous from a child, a crime

all the more cowardly, and all the more monstrous since it had come

after the Bishop’s pardon,—all this recurred to his mind and appeared

clearly to him, but with a clearness which he had never hitherto

witnessed. He examined his life, and it seemed horrible to him; his

soul, and it seemed frightful to him. In the meantime a gentle light

rested over this life and this soul. It seemed to him that he beheld

Satan by the light of Paradise.

How many hours did he weep thus? What did he do after he had wept?

Whither did he go! No one ever knew. The only thing which seems to be

authenticated is that that same night the carrier who served Grenoble

at that epoch, and who arrived at D—— about three o’clock in the

morning, saw, as he traversed the street in which the Bishop’s

residence was situated, a man in the attitude of prayer, kneeling on

the pavement in the shadow, in front of the door of Monseigneur

Welcome.

BOOK THIRD—IN THE YEAR 1817

CHAPTER I—THE YEAR 1817

1817 is the year which Louis XVIII., with a certain royal assurance

which was not wanting in pride, entitled the twenty-second of his

reign. It is the year in which M. Bruguière de Sorsum was celebrated.

All the hairdressers’ shops, hoping for powder and the return of the

royal bird, were besmeared with azure and decked with fleurs-de-lys. It

was the candid time at which Count Lynch sat every Sunday as

church-warden in the church-warden’s pew of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, in

his costume of a peer of France, with his red ribbon and his long nose

and the majesty of profile peculiar to a man who has performed a

brilliant action. The brilliant action performed by M. Lynch was this:

being mayor of Bordeaux, on the 12th of March, 1814, he had surrendered

the city a little too promptly to M. the Duke d’Angoulême. Hence his

peerage. In 1817 fashion swallowed up little boys of from four to six

years of age in vast caps of morocco leather with ear-tabs resembling

Esquimaux mitres. The French army was dressed in white, after the mode

of the Austrian; the regiments were called legions; instead of numbers

they bore the names of departments; Napoleon was at St. Helena; and

since England refused him green cloth, he was having his old coats

turned. In 1817 Pelligrini sang; Mademoiselle Bigottini danced; Potier

reigned; Odry did not yet exist. Madame Saqui had succeeded to Forioso.

There were still Prussians in France. M. Delalot was a personage.

Legitimacy had just asserted itself by cutting off the hand, then the

head, of Pleignier, of Carbonneau, and of Tolleron. The Prince de

Talleyrand, grand chamberlain, and the Abbé Louis, appointed minister

of finance, laughed as they looked at each other, with the laugh of the

two augurs; both of them had celebrated, on the 14th of July, 1790, the

mass of federation in the Champ de Mars; Talleyrand had said it as

bishop, Louis had served it in the capacity of deacon. In 1817, in the

side-alleys of this same Champ de Mars, two great cylinders of wood

might have been seen lying in the rain, rotting amid the grass, painted

blue, with traces of eagles and bees, from which the gilding was

falling. These were the columns which two years before had upheld the

Emperor’s platform in the Champ de Mai. They were blackened here and

there with the scorches of the bivouac of Austrians encamped near

Gros-Caillou. Two or three of these columns had disappeared in these

bivouac fires, and had warmed the large hands of the Imperial troops.

The Field of May had this remarkable point: that it had been held in

the month of June and in the Field of March (Mars). In this year, 1817,

two things were popular: the Voltaire-Touquet and the snuff-box \_à la

Charter\_. The most recent Parisian sensation was the crime of Dautun,

who had thrown his brother’s head into the fountain of the

Flower-Market.

They had begun to feel anxious at the Naval Department, on account of

the lack of news from that fatal frigate, \_The Medusa\_, which was

destined to cover Chaumareix with infamy and Géricault with glory.

Colonel Selves was going to Egypt to become Soliman-Pasha. The palace

of Thermes, in the Rue de La Harpe, served as a shop for a cooper. On

the platform of the octagonal tower of the Hotel de Cluny, the little

shed of boards, which had served as an observatory to Messier, the

naval astronomer under Louis XVI., was still to be seen. The Duchesse

de Duras read to three or four friends her unpublished \_Ourika\_, in her

boudoir furnished by X. in sky-blue satin. The N’s were scratched off

the Louvre. The bridge of Austerlitz had abdicated, and was entitled

the bridge of the King’s Garden [du Jardin du Roi], a double enigma,

which disguised the bridge of Austerlitz and the Jardin des Plantes at

one stroke. Louis XVIII., much preoccupied while annotating Horace with

the corner of his finger-nail, heroes who have become emperors, and

makers of wooden shoes who have become dauphins, had two

anxieties,—Napoleon and Mathurin Bruneau. The French Academy had given

for its prize subject, \_The Happiness procured through Study\_. M.

Bellart was officially eloquent. In his shadow could be seen

germinating that future advocate-general of Broë, dedicated to the

sarcasms of Paul-Louis Courier. There was a false Chateaubriand, named

Marchangy, in the interim, until there should be a false Marchangy,

named d’Arlincourt. \_Claire d’Albe\_ and \_Malek-Adel\_ were masterpieces;

Madame Cottin was proclaimed the chief writer of the epoch. The

Institute had the academician, Napoleon Bonaparte, stricken from its

list of members. A royal ordinance erected Angoulême into a naval

school; for the Duc d’Angoulême, being lord high admiral, it was

evident that the city of Angoulême had all the qualities of a seaport;

otherwise the monarchical principle would have received a wound. In the

Council of Ministers the question was agitated whether vignettes

representing slack-rope performances, which adorned Franconi’s

advertising posters, and which attracted throngs of street urchins,

should be tolerated. M. Paër, the author of \_Agnese\_, a good sort of

fellow, with a square face and a wart on his cheek, directed the little

private concerts of the Marquise de Sasenaye in the Rue Ville l’Évêque.

All the young girls were singing the \_Hermit of Saint-Avelle\_, with

words by Edmond Géraud. \_The Yellow Dwarf\_ was transferred into

\_Mirror\_. The Café Lemblin stood up for the Emperor, against the Café

Valois, which upheld the Bourbons. The Duc de Berri, already surveyed

from the shadow by Louvel, had just been married to a princess of

Sicily. Madame de Staël had died a year previously. The body-guard

hissed Mademoiselle Mars. The grand newspapers were all very small.

Their form was restricted, but their liberty was great. The

\_Constitutionnel\_ was constitutional. \_La Minerve\_ called Chateaubriand

\_Chateaubriant\_. That \_t\_ made the good middle-class people laugh

heartily at the expense of the great writer. In journals which sold

themselves, prostituted journalists, insulted the exiles of 1815. David

had no longer any talent, Arnault had no longer any wit, Carnot was no

longer honest, Soult had won no battles; it is true that Napoleon had

no longer any genius. No one is ignorant of the fact that letters sent

to an exile by post very rarely reached him, as the police made it

their religious duty to intercept them. This is no new fact; Descartes

complained of it in his exile. Now David, having, in a Belgian

publication, shown some displeasure at not receiving letters which had

been written to him, it struck the royalist journals as amusing; and

they derided the prescribed man well on this occasion. What separated

two men more than an abyss was to say, the \_regicides\_, or to say the

\_voters\_; to say the \_enemies\_, or to say the \_allies\_; to say

\_Napoleon\_, or to say \_Buonaparte\_. All sensible people were agreed

that the era of revolution had been closed forever by King Louis

XVIII., surnamed “The Immortal Author of the Charter.” On the platform

of the Pont-Neuf, the word \_Redivivus\_ was carved on the pedestal that

awaited the statue of Henry IV. M. Piet, in the Rue Thérèse, No. 4, was

making the rough draft of his privy assembly to consolidate the

monarchy. The leaders of the Right said at grave conjunctures, “We must

write to Bacot.” MM. Canuel, O’Mahoney, and De Chappedelaine were

preparing the sketch, to some extent with Monsieur’s approval, of what

was to become later on “The Conspiracy of the Bord de l’Eau”—of the

waterside. L’Épingle Noire was already plotting in his own quarter.

Delaverderie was conferring with Trogoff. M. Decazes, who was liberal

to a degree, reigned. Chateaubriand stood every morning at his window

at No. 27 Rue Saint-Dominique, clad in footed trousers, and slippers,

with a madras kerchief knotted over his gray hair, with his eyes fixed

on a mirror, a complete set of dentist’s instruments spread out before

him, cleaning his teeth, which were charming, while he dictated \_The

Monarchy according to the Charter\_ to M. Pilorge, his secretary.

Criticism, assuming an authoritative tone, preferred Lafon to Talma. M.

de Féletez signed himself A.; M. Hoffmann signed himself Z. Charles

Nodier wrote \_Thérèse Aubert\_. Divorce was abolished. Lyceums called

themselves colleges. The collegians, decorated on the collar with a

golden fleur-de-lys, fought each other \_apropos\_ of the King of Rome.

The counter-police of the château had denounced to her Royal Highness

Madame, the portrait, everywhere exhibited, of M. the Duc d’Orléans,

who made a better appearance in his uniform of a colonel-general of

hussars than M. the Duc de Berri, in his uniform of colonel-general of

dragoons—a serious inconvenience. The city of Paris was having the dome

of the Invalides regilded at its own expense. Serious men asked

themselves what M. de Trinquelague would do on such or such an

occasion; M. Clausel de Montals differed on divers points from M.

Clausel de Coussergues; M. de Salaberry was not satisfied. The comedian

Picard, who belonged to the Academy, which the comedian Molière had not

been able to do, had \_The Two Philiberts\_ played at the Odéon, upon

whose pediment the removal of the letters still allowed THEATRE OF THE

EMPRESS to be plainly read. People took part for or against Cugnet de

Montarlot. Fabvier was factious; Bavoux was revolutionary. The Liberal,

Pélicier, published an edition of Voltaire, with the following title:

\_Works of Voltaire\_, of the French Academy. “That will attract

purchasers,” said the ingenious editor. The general opinion was that M.

Charles Loyson would be the genius of the century; envy was beginning

to gnaw at him—a sign of glory; and this verse was composed on him:—

“Even when Loyson steals, one feels that he has paws.”

As Cardinal Fesch refused to resign, M. de Pins, Archbishop of Amasie,

administered the diocese of Lyons. The quarrel over the valley of

Dappes was begun between Switzerland and France by a memoir from

Captain, afterwards General Dufour. Saint-Simon, ignored, was erecting

his sublime dream. There was a celebrated Fourier at the Academy of

Science, whom posterity has forgotten; and in some garret an obscure

Fourier, whom the future will recall. Lord Byron was beginning to make

his mark; a note to a poem by Millevoye introduced him to France in

these terms: \_a certain Lord Baron\_. David d’Angers was trying to work

in marble. The Abbé Caron was speaking, in terms of praise, to a

private gathering of seminarists in the blind alley of Feuillantines,

of an unknown priest, named Félicité-Robert, who, at a latter date,

became Lamennais. A thing which smoked and clattered on the Seine with

the noise of a swimming dog went and came beneath the windows of the

Tuileries, from the Pont Royal to the Pont Louis XV.; it was a piece of

mechanism which was not good for much; a sort of plaything, the idle

dream of a dream-ridden inventor; an utopia—a steamboat. The Parisians

stared indifferently at this useless thing. M. de Vaublanc, the

reformer of the Institute by a coup d’état, the distinguished author of

numerous academicians, ordinances, and batches of members, after having

created them, could not succeed in becoming one himself. The Faubourg

Saint-Germain and the pavilion de Marsan wished to have M. Delaveau for

prefect of police, on account of his piety. Dupuytren and Récamier

entered into a quarrel in the amphitheatre of the School of Medicine,

and threatened each other with their fists on the subject of the

divinity of Jesus Christ. Cuvier, with one eye on Genesis and the other

on nature, tried to please bigoted reaction by reconciling fossils with

texts and by making mastodons flatter Moses.

M. François de Neufchâteau, the praiseworthy cultivator of the memory

of Parmentier, made a thousand efforts to have \_pomme de terre\_

[potato] pronounced \_parmentière\_, and succeeded therein not at all.

The Abbé Grégoire, ex-bishop, ex-conventionary, ex-senator, had passed,

in the royalist polemics, to the state of “Infamous Grégoire.” The

locution of which we have made use—\_passed to the state of\_—has been

condemned as a neologism by M. Royer Collard. Under the third arch of

the Pont de Jéna, the new stone with which, the two years previously,

the mining aperture made by Blücher to blow up the bridge had been

stopped up, was still recognizable on account of its whiteness. Justice

summoned to its bar a man who, on seeing the Comte d’Artois enter Notre

Dame, had said aloud: \_“Sapristi! I regret the time when I saw

Bonaparte and Talma enter the Bel Sauvage, arm in arm.”\_ A seditious

utterance. Six months in prison. Traitors showed themselves unbuttoned;

men who had gone over to the enemy on the eve of battle made no secret

of their recompense, and strutted immodestly in the light of day, in

the cynicism of riches and dignities; deserters from Ligny and

Quatre-Bras, in the brazenness of their well-paid turpitude, exhibited

their devotion to the monarchy in the most barefaced manner.

This is what floats up confusedly, pell-mell, for the year 1817, and is

now forgotten. History neglects nearly all these particulars, and

cannot do otherwise; the infinity would overwhelm it. Nevertheless,

these details, which are wrongly called trivial,—there are no trivial

facts in humanity, nor little leaves in vegetation,—are useful. It is

of the physiognomy of the years that the physiognomy of the centuries

is composed. In this year of 1817 four young Parisians arranged “a fine

farce.”

CHAPTER II—A DOUBLE QUARTETTE

These Parisians came, one from Toulouse, another from Limoges, the

third from Cahors, and the fourth from Montauban; but they were

students; and when one says student, one says Parisian: to study in

Paris is to be born in Paris.

These young men were insignificant; every one has seen such faces; four

specimens of humanity taken at random; neither good nor bad, neither

wise nor ignorant, neither geniuses nor fools; handsome, with that

charming April which is called twenty years. They were four Oscars;

for, at that epoch, Arthurs did not yet exist. \_Burn for him the

perfumes of Araby!\_ exclaimed romance. \_Oscar advances. Oscar, I shall

behold him!\_ People had just emerged from Ossian; elegance was

Scandinavian and Caledonian; the pure English style was only to prevail

later, and the first of the Arthurs, Wellington, had but just won the

battle of Waterloo.

These Oscars bore the names, one of Félix Tholomyès, of Toulouse; the

second, Listolier, of Cahors; the next, Fameuil, of Limoges; the last,

Blachevelle, of Montauban. Naturally, each of them had his mistress.

Blachevelle loved Favourite, so named because she had been in England;

Listolier adored Dahlia, who had taken for her nickname the name of a

flower; Fameuil idolized Zéphine, an abridgment of Joséphine; Tholomyès

had Fantine, called the Blonde, because of her beautiful, sunny hair.

Favourite, Dahlia, Zéphine, and Fantine were four ravishing young

women, perfumed and radiant, still a little like working-women, and not

yet entirely divorced from their needles; somewhat disturbed by

intrigues, but still retaining on their faces something of the serenity

of toil, and in their souls that flower of honesty which survives the

first fall in woman. One of the four was called the young, because she

was the youngest of them, and one was called the old; the old one was

twenty-three. Not to conceal anything, the three first were more

experienced, more heedless, and more emancipated into the tumult of

life than Fantine the Blonde, who was still in her first illusions.

Dahlia, Zéphine, and especially Favourite, could not have said as much.

There had already been more than one episode in their romance, though

hardly begun; and the lover who had borne the name of Adolph in the

first chapter had turned out to be Alphonse in the second, and Gustave

in the third. Poverty and coquetry are two fatal counsellors; one

scolds and the other flatters, and the beautiful daughters of the

people have both of them whispering in their ear, each on its own side.

These badly guarded souls listen. Hence the falls which they

accomplish, and the stones which are thrown at them. They are

overwhelmed with splendor of all that is immaculate and inaccessible.

Alas! what if the Jungfrau were hungry?

Favourite having been in England, was admired by Dahlia and Zéphine.

She had had an establishment of her own very early in life. Her father

was an old unmarried professor of mathematics, a brutal man and a

braggart, who went out to give lessons in spite of his age. This

professor, when he was a young man, had one day seen a chambermaid’s

gown catch on a fender; he had fallen in love in consequence of this

accident. The result had been Favourite. She met her father from time

to time, and he bowed to her. One morning an old woman with the air of

a devotee, had entered her apartments, and had said to her, “You do not

know me, Mamemoiselle?” “No.” “I am your mother.” Then the old woman

opened the sideboard, and ate and drank, had a mattress which she owned

brought in, and installed herself. This cross and pious old mother

never spoke to Favourite, remained hours without uttering a word,

breakfasted, dined, and supped for four, and went down to the porter’s

quarters for company, where she spoke ill of her daughter.

It was having rosy nails that were too pretty which had drawn Dahlia to

Listolier, to others perhaps, to idleness. How could she make such

nails work? She who wishes to remain virtuous must not have pity on her

hands. As for Zéphine, she had conquered Fameuil by her roguish and

caressing little way of saying “Yes, sir.”

The young men were comrades; the young girls were friends. Such loves

are always accompanied by such friendships.

Goodness and philosophy are two distinct things; the proof of this is

that, after making all due allowances for these little irregular

households, Favourite, Zéphine, and Dahlia were philosophical young

women, while Fantine was a good girl.

Good! some one will exclaim; and Tholomyès? Solomon would reply that

love forms a part of wisdom. We will confine ourselves to saying that

the love of Fantine was a first love, a sole love, a faithful love.

She alone, of all the four, was not called “thou” by a single one of

them.

Fantine was one of those beings who blossom, so to speak, from the

dregs of the people. Though she had emerged from the most unfathomable

depths of social shadow, she bore on her brow the sign of the anonymous

and the unknown. She was born at M. sur M. Of what parents? Who can

say? She had never known father or mother. She was called Fantine. Why

Fantine? She had never borne any other name. At the epoch of her birth

the Directory still existed. She had no family name; she had no family;

no baptismal name; the Church no longer existed. She bore the name

which pleased the first random passer-by, who had encountered her, when

a very small child, running bare-legged in the street. She received the

name as she received the water from the clouds upon her brow when it

rained. She was called little Fantine. No one knew more than that. This

human creature had entered life in just this way. At the age of ten,

Fantine quitted the town and went to service with some farmers in the

neighborhood. At fifteen she came to Paris “to seek her fortune.”

Fantine was beautiful, and remained pure as long as she could. She was

a lovely blonde, with fine teeth. She had gold and pearls for her

dowry; but her gold was on her head, and her pearls were in her mouth.

She worked for her living; then, still for the sake of her living,—for

the heart, also, has its hunger,—she loved.

She loved Tholomyès.

An amour for him; passion for her. The streets of the Latin quarter,

filled with throngs of students and grisettes, saw the beginning of

their dream. Fantine had long evaded Tholomyès in the mazes of the hill

of the Pantheon, where so many adventurers twine and untwine, but in

such a way as constantly to encounter him again. There is a way of

avoiding which resembles seeking. In short, the eclogue took place.

Blachevelle, Listolier, and Fameuil formed a sort of group of which

Tholomyès was the head. It was he who possessed the wit.

Tholomyès was the antique old student; he was rich; he had an income of

four thousand francs; four thousand francs! a splendid scandal on Mount

Sainte-Geneviève. Tholomyès was a fast man of thirty, and badly

preserved. He was wrinkled and toothless, and he had the beginning of a

bald spot, of which he himself said with sadness, \_the skull at thirty,

the knee at forty\_. His digestion was mediocre, and he had been

attacked by a watering in one eye. But in proportion as his youth

disappeared, gayety was kindled; he replaced his teeth with

buffooneries, his hair with mirth, his health with irony, his weeping

eye laughed incessantly. He was dilapidated but still in flower. His

youth, which was packing up for departure long before its time, beat a

retreat in good order, bursting with laughter, and no one saw anything

but fire. He had had a piece rejected at the Vaudeville. He made a few

verses now and then. In addition to this he doubted everything to the

last degree, which is a vast force in the eyes of the weak. Being thus

ironical and bald, he was the leader. \_Iron\_ is an English word. Is it

possible that irony is derived from it?

One day Tholomyès took the three others aside, with the gesture of an

oracle, and said to them:—

“Fantine, Dahlia, Zéphine, and Favourite have been teasing us for

nearly a year to give them a surprise. We have promised them solemnly

that we would. They are forever talking about it to us, to me in

particular, just as the old women in Naples cry to Saint Januarius,

‘\_Faccia gialluta, fa o miracolo\_, Yellow face, perform thy miracle,’

so our beauties say to me incessantly, ‘Tholomyès, when will you bring

forth your surprise?’ At the same time our parents keep writing to us.

Pressure on both sides. The moment has arrived, it seems to me; let us

discuss the question.”

Thereupon, Tholomyès lowered his voice and articulated something so

mirthful, that a vast and enthusiastic grin broke out upon the four

mouths simultaneously, and Blachevelle exclaimed, “That is an idea.”

A smoky tap-room presented itself; they entered, and the remainder of

their confidential colloquy was lost in shadow.

The result of these shades was a dazzling pleasure party which took

place on the following Sunday, the four young men inviting the four

young girls.

CHAPTER III—FOUR AND FOUR

It is hard nowadays to picture to one’s self what a pleasure-trip of

students and grisettes to the country was like, forty-five years ago.

The suburbs of Paris are no longer the same; the physiognomy of what

may be called circumparisian life has changed completely in the last

half-century; where there was the cuckoo, there is the railway car;

where there was a tender-boat, there is now the steamboat; people speak

of Fécamp nowadays as they spoke of Saint-Cloud in those days. The

Paris of 1862 is a city which has France for its outskirts.

The four couples conscientiously went through with all the country

follies possible at that time. The vacation was beginning, and it was a

warm, bright, summer day. On the preceding day, Favourite, the only one

who knew how to write, had written the following to Tholomyès in the

name of the four: “It is a good hour to emerge from happiness.” That is

why they rose at five o’clock in the morning. Then they went to

Saint-Cloud by the coach, looked at the dry cascade and exclaimed,

“This must be very beautiful when there is water!” They breakfasted at

the \_Tête-Noir\_, where Castaing had not yet been; they treated

themselves to a game of ring-throwing under the quincunx of trees of

the grand fountain; they ascended Diogenes’ lantern, they gambled for

macaroons at the roulette establishment of the Pont de Sèvres, picked

bouquets at Pateaux, bought reed-pipes at Neuilly, ate apple tarts

everywhere, and were perfectly happy.

The young girls rustled and chatted like warblers escaped from their

cage. It was a perfect delirium. From time to time they bestowed little

taps on the young men. Matutinal intoxication of life! adorable years!

the wings of the dragonfly quiver. Oh, whoever you may be, do you not

remember? Have you rambled through the brushwood, holding aside the

branches, on account of the charming head which is coming on behind

you? Have you slid, laughing, down a slope all wet with rain, with a

beloved woman holding your hand, and crying, “Ah, my new boots! what a

state they are in!”

Let us say at once that that merry obstacle, a shower, was lacking in

the case of this good-humored party, although Favourite had said as

they set out, with a magisterial and maternal tone, \_“The slugs are

crawling in the paths,—a sign of rain, children.”\_

All four were madly pretty. A good old classic poet, then famous, a

good fellow who had an Éléonore, M. le Chevalier de Labouisse, as he

strolled that day beneath the chestnut-trees of Saint-Cloud, saw them

pass about ten o’clock in the morning, and exclaimed, “There is one too

many of them,” as he thought of the Graces. Favourite, Blachevelle’s

friend, the one aged three and twenty, the old one, ran on in front

under the great green boughs, jumped the ditches, stalked distractedly

over bushes, and presided over this merry-making with the spirit of a

young female faun. Zéphine and Dahlia, whom chance had made beautiful

in such a way that they set each off when they were together, and

completed each other, never left each other, more from an instinct of

coquetry than from friendship, and clinging to each other, they assumed

English poses; the first \_keepsakes\_ had just made their appearance,

melancholy was dawning for women, as later on, Byronism dawned for men;

and the hair of the tender sex began to droop dolefully. Zéphine and

Dahlia had their hair dressed in rolls. Listolier and Fameuil, who were

engaged in discussing their professors, explained to Fantine the

difference that existed between M. Delvincourt and M. Blondeau.

Blachevelle seemed to have been created expressly to carry Favourite’s

single-bordered, imitation India shawl of Ternaux’s manufacture, on his

arm on Sundays.

Tholomyès followed, dominating the group. He was very gay, but one felt

the force of government in him; there was dictation in his joviality;

his principal ornament was a pair of trousers of elephant-leg pattern

of nankeen, with straps of braided copper wire; he carried a stout

rattan worth two hundred francs in his hand, and, as he treated himself

to everything, a strange thing called a cigar in his mouth. Nothing was

sacred to him; he smoked.

“That Tholomyès is astounding!” said the others, with veneration. “What

trousers! What energy!”

As for Fantine, she was a joy to behold. Her splendid teeth had

evidently received an office from God,—laughter. She preferred to carry

her little hat of sewed straw, with its long white strings, in her hand

rather than on her head. Her thick blond hair, which was inclined to

wave, and which easily uncoiled, and which it was necessary to fasten

up incessantly, seemed made for the flight of Galatea under the

willows. Her rosy lips babbled enchantingly. The corners of her mouth

voluptuously turned up, as in the antique masks of Erigone, had an air

of encouraging the audacious; but her long, shadowy lashes drooped

discreetly over the jollity of the lower part of the face as though to

call a halt. There was something indescribably harmonious and striking

about her entire dress. She wore a gown of mauve barège, little reddish

brown buskins, whose ribbons traced an X on her fine, white,

open-worked stockings, and that sort of muslin spencer, a Marseilles

invention, whose name, \_canezou\_, a corruption of the words \_quinze

août\_, pronounced after the fashion of the Canebière, signifies fine

weather, heat, and midday. The three others, less timid, as we have

already said, wore low-necked dresses without disguise, which in

summer, beneath flower-adorned hats, are very graceful and enticing;

but by the side of these audacious outfits, blond Fantine’s \_canezou\_,

with its transparencies, its indiscretion, and its reticence,

concealing and displaying at one and the same time, seemed an alluring

godsend of decency, and the famous Court of Love, presided over by the

Vicomtesse de Cette, with the sea-green eyes, would, perhaps, have

awarded the prize for coquetry to this \_canezou\_, in the contest for

the prize of modesty. The most ingenious is, at times, the wisest. This

does happen.

Brilliant of face, delicate of profile, with eyes of a deep blue, heavy

lids, feet arched and small, wrists and ankles admirably formed, a

white skin which, here and there allowed the azure branching of the

veins to be seen, joy, a cheek that was young and fresh, the robust

throat of the Juno of Ægina, a strong and supple nape of the neck,

shoulders modelled as though by Coustou, with a voluptuous dimple in

the middle, visible through the muslin; a gayety cooled by dreaminess;

sculptural and exquisite—such was Fantine; and beneath these feminine

adornments and these ribbons one could divine a statue, and in that

statue a soul.

Fantine was beautiful, without being too conscious of it. Those rare

dreamers, mysterious priests of the beautiful who silently confront

everything with perfection, would have caught a glimpse in this little

working-woman, through the transparency of her Parisian grace, of the

ancient sacred euphony. This daughter of the shadows was thoroughbred.

She was beautiful in the two ways—style and rhythm. Style is the form

of the ideal; rhythm is its movement.

We have said that Fantine was joy; she was also modesty.

To an observer who studied her attentively, that which breathed from

her athwart all the intoxication of her age, the season, and her love

affair, was an invincible expression of reserve and modesty. She

remained a little astonished. This chaste astonishment is the shade of

difference which separates Psyche from Venus. Fantine had the long,

white, fine fingers of the vestal virgin who stirs the ashes of the

sacred fire with a golden pin. Although she would have refused nothing

to Tholomyès, as we shall have more than ample opportunity to see, her

face in repose was supremely virginal; a sort of serious and almost

austere dignity suddenly overwhelmed her at certain times, and there

was nothing more singular and disturbing than to see gayety become so

suddenly extinct there, and meditation succeed to cheerfulness without

any transition state. This sudden and sometimes severely accentuated

gravity resembled the disdain of a goddess. Her brow, her nose, her

chin, presented that equilibrium of outline which is quite distinct

from equilibrium of proportion, and from which harmony of countenance

results; in the very characteristic interval which separates the base

of the nose from the upper lip, she had that imperceptible and charming

fold, a mysterious sign of chastity, which makes Barberousse fall in

love with a Diana found in the treasures of Iconia.

Love is a fault; so be it. Fantine was innocence floating high over

fault.

CHAPTER IV—THOLOMYÈS IS SO MERRY THAT HE SINGS A SPANISH DITTY

That day was composed of dawn, from one end to the other. All nature

seemed to be having a holiday, and to be laughing. The flower-beds of

Saint-Cloud perfumed the air; the breath of the Seine rustled the

leaves vaguely; the branches gesticulated in the wind, bees pillaged

the jasmines; a whole bohemia of butterflies swooped down upon the

yarrow, the clover, and the sterile oats; in the august park of the

King of France there was a pack of vagabonds, the birds.

The four merry couples, mingled with the sun, the fields, the flowers,

the trees, were resplendent.

And in this community of Paradise, talking, singing, running, dancing,

chasing butterflies, plucking convolvulus, wetting their pink,

open-work stockings in the tall grass, fresh, wild, without malice, all

received, to some extent, the kisses of all, with the exception of

Fantine, who was hedged about with that vague resistance of hers

composed of dreaminess and wildness, and who was in love. “You always

have a queer look about you,” said Favourite to her.

Such things are joys. These passages of happy couples are a profound

appeal to life and nature, and make a caress and light spring forth

from everything. There was once a fairy who created the fields and

forests expressly for those in love,—in that eternal hedge-school of

lovers, which is forever beginning anew, and which will last as long as

there are hedges and scholars. Hence the popularity of spring among

thinkers. The patrician and the knife-grinder, the duke and the peer,

the limb of the law, the courtiers and townspeople, as they used to say

in olden times, all are subjects of this fairy. They laugh and hunt,

and there is in the air the brilliance of an apotheosis—what a

transfiguration effected by love! Notaries’ clerks are gods. And the

little cries, the pursuits through the grass, the waists embraced on

the fly, those jargons which are melodies, those adorations which burst

forth in the manner of pronouncing a syllable, those cherries torn from

one mouth by another,—all this blazes forth and takes its place among

the celestial glories. Beautiful women waste themselves sweetly. They

think that this will never come to an end. Philosophers, poets,

painters, observe these ecstasies and know not what to make of it, so

greatly are they dazzled by it. The departure for Cythera! exclaims

Watteau; Lancret, the painter of plebeians, contemplates his bourgeois,

who have flitted away into the azure sky; Diderot stretches out his

arms to all these love idyls, and d’Urfé mingles druids with them.

After breakfast the four couples went to what was then called the

King’s Square to see a newly arrived plant from India, whose name

escapes our memory at this moment, and which, at that epoch, was

attracting all Paris to Saint-Cloud. It was an odd and charming shrub

with a long stem, whose numerous branches, bristling and leafless and

as fine as threads, were covered with a million tiny white rosettes;

this gave the shrub the air of a head of hair studded with flowers.

There was always an admiring crowd about it.

After viewing the shrub, Tholomyès exclaimed, “I offer you asses!” and

having agreed upon a price with the owner of the asses, they returned

by way of Vanvres and Issy. At Issy an incident occurred. The truly

national park, at that time owned by Bourguin the contractor, happened

to be wide open. They passed the gates, visited the manikin anchorite

in his grotto, tried the mysterious little effects of the famous

cabinet of mirrors, the wanton trap worthy of a satyr become a

millionaire or of Turcaret metamorphosed into a Priapus. They had

stoutly shaken the swing attached to the two chestnut-trees celebrated

by the Abbé de Bernis. As he swung these beauties, one after the other,

producing folds in the fluttering skirts which Greuze would have found

to his taste, amid peals of laughter, the Toulousan Tholomyès, who was

somewhat of a Spaniard, Toulouse being the cousin of Tolosa, sang, to a

melancholy chant, the old ballad \_gallega\_, probably inspired by some

lovely maid dashing in full flight upon a rope between two trees:—

“Soy de Badajoz,

Amor me llama,

Toda mi alma,

Es en mi ojos,

Porque enseñas,

A tuas piernas.

“Badajoz is my home,

And Love is my name;

To my eyes in flame,

All my soul doth come;

For instruction meet

I receive at thy feet”

Fantine alone refused to swing.

“I don’t like to have people put on airs like that,” muttered

Favourite, with a good deal of acrimony.

After leaving the asses there was a fresh delight; they crossed the

Seine in a boat, and proceeding from Passy on foot they reached the

barrier of l’Étoile. They had been up since five o’clock that morning,

as the reader will remember; but \_bah! there is no such thing as

fatigue on Sunday\_, said Favourite; \_on Sunday fatigue does not work\_.

About three o’clock the four couples, frightened at their happiness,

were sliding down the Russian mountains, a singular edifice which then

occupied the heights of Beaujon, and whose undulating line was visible

above the trees of the Champs-Élysées.

From time to time Favourite exclaimed:—

“And the surprise? I claim the surprise.”

“Patience,” replied Tholomyès.

CHAPTER V—AT BOMBARDA’S

The Russian mountains having been exhausted, they began to think about

dinner; and the radiant party of eight, somewhat weary at last, became

stranded in Bombarda’s public house, a branch establishment which had

been set up in the Champs-Élysées by that famous restaurant-keeper,

Bombarda, whose sign could then be seen in the Rue de Rivoli, near

Delorme Alley.

A large but ugly room, with an alcove and a bed at the end (they had

been obliged to put up with this accommodation in view of the Sunday

crowd); two windows whence they could survey beyond the elms, the quay

and the river; a magnificent August sunlight lightly touching the

panes; two tables; upon one of them a triumphant mountain of bouquets,

mingled with the hats of men and women; at the other the four couples

seated round a merry confusion of platters, dishes, glasses, and

bottles; jugs of beer mingled with flasks of wine; very little order on

the table, some disorder beneath it;

“They made beneath the table

A noise, a clatter of the feet that was abominable,”

says Molière.

This was the state which the shepherd idyl, begun at five o’clock in

the morning, had reached at half-past four in the afternoon. The sun

was setting; their appetites were satisfied.

The Champs-Élysées, filled with sunshine and with people, were nothing

but light and dust, the two things of which glory is composed. The

horses of Marly, those neighing marbles, were prancing in a cloud of

gold. Carriages were going and coming. A squadron of magnificent

body-guards, with their clarions at their head, were descending the

Avenue de Neuilly; the white flag, showing faintly rosy in the setting

sun, floated over the dome of the Tuileries. The Place de la Concorde,

which had become the Place Louis XV. once more, was choked with happy

promenaders. Many wore the silver fleur-de-lys suspended from the

white-watered ribbon, which had not yet wholly disappeared from

button-holes in the year 1817. Here and there choruses of little girls

threw to the winds, amid the passers-by, who formed into circles and

applauded, the then celebrated Bourbon air, which was destined to

strike the Hundred Days with lightning, and which had for its refrain:—

“Rendez-nous notre père de Gand,

Rendez-nous notre père.”

“Give us back our father from Ghent,

Give us back our father.”

Groups of dwellers in the suburbs, in Sunday array, sometimes even

decorated with the fleur-de-lys, like the bourgeois, scattered over the

large square and the Marigny square, were playing at rings and

revolving on the wooden horses; others were engaged in drinking; some

journeyman printers had on paper caps; their laughter was audible.

Everything was radiant. It was a time of undisputed peace and profound

royalist security; it was the epoch when a special and private report

of Chief of Police Anglès to the King, on the subject of the suburbs of

Paris, terminated with these lines:—

“Taking all things into consideration, Sire, there is nothing to be

feared from these people. They are as heedless and as indolent as cats.

The populace is restless in the provinces; it is not in Paris. These

are very pretty men, Sire. It would take all of two of them to make one

of your grenadiers. There is nothing to be feared on the part of the

populace of Paris the capital. It is remarkable that the stature of

this population should have diminished in the last fifty years; and the

populace of the suburbs is still more puny than at the time of the

Revolution. It is not dangerous. In short, it is an amiable rabble.”

Prefects of the police do not deem it possible that a cat can transform

itself into a lion; that does happen, however, and in that lies the

miracle wrought by the populace of Paris. Moreover, the cat so despised

by Count Anglès possessed the esteem of the republics of old. In their

eyes it was liberty incarnate; and as though to serve as pendant to the

Minerva Aptera of the Piræus, there stood on the public square in

Corinth the colossal bronze figure of a cat. The ingenuous police of

the Restoration beheld the populace of Paris in too “rose-colored” a

light; it is not so much of “an amiable rabble” as it is thought. The

Parisian is to the Frenchman what the Athenian was to the Greek: no one

sleeps more soundly than he, no one is more frankly frivolous and lazy

than he, no one can better assume the air of forgetfulness; let him not

be trusted nevertheless; he is ready for any sort of cool deed; but

when there is glory at the end of it, he is worthy of admiration in

every sort of fury. Give him a pike, he will produce the 10th of

August; give him a gun, you will have Austerlitz. He is Napoleon’s stay

and Danton’s resource. Is it a question of country, he enlists; is it a

question of liberty, he tears up the pavements. Beware! his hair filled

with wrath, is epic; his blouse drapes itself like the folds of a

chlamys. Take care! he will make of the first Rue Grenétat which comes

to hand Caudine Forks. When the hour strikes, this man of the faubourgs

will grow in stature; this little man will arise, and his gaze will be

terrible, and his breath will become a tempest, and there will issue

forth from that slender chest enough wind to disarrange the folds of

the Alps. It is, thanks to the suburban man of Paris, that the

Revolution, mixed with arms, conquers Europe. He sings; it is his

delight. Proportion his song to his nature, and you will see! As long

as he has for refrain nothing but \_la Carmagnole\_, he only overthrows

Louis XVI.; make him sing the \_Marseillaise\_, and he will free the

world.

This note jotted down on the margin of Anglès’ report, we will return

to our four couples. The dinner, as we have said, was drawing to its

close.

CHAPTER VI—A CHAPTER IN WHICH THEY ADORE EACH OTHER

Chat at table, the chat of love; it is as impossible to reproduce one

as the other; the chat of love is a cloud; the chat at table is smoke.

Fameuil and Dahlia were humming. Tholomyès was drinking. Zéphine was

laughing, Fantine smiling, Listolier blowing a wooden trumpet which he

had purchased at Saint-Cloud.

Favourite gazed tenderly at Blachevelle and said:—

“Blachevelle, I adore you.”

This called forth a question from Blachevelle:—

“What would you do, Favourite, if I were to cease to love you?”

“I!” cried Favourite. “Ah! Do not say that even in jest! If you were to

cease to love me, I would spring after you, I would scratch you, I

should rend you, I would throw you into the water, I would have you

arrested.”

Blachevelle smiled with the voluptuous self-conceit of a man who is

tickled in his self-love. Favourite resumed:—

“Yes, I would scream to the police! Ah! I should not restrain myself,

not at all! Rabble!”

Blachevelle threw himself back in his chair, in an ecstasy, and closed

both eyes proudly.

Dahlia, as she ate, said in a low voice to Favourite, amid the uproar:—

“So you really idolize him deeply, that Blachevelle of yours?”

“I? I detest him,” replied Favourite in the same tone, seizing her fork

again. “He is avaricious. I love the little fellow opposite me in my

house. He is very nice, that young man; do you know him? One can see

that he is an actor by profession. I love actors. As soon as he comes

in, his mother says to him: ‘Ah! mon Dieu! my peace of mind is gone.

There he goes with his shouting. But, my dear, you are splitting my

head!’ So he goes up to rat-ridden garrets, to black holes, as high as

he can mount, and there he sets to singing, declaiming, how do I know

what? so that he can be heard downstairs! He earns twenty sous a day at

an attorney’s by penning quibbles. He is the son of a former precentor

of Saint-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas. Ah! he is very nice. He idolizes me so,

that one day when he saw me making batter for some pancakes, he said to

me: \_‘Mamselle, make your gloves into fritters, and I will eat them.’\_

It is only artists who can say such things as that. Ah! he is very

nice. I am in a fair way to go out of my head over that little fellow.

Never mind; I tell Blachevelle that I adore him—how I lie! Hey! How I

do lie!”

Favourite paused, and then went on:—

“I am sad, you see, Dahlia. It has done nothing but rain all summer;

the wind irritates me; the wind does not abate. Blachevelle is very

stingy; there are hardly any green peas in the market; one does not

know what to eat. I have the spleen, as the English say, butter is so

dear! and then you see it is horrible, here we are dining in a room

with a bed in it, and that disgusts me with life.”

CHAPTER VII—THE WISDOM OF THOLOMYÈS

In the meantime, while some sang, the rest talked together tumultuously

all at once; it was no longer anything but noise. Tholomyès intervened.

“Let us not talk at random nor too fast,” he exclaimed. “Let us

reflect, if we wish to be brilliant. Too much improvisation empties the

mind in a stupid way. Running beer gathers no froth. No haste,

gentlemen. Let us mingle majesty with the feast. Let us eat with

meditation; let us make haste slowly. Let us not hurry. Consider the

springtime; if it makes haste, it is done for; that is to say, it gets

frozen. Excess of zeal ruins peach-trees and apricot-trees. Excess of

zeal kills the grace and the mirth of good dinners. No zeal, gentlemen!

Grimod de la Reynière agrees with Talleyrand.”

A hollow sound of rebellion rumbled through the group.

“Leave us in peace, Tholomyès,” said Blachevelle.

“Down with the tyrant!” said Fameuil.

“Bombarda, Bombance, and Bambochel!” cried Listolier.

“Sunday exists,” resumed Fameuil.

“We are sober,” added Listolier.

“Tholomyès,” remarked Blachevelle, “contemplate my calmness [\_mon

calme\_].”

“You are the Marquis of that,” retorted Tholomyès.

This mediocre play upon words produced the effect of a stone in a pool.

The Marquis de Montcalm was at that time a celebrated royalist. All the

frogs held their peace.

“Friends,” cried Tholomyès, with the accent of a man who had recovered

his empire, “Come to yourselves. This pun which has fallen from the

skies must not be received with too much stupor. Everything which falls

in that way is not necessarily worthy of enthusiasm and respect. The

pun is the dung of the mind which soars. The jest falls, no matter

where; and the mind after producing a piece of stupidity plunges into

the azure depths. A whitish speck flattened against the rock does not

prevent the condor from soaring aloft. Far be it from me to insult the

pun! I honor it in proportion to its merits; nothing more. All the most

august, the most sublime, the most charming of humanity, and perhaps

outside of humanity, have made puns. Jesus Christ made a pun on St.

Peter, Moses on Isaac, Æschylus on Polynices, Cleopatra on Octavius.

And observe that Cleopatra’s pun preceded the battle of Actium, and

that had it not been for it, no one would have remembered the city of

Toryne, a Greek name which signifies a ladle. That once conceded, I

return to my exhortation. I repeat, brothers, I repeat, no zeal, no

hubbub, no excess; even in witticisms, gayety, jollities, or plays on

words. Listen to me. I have the prudence of Amphiaraüs and the baldness

of Cæsar. There must be a limit, even to rebuses. \_Est modus in rebus\_.

“There must be a limit, even to dinners. You are fond of apple

turnovers, ladies; do not indulge in them to excess. Even in the matter

of turnovers, good sense and art are requisite. Gluttony chastises the

glutton, \_Gula punit Gulax\_. Indigestion is charged by the good God

with preaching morality to stomachs. And remember this: each one of our

passions, even love, has a stomach which must not be filled too full.

In all things the word \_finis\_ must be written in good season;

self-control must be exercised when the matter becomes urgent; the bolt

must be drawn on appetite; one must set one’s own fantasy to the

violin, and carry one’s self to the post. The sage is the man who knows

how, at a given moment, to effect his own arrest. Have some confidence

in me, for I have succeeded to some extent in my study of the law,

according to the verdict of my examinations, for I know the difference

between the question put and the question pending, for I have sustained

a thesis in Latin upon the manner in which torture was administered at

Rome at the epoch when Munatius Demens was quæstor of the Parricide;

because I am going to be a doctor, apparently it does not follow that

it is absolutely necessary that I should be an imbecile. I recommend

you to moderation in your desires. It is true that my name is Félix

Tholomyès; I speak well. Happy is he who, when the hour strikes, takes

a heroic resolve, and abdicates like Sylla or Origenes.”

Favourite listened with profound attention.

“Félix,” said she, “what a pretty word! I love that name. It is Latin;

it means prosper.”

Tholomyès went on:—

“Quirites, gentlemen, caballeros, my friends. Do you wish never to feel

the prick, to do without the nuptial bed, and to brave love? Nothing

more simple. Here is the receipt: lemonade, excessive exercise, hard

labor; work yourself to death, drag blocks, sleep not, hold vigil,

gorge yourself with nitrous beverages, and potions of nymphæas; drink

emulsions of poppies and agnus castus; season this with a strict diet,

starve yourself, and add thereto cold baths, girdles of herbs, the

application of a plate of lead, lotions made with the subacetate of

lead, and fomentations of oxycrat.”

“I prefer a woman,” said Listolier.

“Woman,” resumed Tholomyès; “distrust her. Woe to him who yields

himself to the unstable heart of woman! Woman is perfidious and

disingenuous. She detests the serpent from professional jealousy. The

serpent is the shop over the way.”

“Tholomyès!” cried Blachevelle, “you are drunk!”

“Pardieu,” said Tholomyès.

“Then be gay,” resumed Blachevelle.

“I agree to that,” responded Tholomyès.

And, refilling his glass, he rose.

“Glory to wine! \_Nunc te, Bacche, canam!\_ Pardon me ladies; that is

Spanish. And the proof of it, señoras, is this: like people, like cask.

The arrobe of Castille contains sixteen litres; the cantaro of

Alicante, twelve; the almude of the Canaries, twenty-five; the cuartin

of the Balearic Isles, twenty-six; the boot of Tzar Peter, thirty. Long

live that Tzar who was great, and long live his boot, which was still

greater! Ladies, take the advice of a friend; make a mistake in your

neighbor if you see fit. The property of love is to err. A love affair

is not made to crouch down and brutalize itself like an English

serving-maid who has callouses on her knees from scrubbing. It is not

made for that; it errs gayly, our gentle love. It has been said, error

is human; I say, error is love. Ladies, I idolize you all. O Zéphine, O

Joséphine, face more than irregular, you would be charming were you not

all askew. You have the air of a pretty face upon which some one has

sat down by mistake. As for Favourite, O nymphs and muses! one day when

Blachevelle was crossing the gutter in the Rue Guérin-Boisseau, he

espied a beautiful girl with white stockings well drawn up, which

displayed her legs. This prologue pleased him, and Blachevelle fell in

love. The one he loved was Favourite. O Favourite, thou hast Ionian

lips. There was a Greek painter named Euphorion, who was surnamed the

painter of the lips. That Greek alone would have been worthy to paint

thy mouth. Listen! before thee, there was never a creature worthy of

the name. Thou wert made to receive the apple like Venus, or to eat it

like Eve; beauty begins with thee. I have just referred to Eve; it is

thou who hast created her. Thou deservest the letters-patent of the

beautiful woman. O Favourite, I cease to address you as ‘thou,’ because

I pass from poetry to prose. You were speaking of my name a little

while ago. That touched me; but let us, whoever we may be, distrust

names. They may delude us. I am called Félix, and I am not happy. Words

are liars. Let us not blindly accept the indications which they afford

us. It would be a mistake to write to Liège 2 for corks, and to Pau for

gloves. Miss Dahlia, were I in your place, I would call myself Rosa. A

flower should smell sweet, and woman should have wit. I say nothing of

Fantine; she is a dreamer, a musing, thoughtful, pensive person; she is

a phantom possessed of the form of a nymph and the modesty of a nun,

who has strayed into the life of a grisette, but who takes refuge in

illusions, and who sings and prays and gazes into the azure without

very well knowing what she sees or what she is doing, and who, with her

eyes fixed on heaven, wanders in a garden where there are more birds

than are in existence. O Fantine, know this: I, Tholomyès, I am an

illusion; but she does not even hear me, that blond maid of Chimeras!

as for the rest, everything about her is freshness, suavity, youth,

sweet morning light. O Fantine, maid worthy of being called Marguerite

or Pearl, you are a woman from the beauteous Orient. Ladies, a second

piece of advice: do not marry; marriage is a graft; it takes well or

ill; avoid that risk. But bah! what am I saying? I am wasting my words.

Girls are incurable on the subject of marriage, and all that we wise

men can say will not prevent the waistcoat-makers and the

shoe-stitchers from dreaming of husbands studded with diamonds. Well,

so be it; but, my beauties, remember this, you eat too much sugar. You

have but one fault, O woman, and that is nibbling sugar. O nibbling

sex, your pretty little white teeth adore sugar. Now, heed me well,

sugar is a salt. All salts are withering. Sugar is the most desiccating

of all salts; it sucks the liquids of the blood through the veins;

hence the coagulation, and then the solidification of the blood; hence

tubercles in the lungs, hence death. That is why diabetes borders on

consumption. Then, do not crunch sugar, and you will live. I turn to

the men: gentlemen, make conquest, rob each other of your well-beloved

without remorse. Chassez across. In love there are no friends.

Everywhere where there is a pretty woman hostility is open. No quarter,

war to the death! a pretty woman is a \_casus belli\_; a pretty woman is

flagrant misdemeanor. All the invasions of history have been determined

by petticoats. Woman is man’s right. Romulus carried off the Sabines;

William carried off the Saxon women; Cæsar carried off the Roman women.

The man who is not loved soars like a vulture over the mistresses of

other men; and for my own part, to all those unfortunate men who are

widowers, I throw the sublime proclamation of Bonaparte to the army of

Italy: “Soldiers, you are in need of everything; the enemy has it.”

Tholomyès paused.

“Take breath, Tholomyès,” said Blachevelle.

At the same moment Blachevelle, supported by Listolier and Fameuil,

struck up to a plaintive air, one of those studio songs composed of the

first words which come to hand, rhymed richly and not at all, as

destitute of sense as the gesture of the tree and the sound of the

wind, which have their birth in the vapor of pipes, and are dissipated

and take their flight with them. This is the couplet by which the group

replied to Tholomyès’ harangue:—

“The father turkey-cocks so grave

Some money to an agent gave,

That master good Clermont-Tonnerre

Might be made pope on Saint Johns’ day fair.

But this good Clermont could not be

Made pope, because no priest was he;

And then their agent, whose wrath burned,

With all their money back returned.”

This was not calculated to calm Tholomyès’ improvisation; he emptied

his glass, filled, refilled it, and began again:—

“Down with wisdom! Forget all that I have said. Let us be neither

prudes nor prudent men nor prudhommes. I propose a toast to mirth; be

merry. Let us complete our course of law by folly and eating!

Indigestion and the digest. Let Justinian be the male, and Feasting,

the female! Joy in the depths! Live, O creation! The world is a great

diamond. I am happy. The birds are astonishing. What a festival

everywhere! The nightingale is a gratuitous Elleviou. Summer, I salute

thee! O Luxembourg! O Georgics of the Rue Madame, and of the Allée de

l’Observatoire! O pensive infantry soldiers! O all those charming

nurses who, while they guard the children, amuse themselves! The pampas

of America would please me if I had not the arcades of the Odéon. My

soul flits away into the virgin forests and to the savannas. All is

beautiful. The flies buzz in the sun. The sun has sneezed out the

humming bird. Embrace me, Fantine!”

He made a mistake and embraced Favourite.

CHAPTER VIII—THE DEATH OF A HORSE

“The dinners are better at Édon’s than at Bombarda’s,” exclaimed

Zéphine.

“I prefer Bombarda to Édon,” declared Blachevelle. “There is more

luxury. It is more Asiatic. Look at the room downstairs; there are

mirrors [\_glaces\_] on the walls.”

“I prefer them [\_glaces\_, ices] on my plate,” said Favourite.

Blachevelle persisted:—

“Look at the knives. The handles are of silver at Bombarda’s and of

bone at Édon’s. Now, silver is more valuable than bone.”

“Except for those who have a silver chin,” observed Tholomyès.

He was looking at the dome of the Invalides, which was visible from

Bombarda’s windows.

A pause ensued.

“Tholomyès,” exclaimed Fameuil, “Listolier and I were having a

discussion just now.”

“A discussion is a good thing,” replied Tholomyès; “a quarrel is

better.”

“We were disputing about philosophy.”

“Well?”

“Which do you prefer, Descartes or Spinoza?”

“Désaugiers,” said Tholomyès.

This decree pronounced, he took a drink, and went on:—

“I consent to live. All is not at an end on earth since we can still

talk nonsense. For that I return thanks to the immortal gods. We lie.

One lies, but one laughs. One affirms, but one doubts. The unexpected

bursts forth from the syllogism. That is fine. There are still human

beings here below who know how to open and close the surprise box of

the paradox merrily. This, ladies, which you are drinking with so

tranquil an air is Madeira wine, you must know, from the vineyard of

Coural das Freiras, which is three hundred and seventeen fathoms above

the level of the sea. Attention while you drink! three hundred and

seventeen fathoms! and Monsieur Bombarda, the magnificent eating-house

keeper, gives you those three hundred and seventeen fathoms for four

francs and fifty centimes.”

Again Fameuil interrupted him:—

“Tholomyès, your opinions fix the law. Who is your favorite author?”

“Ber—”

“Quin?”

“No; Choux.”

And Tholomyès continued:—

“Honor to Bombarda! He would equal Munophis of Elephanta if he could

but get me an Indian dancing-girl, and Thygelion of Chæronea if he

could bring me a Greek courtesan; for, oh, ladies! there were Bombardas

in Greece and in Egypt. Apuleius tells us of them. Alas! always the

same, and nothing new; nothing more unpublished by the creator in

creation! \_Nil sub sole novum\_, says Solomon; \_amor omnibus idem\_, says

Virgil; and Carabine mounts with Carabin into the bark at Saint-Cloud,

as Aspasia embarked with Pericles upon the fleet at Samos. One last

word. Do you know what Aspasia was, ladies? Although she lived at an

epoch when women had, as yet, no soul, she was a soul; a soul of a rosy

and purple hue, more ardent hued than fire, fresher than the dawn.

Aspasia was a creature in whom two extremes of womanhood met; she was

the goddess prostitute; Socrates plus Manon Lescaut. Aspasia was

created in case a mistress should be needed for Prometheus.”

Tholomyès, once started, would have found some difficulty in stopping,

had not a horse fallen down upon the quay just at that moment. The

shock caused the cart and the orator to come to a dead halt. It was a

Beauceron mare, old and thin, and one fit for the knacker, which was

dragging a very heavy cart. On arriving in front of Bombarda’s, the

worn-out, exhausted beast had refused to proceed any further. This

incident attracted a crowd. Hardly had the cursing and indignant carter

had time to utter with proper energy the sacramental word, \_Mâtin\_ (the

jade), backed up with a pitiless cut of the whip, when the jade fell,

never to rise again. On hearing the hubbub made by the passers-by,

Tholomyès’ merry auditors turned their heads, and Tholomyès took

advantage of the opportunity to bring his allocution to a close with

this melancholy strophe:—

“Elle était de ce monde ou coucous et carrosses

Ont le même destin;

Et, rosse, elle a vécu ce que vivant les rosses,

L’espace d’un mâtin!” 3

“Poor horse!” sighed Fantine.

And Dahlia exclaimed:—

“There is Fantine on the point of crying over horses. How can one be

such a pitiful fool as that!”

At that moment Favourite, folding her arms and throwing her head back,

looked resolutely at Tholomyès and said:—

“Come, now! the surprise?”

“Exactly. The moment has arrived,” replied Tholomyès. “Gentlemen, the

hour for giving these ladies a surprise has struck. Wait for us a

moment, ladies.”

“It begins with a kiss,” said Blachevelle.

“On the brow,” added Tholomyès.

Each gravely bestowed a kiss on his mistress’s brow; then all four

filed out through the door, with their fingers on their lips.

Favourite clapped her hands on their departure.

“It is beginning to be amusing already,” said she.

“Don’t be too long,” murmured Fantine; “we are waiting for you.”

CHAPTER IX—A MERRY END TO MIRTH

When the young girls were left alone, they leaned two by two on the

window-sills, chatting, craning out their heads, and talking from one

window to the other.

They saw the young men emerge from the Café Bombarda arm in arm. The

latter turned round, made signs to them, smiled, and disappeared in

that dusty Sunday throng which makes a weekly invasion into the

Champs-Élysées.

“Don’t be long!” cried Fantine.

“What are they going to bring us?” said Zéphine.

“It will certainly be something pretty,” said Dahlia.

“For my part,” said Favourite, “I want it to be of gold.”

Their attention was soon distracted by the movements on the shore of

the lake, which they could see through the branches of the large trees,

and which diverted them greatly.

It was the hour for the departure of the mail-coaches and diligences.

Nearly all the stage-coaches for the south and west passed through the

Champs-Élysées. The majority followed the quay and went through the

Passy Barrier. From moment to moment, some huge vehicle, painted yellow

and black, heavily loaded, noisily harnessed, rendered shapeless by

trunks, tarpaulins, and valises, full of heads which immediately

disappeared, rushed through the crowd with all the sparks of a forge,

with dust for smoke, and an air of fury, grinding the pavements,

changing all the paving-stones into steels. This uproar delighted the

young girls. Favourite exclaimed:—

“What a row! One would say that it was a pile of chains flying away.”

It chanced that one of these vehicles, which they could only see with

difficulty through the thick elms, halted for a moment, then set out

again at a gallop. This surprised Fantine.

“That’s odd!” said she. “I thought the diligence never stopped.”

Favourite shrugged her shoulders.

“This Fantine is surprising. I am coming to take a look at her out of

curiosity. She is dazzled by the simplest things. Suppose a case: I am

a traveller; I say to the diligence, ‘I will go on in advance; you

shall pick me up on the quay as you pass.’ The diligence passes, sees

me, halts, and takes me. That is done every day. You do not know life,

my dear.”

In this manner a certain time elapsed. All at once Favourite made a

movement, like a person who is just waking up.

“Well,” said she, “and the surprise?”

“Yes, by the way,” joined in Dahlia, “the famous surprise?”

“They are a very long time about it!” said Fantine.

As Fantine concluded this sigh, the waiter who had served them at

dinner entered. He held in his hand something which resembled a letter.

“What is that?” demanded Favourite.

The waiter replied:—

“It is a paper that those gentlemen left for these ladies.”

“Why did you not bring it at once?”

“Because,” said the waiter, “the gentlemen ordered me not to deliver it

to the ladies for an hour.”

Favourite snatched the paper from the waiter’s hand. It was, in fact, a

letter.

“Stop!” said she; “there is no address; but this is what is written on

it—”

“THIS IS THE SURPRISE.”

She tore the letter open hastily, opened it, and read [she knew how to

read]:—

“OUR BELOVED:—

“You must know that we have parents. Parents—you do not know much about

such things. They are called fathers and mothers by the civil code,

which is puerile and honest. Now, these parents groan, these old folks

implore us, these good men and these good women call us prodigal sons;

they desire our return, and offer to kill calves for us. Being

virtuous, we obey them. At the hour when you read this, five fiery

horses will be bearing us to our papas and mammas. We are pulling up

our stakes, as Bossuet says. We are going; we are gone. We flee in the

arms of Laffitte and on the wings of Caillard. The Toulouse diligence

tears us from the abyss, and the abyss is you, O our little beauties!

We return to society, to duty, to respectability, at full trot, at the

rate of three leagues an hour. It is necessary for the good of the

country that we should be, like the rest of the world, prefects,

fathers of families, rural police, and councillors of state. Venerate

us. We are sacrificing ourselves. Mourn for us in haste, and replace us

with speed. If this letter lacerates you, do the same by it. Adieu.

“For the space of nearly two years we have made you happy. We bear you

no grudge for that. “Signed:

BLACHEVELLE.

FAMUEIL.

LISTOLIER.

FÉLIX THOLOMYÈS.

“\_Postscriptum\_. The dinner is paid for.”

The four young women looked at each other.

Favourite was the first to break the silence.

“Well!” she exclaimed, “it’s a very pretty farce, all the same.”

“It is very droll,” said Zéphine.

“That must have been Blachevelle’s idea,” resumed Favourite. “It makes

me in love with him. No sooner is he gone than he is loved. This is an

adventure, indeed.”

“No,” said Dahlia; “it was one of Tholomyès’ ideas. That is evident.

“In that case,” retorted Favourite, “death to Blachevelle, and long

live Tholomyès!”

“Long live Tholomyès!” exclaimed Dahlia and Zéphine.

And they burst out laughing.

Fantine laughed with the rest.

An hour later, when she had returned to her room, she wept. It was her

first love affair, as we have said; she had given herself to this

Tholomyès as to a husband, and the poor girl had a child.

BOOK FOURTH—TO CONFIDE IS SOMETIMES TO DELIVER INTO A PERSON’S POWER

CHAPTER I—ONE MOTHER MEETS ANOTHER MOTHER

There was, at Montfermeil, near Paris, during the first quarter of this

century, a sort of cook-shop which no longer exists. This cook-shop was

kept by some people named Thénardier, husband and wife. It was situated

in Boulanger Lane. Over the door there was a board nailed flat against

the wall. Upon this board was painted something which resembled a man

carrying another man on his back, the latter wearing the big gilt

epaulettes of a general, with large silver stars; red spots represented

blood; the rest of the picture consisted of smoke, and probably

represented a battle. Below ran this inscription: AT THE SIGN OF

SERGEANT OF WATERLOO (\_Au Sargent de Waterloo\_).

Nothing is more common than a cart or a truck at the door of a

hostelry. Nevertheless, the vehicle, or, to speak more accurately, the

fragment of a vehicle, which encumbered the street in front of the

cook-shop of the \_Sergeant of Waterloo\_, one evening in the spring of

1818, would certainly have attracted, by its mass, the attention of any

painter who had passed that way.

It was the fore-carriage of one of those trucks which are used in

wooded tracts of country, and which serve to transport thick planks and

the trunks of trees. This fore-carriage was composed of a massive iron

axle-tree with a pivot, into which was fitted a heavy shaft, and which

was supported by two huge wheels. The whole thing was compact,

overwhelming, and misshapen. It seemed like the gun-carriage of an

enormous cannon. The ruts of the road had bestowed on the wheels, the

fellies, the hub, the axle, and the shaft, a layer of mud, a hideous

yellowish daubing hue, tolerably like that with which people are fond

of ornamenting cathedrals. The wood was disappearing under mud, and the

iron beneath rust. Under the axle-tree hung, like drapery, a huge

chain, worthy of some Goliath of a convict. This chain suggested, not

the beams, which it was its office to transport, but the mastodons and

mammoths which it might have served to harness; it had the air of the

galleys, but of cyclopean and superhuman galleys, and it seemed to have

been detached from some monster. Homer would have bound Polyphemus with

it, and Shakespeare, Caliban.

Why was that fore-carriage of a truck in that place in the street? In

the first place, to encumber the street; next, in order that it might

finish the process of rusting. There is a throng of institutions in the

old social order, which one comes across in this fashion as one walks

about outdoors, and which have no other reasons for existence than the

above.

The centre of the chain swung very near the ground in the middle, and

in the loop, as in the rope of a swing, there were seated and grouped,

on that particular evening, in exquisite interlacement, two little

girls; one about two years and a half old, the other, eighteen months;

the younger in the arms of the other. A handkerchief, cleverly knotted

about them, prevented their falling out. A mother had caught sight of

that frightful chain, and had said, “Come! there’s a plaything for my

children.”

The two children, who were dressed prettily and with some elegance,

were radiant with pleasure; one would have said that they were two

roses amid old iron; their eyes were a triumph; their fresh cheeks were

full of laughter. One had chestnut hair; the other, brown. Their

innocent faces were two delighted surprises; a blossoming shrub which

grew near wafted to the passers-by perfumes which seemed to emanate

from them; the child of eighteen months displayed her pretty little

bare stomach with the chaste indecency of childhood. Above and around

these two delicate heads, all made of happiness and steeped in light,

the gigantic fore-carriage, black with rust, almost terrible, all

entangled in curves and wild angles, rose in a vault, like the entrance

of a cavern. A few paces apart, crouching down upon the threshold of

the hostelry, the mother, not a very prepossessing woman, by the way,

though touching at that moment, was swinging the two children by means

of a long cord, watching them carefully, for fear of accidents, with

that animal and celestial expression which is peculiar to maternity. At

every backward and forward swing the hideous links emitted a strident

sound, which resembled a cry of rage; the little girls were in

ecstasies; the setting sun mingled in this joy, and nothing could be

more charming than this caprice of chance which had made of a chain of

Titans the swing of cherubim.

As she rocked her little ones, the mother hummed in a discordant voice

a romance then celebrated:—

“It must be, said a warrior.”

Her song, and the contemplation of her daughters, prevented her hearing

and seeing what was going on in the street.

In the meantime, some one had approached her, as she was beginning the

first couplet of the romance, and suddenly she heard a voice saying

very near her ear:—

“You have two beautiful children there, Madame.”

“To the fair and tender Imogene—”

replied the mother, continuing her romance; then she turned her head.

A woman stood before her, a few paces distant. This woman also had a

child, which she carried in her arms.

She was carrying, in addition, a large carpet-bag, which seemed very

heavy.

This woman’s child was one of the most divine creatures that it is

possible to behold. It was a girl, two or three years of age. She could

have entered into competition with the two other little ones, so far as

the coquetry of her dress was concerned; she wore a cap of fine linen,

ribbons on her bodice, and Valenciennes lace on her cap. The folds of

her skirt were raised so as to permit a view of her white, firm, and

dimpled leg. She was admirably rosy and healthy. The little beauty

inspired a desire to take a bite from the apples of her cheeks. Of her

eyes nothing could be known, except that they must be very large, and

that they had magnificent lashes. She was asleep.

She slept with that slumber of absolute confidence peculiar to her age.

The arms of mothers are made of tenderness; in them children sleep

profoundly.

As for the mother, her appearance was sad and poverty-stricken. She was

dressed like a working-woman who is inclined to turn into a peasant

again. She was young. Was she handsome? Perhaps; but in that attire it

was not apparent. Her hair, a golden lock of which had escaped, seemed

very thick, but was severely concealed beneath an ugly, tight, close,

nun-like cap, tied under the chin. A smile displays beautiful teeth

when one has them; but she did not smile. Her eyes did not seem to have

been dry for a very long time. She was pale; she had a very weary and

rather sickly appearance. She gazed upon her daughter asleep in her

arms with the air peculiar to a mother who has nursed her own child. A

large blue handkerchief, such as the Invalides use, was folded into a

fichu, and concealed her figure clumsily. Her hands were sunburnt and

all dotted with freckles, her forefinger was hardened and lacerated

with the needle; she wore a cloak of coarse brown woollen stuff, a

linen gown, and coarse shoes. It was Fantine.

It was Fantine, but difficult to recognize. Nevertheless, on

scrutinizing her attentively, it was evident that she still retained

her beauty. A melancholy fold, which resembled the beginning of irony,

wrinkled her right cheek. As for her toilette, that aerial toilette of

muslin and ribbons, which seemed made of mirth, of folly, and of music,

full of bells, and perfumed with lilacs had vanished like that

beautiful and dazzling hoar-frost which is mistaken for diamonds in the

sunlight; it melts and leaves the branch quite black.

Ten months had elapsed since the “pretty farce.”

What had taken place during those ten months? It can be divined.

After abandonment, straightened circumstances. Fantine had immediately

lost sight of Favourite, Zéphine and Dahlia; the bond once broken on

the side of the men, it was loosed between the women; they would have

been greatly astonished had any one told them a fortnight later, that

they had been friends; there no longer existed any reason for such a

thing. Fantine had remained alone. The father of her child gone,—alas!

such ruptures are irrevocable,—she found herself absolutely isolated,

minus the habit of work and plus the taste for pleasure. Drawn away by

her \_liaison\_ with Tholomyès to disdain the pretty trade which she

knew, she had neglected to keep her market open; it was now closed to

her. She had no resource. Fantine barely knew how to read, and did not

know how to write; in her childhood she had only been taught to sign

her name; she had a public letter-writer indite an epistle to

Tholomyès, then a second, then a third. Tholomyès replied to none of

them. Fantine heard the gossips say, as they looked at her child: “Who

takes those children seriously! One only shrugs one’s shoulders over

such children!” Then she thought of Tholomyès, who had shrugged his

shoulders over his child, and who did not take that innocent being

seriously; and her heart grew gloomy toward that man. But what was she

to do? She no longer knew to whom to apply. She had committed a fault,

but the foundation of her nature, as will be remembered, was modesty

and virtue. She was vaguely conscious that she was on the verge of

falling into distress, and of gliding into a worse state. Courage was

necessary; she possessed it, and held herself firm. The idea of

returning to her native town of M. sur M. occurred to her. There, some

one might possibly know her and give her work; yes, but it would be

necessary to conceal her fault. In a confused way she perceived the

necessity of a separation which would be more painful than the first

one. Her heart contracted, but she took her resolution. Fantine, as we

shall see, had the fierce bravery of life. She had already valiantly

renounced finery, had dressed herself in linen, and had put all her

silks, all her ornaments, all her ribbons, and all her laces on her

daughter, the only vanity which was left to her, and a holy one it was.

She sold all that she had, which produced for her two hundred francs;

her little debts paid, she had only about eighty francs left. At the

age of twenty-two, on a beautiful spring morning, she quitted Paris,

bearing her child on her back. Any one who had seen these two pass

would have had pity on them. This woman had, in all the world, nothing

but her child, and the child had, in all the world, no one but this

woman. Fantine had nursed her child, and this had tired her chest, and

she coughed a little.

We shall have no further occasion to speak of M. Félix Tholomyès. Let

us confine ourselves to saying, that, twenty years later, under King

Louis Philippe, he was a great provincial lawyer, wealthy and

influential, a wise elector, and a very severe juryman; he was still a

man of pleasure.

Towards the middle of the day, after having, from time to time, for the

sake of resting herself, travelled, for three or four sous a league, in

what was then known as the \_Petites Voitures des Environs de Paris\_,

the “little suburban coach service,” Fantine found herself at

Montfermeil, in the alley Boulanger.

As she passed the Thénardier hostelry, the two little girls, blissful

in the monster swing, had dazzled her in a manner, and she had halted

in front of that vision of joy.

Charms exist. These two little girls were a charm to this mother.

She gazed at them in much emotion. The presence of angels is an

announcement of Paradise. She thought that, above this inn, she beheld

the mysterious HERE of Providence. These two little creatures were

evidently happy. She gazed at them, she admired them, in such emotion

that at the moment when their mother was recovering her breath between

two couplets of her song, she could not refrain from addressing to her

the remark which we have just read:—

“You have two pretty children, Madame.”

The most ferocious creatures are disarmed by caresses bestowed on their

young.

The mother raised her head and thanked her, and bade the wayfarer sit

down on the bench at the door, she herself being seated on the

threshold. The two women began to chat.

“My name is Madame Thénardier,” said the mother of the two little

girls. “We keep this inn.”

Then, her mind still running on her romance, she resumed humming

between her teeth:—

“It must be so; I am a knight,

And I am off to Palestine.”

This Madame Thénardier was a sandy-complexioned woman, thin and

angular—the type of the soldier’s wife in all its unpleasantness; and

what was odd, with a languishing air, which she owed to her perusal of

romances. She was a simpering, but masculine creature. Old romances

produce that effect when rubbed against the imagination of cook-shop

woman. She was still young; she was barely thirty. If this crouching

woman had stood upright, her lofty stature and her frame of a

perambulating colossus suitable for fairs, might have frightened the

traveller at the outset, troubled her confidence, and disturbed what

caused what we have to relate to vanish. A person who is seated instead

of standing erect—destinies hang upon such a thing as that.

The traveller told her story, with slight modifications.

That she was a working-woman; that her husband was dead; that her work

in Paris had failed her, and that she was on her way to seek it

elsewhere, in her own native parts; that she had left Paris that

morning on foot; that, as she was carrying her child, and felt

fatigued, she had got into the Villemomble coach when she met it; that

from Villemomble she had come to Montfermeil on foot; that the little

one had walked a little, but not much, because she was so young, and

that she had been obliged to take her up, and the jewel had fallen

asleep.

At this word she bestowed on her daughter a passionate kiss, which woke

her. The child opened her eyes, great blue eyes like her mother’s, and

looked at—what? Nothing; with that serious and sometimes severe air of

little children, which is a mystery of their luminous innocence in the

presence of our twilight of virtue. One would say that they feel

themselves to be angels, and that they know us to be men. Then the

child began to laugh; and although the mother held fast to her, she

slipped to the ground with the unconquerable energy of a little being

which wished to run. All at once she caught sight of the two others in

the swing, stopped short, and put out her tongue, in sign of

admiration.

Mother Thénardier released her daughters, made them descend from the

swing, and said:—

“Now amuse yourselves, all three of you.”

Children become acquainted quickly at that age, and at the expiration

of a minute the little Thénardiers were playing with the newcomer at

making holes in the ground, which was an immense pleasure.

The newcomer was very gay; the goodness of the mother is written in the

gayety of the child; she had seized a scrap of wood which served her

for a shovel, and energetically dug a cavity big enough for a fly. The

grave-digger’s business becomes a subject for laughter when performed

by a child.

The two women pursued their chat.

“What is your little one’s name?”

“Cosette.”

For Cosette, read Euphrasie. The child’s name was Euphrasie. But out of

Euphrasie the mother had made Cosette by that sweet and graceful

instinct of mothers and of the populace which changes Josepha into

Pepita, and Françoise into Sillette. It is a sort of derivative which

disarranges and disconcerts the whole science of etymologists. We have

known a grandmother who succeeded in turning Theodore into Gnon.

“How old is she?”

“She is going on three.”

“That is the age of my eldest.”

In the meantime, the three little girls were grouped in an attitude of

profound anxiety and blissfulness; an event had happened; a big worm

had emerged from the ground, and they were afraid; and they were in

ecstasies over it.

Their radiant brows touched each other; one would have said that there

were three heads in one aureole.

“How easily children get acquainted at once!” exclaimed Mother

Thénardier; “one would swear that they were three sisters!”

This remark was probably the spark which the other mother had been

waiting for. She seized the Thénardier’s hand, looked at her fixedly,

and said:—

“Will you keep my child for me?”

The Thénardier made one of those movements of surprise which signify

neither assent nor refusal.

Cosette’s mother continued:—

“You see, I cannot take my daughter to the country. My work will not

permit it. With a child one can find no situation. People are

ridiculous in the country. It was the good God who caused me to pass

your inn. When I caught sight of your little ones, so pretty, so clean,

and so happy, it overwhelmed me. I said: ‘Here is a good mother. That

is just the thing; that will make three sisters.’ And then, it will not

be long before I return. Will you keep my child for me?”

“I must see about it,” replied the Thénardier.

“I will give you six francs a month.”

Here a man’s voice called from the depths of the cook-shop:—

“Not for less than seven francs. And six months paid in advance.”

“Six times seven makes forty-two,” said the Thénardier.

“I will give it,” said the mother.

“And fifteen francs in addition for preliminary expenses,” added the

man’s voice.

“Total, fifty-seven francs,” said Madame Thénardier. And she hummed

vaguely, with these figures:—

“It must be, said a warrior.”

“I will pay it,” said the mother. “I have eighty francs. I shall have

enough left to reach the country, by travelling on foot. I shall earn

money there, and as soon as I have a little I will return for my

darling.”

The man’s voice resumed:—

“The little one has an outfit?”

“That is my husband,” said the Thénardier.

“Of course she has an outfit, the poor treasure.—I understood perfectly

that it was your husband.—And a beautiful outfit, too! a senseless

outfit, everything by the dozen, and silk gowns like a lady. It is

here, in my carpet-bag.”

“You must hand it over,” struck in the man’s voice again.

“Of course I shall give it to you,” said the mother. “It would be very

queer if I were to leave my daughter quite naked!”

The master’s face appeared.

“That’s good,” said he.

The bargain was concluded. The mother passed the night at the inn, gave

up her money and left her child, fastened her carpet-bag once more, now

reduced in volume by the removal of the outfit, and light henceforth

and set out on the following morning, intending to return soon. People

arrange such departures tranquilly; but they are despairs!

A neighbor of the Thénardiers met this mother as she was setting out,

and came back with the remark:—

“I have just seen a woman crying in the street so that it was enough to

rend your heart.”

When Cosette’s mother had taken her departure, the man said to the

woman:—

“That will serve to pay my note for one hundred and ten francs which

falls due to-morrow; I lacked fifty francs. Do you know that I should

have had a bailiff and a protest after me? You played the mouse-trap

nicely with your young ones.”

“Without suspecting it,” said the woman.

CHAPTER II—FIRST SKETCH OF TWO UNPREPOSSESSING FIGURES

The mouse which had been caught was a pitiful specimen; but the cat

rejoices even over a lean mouse.

Who were these Thénardiers?

Let us say a word or two of them now. We will complete the sketch later

on.

These beings belonged to that bastard class composed of coarse people

who have been successful, and of intelligent people who have descended

in the scale, which is between the class called “middle” and the class

denominated as “inferior,” and which combines some of the defects of

the second with nearly all the vices of the first, without possessing

the generous impulse of the workingman nor the honest order of the

bourgeois.

They were of those dwarfed natures which, if a dull fire chances to

warm them up, easily become monstrous. There was in the woman a

substratum of the brute, and in the man the material for a blackguard.

Both were susceptible, in the highest degree, of the sort of hideous

progress which is accomplished in the direction of evil. There exist

crab-like souls which are continually retreating towards the darkness,

retrograding in life rather than advancing, employing experience to

augment their deformity, growing incessantly worse, and becoming more

and more impregnated with an ever-augmenting blackness. This man and

woman possessed such souls.

Thénardier, in particular, was troublesome for a physiognomist. One can

only look at some men to distrust them; for one feels that they are

dark in both directions. They are uneasy in the rear and threatening in

front. There is something of the unknown about them. One can no more

answer for what they have done than for what they will do. The shadow

which they bear in their glance denounces them. From merely hearing

them utter a word or seeing them make a gesture, one obtains a glimpse

of sombre secrets in their past and of sombre mysteries in their

future.

This Thénardier, if he himself was to be believed, had been a soldier—a

sergeant, he said. He had probably been through the campaign of 1815,

and had even conducted himself with tolerable valor, it would seem. We

shall see later on how much truth there was in this. The sign of his

hostelry was in allusion to one of his feats of arms. He had painted it

himself; for he knew how to do a little of everything, and badly.

It was at the epoch when the ancient classical romance which, after

having been \_Clélie\_, was no longer anything but \_Lodoïska\_, still

noble, but ever more and more vulgar, having fallen from Mademoiselle

de Scudéri to Madame Bournon-Malarme, and from Madame de Lafayette to

Madame Barthélemy-Hadot, was setting the loving hearts of the

portresses of Paris aflame, and even ravaging the suburbs to some

extent. Madame Thénardier was just intelligent enough to read this sort

of books. She lived on them. In them she drowned what brains she

possessed. This had given her, when very young, and even a little

later, a sort of pensive attitude towards her husband, a scamp of a

certain depth, a ruffian lettered to the extent of the grammar, coarse

and fine at one and the same time, but, so far as sentimentalism was

concerned, given to the perusal of Pigault-Lebrun, and “in what

concerns the sex,” as he said in his jargon—a downright, unmitigated

lout. His wife was twelve or fifteen years younger than he was. Later

on, when her hair, arranged in a romantically drooping fashion, began

to grow gray, when the Megæra began to be developed from the Pamela,

the female Thénardier was nothing but a coarse, vicious woman, who had

dabbled in stupid romances. Now, one cannot read nonsense with

impunity. The result was that her eldest daughter was named Éponine; as

for the younger, the poor little thing came near being called Gulnare;

I know not to what diversion, effected by a romance of Ducray-Dumenil,

she owed the fact that she merely bore the name of Azelma.

However, we will remark by the way, everything was not ridiculous and

superficial in that curious epoch to which we are alluding, and which

may be designated as the anarchy of baptismal names. By the side of

this romantic element which we have just indicated there is the social

symptom. It is not rare for the neatherd’s boy nowadays to bear the

name of Arthur, Alfred, or Alphonse, and for the vicomte—if there are

still any vicomtes—to be called Thomas, Pierre, or Jacques. This

displacement, which places the “elegant” name on the plebeian and the

rustic name on the aristocrat, is nothing else than an eddy of

equality. The irresistible penetration of the new inspiration is there

as everywhere else. Beneath this apparent discord there is a great and

a profound thing,—the French Revolution.

CHAPTER III—THE LARK

It is not all in all sufficient to be wicked in order to prosper. The

cook-shop was in a bad way.

Thanks to the traveller’s fifty-seven francs, Thénardier had been able

to avoid a protest and to honor his signature. On the following month

they were again in need of money. The woman took Cosette’s outfit to

Paris, and pawned it at the pawnbroker’s for sixty francs. As soon as

that sum was spent, the Thénardiers grew accustomed to look on the

little girl merely as a child whom they were caring for out of charity;

and they treated her accordingly. As she had no longer any clothes,

they dressed her in the cast-off petticoats and chemises of the

Thénardier brats; that is to say, in rags. They fed her on what all the

rest had left—a little better than the dog, a little worse than the

cat. Moreover, the cat and the dog were her habitual table-companions;

Cosette ate with them under the table, from a wooden bowl similar to

theirs.

The mother, who had established herself, as we shall see later on, at

M. sur M., wrote, or, more correctly, caused to be written, a letter

every month, that she might have news of her child. The Thénardiers

replied invariably, “Cosette is doing wonderfully well.”

At the expiration of the first six months the mother sent seven francs

for the seventh month, and continued her remittances with tolerable

regularity from month to month. The year was not completed when

Thénardier said: “A fine favor she is doing us, in sooth! What does she

expect us to do with her seven francs?” and he wrote to demand twelve

francs. The mother, whom they had persuaded into the belief that her

child was happy, “and was coming on well,” submitted, and forwarded the

twelve francs.

Certain natures cannot love on the one hand without hating on the

other. Mother Thénardier loved her two daughters passionately, which

caused her to hate the stranger.

It is sad to think that the love of a mother can possess villainous

aspects. Little as was the space occupied by Cosette, it seemed to her

as though it were taken from her own, and that that little child

diminished the air which her daughters breathed. This woman, like many

women of her sort, had a load of caresses and a burden of blows and

injuries to dispense each day. If she had not had Cosette, it is

certain that her daughters, idolized as they were, would have received

the whole of it; but the stranger did them the service to divert the

blows to herself. Her daughters received nothing but caresses. Cosette

could not make a motion which did not draw down upon her head a heavy

shower of violent blows and unmerited chastisement. The sweet, feeble

being, who should not have understood anything of this world or of God,

incessantly punished, scolded, ill-used, beaten, and seeing beside her

two little creatures like herself, who lived in a ray of dawn!

Madame Thénardier was vicious with Cosette. Éponine and Azelma were

vicious. Children at that age are only copies of their mother. The size

is smaller; that is all.

A year passed; then another.

People in the village said:—

“Those Thénardiers are good people. They are not rich, and yet they are

bringing up a poor child who was abandoned on their hands!”

They thought that Cosette’s mother had forgotten her.

In the meanwhile, Thénardier, having learned, it is impossible to say

by what obscure means, that the child was probably a bastard, and that

the mother could not acknowledge it, exacted fifteen francs a month,

saying that “the creature” was growing and “eating,” and threatening to

send her away. “Let her not bother me,” he exclaimed, “or I’ll fire her

brat right into the middle of her secrets. I must have an increase.”

The mother paid the fifteen francs.

From year to year the child grew, and so did her wretchedness.

As long as Cosette was little, she was the scape-goat of the two other

children; as soon as she began to develop a little, that is to say,

before she was even five years old, she became the servant of the

household.

Five years old! the reader will say; that is not probable. Alas! it is

true. Social suffering begins at all ages. Have we not recently seen

the trial of a man named Dumollard, an orphan turned bandit, who, from

the age of five, as the official documents state, being alone in the

world, “worked for his living and stole”?

Cosette was made to run on errands, to sweep the rooms, the courtyard,

the street, to wash the dishes, to even carry burdens. The Thénardiers

considered themselves all the more authorized to behave in this manner,

since the mother, who was still at M. sur M., had become irregular in

her payments. Some months she was in arrears.

If this mother had returned to Montfermeil at the end of these three

years, she would not have recognized her child. Cosette, so pretty and

rosy on her arrival in that house, was now thin and pale. She had an

indescribably uneasy look. “The sly creature,” said the Thénardiers.

Injustice had made her peevish, and misery had made her ugly. Nothing

remained to her except her beautiful eyes, which inspired pain,

because, large as they were, it seemed as though one beheld in them a

still larger amount of sadness.

It was a heart-breaking thing to see this poor child, not yet six years

old, shivering in the winter in her old rags of linen, full of holes,

sweeping the street before daylight, with an enormous broom in her tiny

red hands, and a tear in her great eyes.

[Illustration: Cossette Sweeping]

She was called the \_Lark\_ in the neighborhood. The populace, who are

fond of these figures of speech, had taken a fancy to bestow this name

on this trembling, frightened, and shivering little creature, no bigger

than a bird, who was awake every morning before any one else in the

house or the village, and was always in the street or the fields before

daybreak.

Only the little lark never sang.

BOOK FIFTH—THE DESCENT

CHAPTER I—THE HISTORY OF A PROGRESS IN BLACK GLASS TRINKETS

And in the meantime, what had become of that mother who according to

the people at Montfermeil, seemed to have abandoned her child? Where

was she? What was she doing?

After leaving her little Cosette with the Thénardiers, she had

continued her journey, and had reached M. sur M.

This, it will be remembered, was in 1818.

Fantine had quitted her province ten years before. M. sur M. had

changed its aspect. While Fantine had been slowly descending from

wretchedness to wretchedness, her native town had prospered.

About two years previously one of those industrial facts which are the

grand events of small districts had taken place.

This detail is important, and we regard it as useful to develop it at

length; we should almost say, to underline it.

From time immemorial, M. sur M. had had for its special industry the

imitation of English jet and the black glass trinkets of Germany. This

industry had always vegetated, on account of the high price of the raw

material, which reacted on the manufacture. At the moment when Fantine

returned to M. sur M., an unheard-of transformation had taken place in

the production of “black goods.” Towards the close of 1815 a man, a

stranger, had established himself in the town, and had been inspired

with the idea of substituting, in this manufacture, gum-lac for resin,

and, for bracelets in particular, slides of sheet-iron simply laid

together, for slides of soldered sheet-iron.

This very small change had effected a revolution.

This very small change had, in fact, prodigiously reduced the cost of

the raw material, which had rendered it possible in the first place, to

raise the price of manufacture, a benefit to the country; in the second

place, to improve the workmanship, an advantage to the consumer; in the

third place, to sell at a lower price, while trebling the profit, which

was a benefit to the manufacturer.

Thus three results ensued from one idea.

In less than three years the inventor of this process had become rich,

which is good, and had made every one about him rich, which is better.

He was a stranger in the Department. Of his origin, nothing was known;

of the beginning of his career, very little. It was rumored that he had

come to town with very little money, a few hundred francs at the most.

It was from this slender capital, enlisted in the service of an

ingenious idea, developed by method and thought, that he had drawn his

own fortune, and the fortune of the whole countryside.

On his arrival at M. sur M. he had only the garments, the appearance,

and the language of a workingman.

It appears that on the very day when he made his obscure entry into the

little town of M. sur M., just at nightfall, on a December evening,

knapsack on back and thorn club in hand, a large fire had broken out in

the town-hall. This man had rushed into the flames and saved, at the

risk of his own life, two children who belonged to the captain of the

gendarmerie; this is why they had forgotten to ask him for his

passport. Afterwards they had learned his name. He was called Father

Madeleine.

CHAPTER II—MADELEINE

He was a man about fifty years of age, who had a preoccupied air, and

who was good. That was all that could be said about him.

Thanks to the rapid progress of the industry which he had so admirably

reconstructed, M. sur M. had become a rather important centre of trade.

Spain, which consumes a good deal of black jet, made enormous purchases

there each year. M. sur M. almost rivalled London and Berlin in this

branch of commerce. Father Madeleine’s profits were such, that at the

end of the second year he was able to erect a large factory, in which

there were two vast workrooms, one for the men, and the other for

women. Any one who was hungry could present himself there, and was sure

of finding employment and bread. Father Madeleine required of the men

good will, of the women pure morals, and of all, probity. He had

separated the work-rooms in order to separate the sexes, and so that

the women and girls might remain discreet. On this point he was

inflexible. It was the only thing in which he was in a manner

intolerant. He was all the more firmly set on this severity, since M.

sur M., being a garrison town, opportunities for corruption abounded.

However, his coming had been a boon, and his presence was a godsend.

Before Father Madeleine’s arrival, everything had languished in the

country; now everything lived with a healthy life of toil. A strong

circulation warmed everything and penetrated everywhere. Slack seasons

and wretchedness were unknown. There was no pocket so obscure that it

had not a little money in it; no dwelling so lowly that there was not

some little joy within it.

Father Madeleine gave employment to every one. He exacted but one

thing: Be an honest man. Be an honest woman.

As we have said, in the midst of this activity of which he was the

cause and the pivot, Father Madeleine made his fortune; but a singular

thing in a simple man of business, it did not seem as though that were

his chief care. He appeared to be thinking much of others, and little

of himself. In 1820 he was known to have a sum of six hundred and

thirty thousand francs lodged in his name with Laffitte; but before

reserving these six hundred and thirty thousand francs, he had spent

more than a million for the town and its poor.

The hospital was badly endowed; he founded six beds there. M. sur M. is

divided into the upper and the lower town. The lower town, in which he

lived, had but one school, a miserable hovel, which was falling to

ruin: he constructed two, one for girls, the other for boys. He

allotted a salary from his own funds to the two instructors, a salary

twice as large as their meagre official salary, and one day he said to

some one who expressed surprise, “The two prime functionaries of the

state are the nurse and the schoolmaster.” He created at his own

expense an infant school, a thing then almost unknown in France, and a

fund for aiding old and infirm workmen. As his factory was a centre, a

new quarter, in which there were a good many indigent families, rose

rapidly around him; he established there a free dispensary.

At first, when they watched his beginnings, the good souls said, “He’s

a jolly fellow who means to get rich.” When they saw him enriching the

country before he enriched himself, the good souls said, “He is an

ambitious man.” This seemed all the more probable since the man was

religious, and even practised his religion to a certain degree, a thing

which was very favorably viewed at that epoch. He went regularly to low

mass every Sunday. The local deputy, who nosed out all rivalry

everywhere, soon began to grow uneasy over this religion. This deputy

had been a member of the legislative body of the Empire, and shared the

religious ideas of a father of the Oratoire, known under the name of

Fouché, Duc d’Otrante, whose creature and friend he had been. He

indulged in gentle raillery at God with closed doors. But when he

beheld the wealthy manufacturer Madeleine going to low mass at seven

o’clock, he perceived in him a possible candidate, and resolved to

outdo him; he took a Jesuit confessor, and went to high mass and to

vespers. Ambition was at that time, in the direct acceptation of the

word, a race to the steeple. The poor profited by this terror as well

as the good God, for the honorable deputy also founded two beds in the

hospital, which made twelve.

Nevertheless, in 1819 a rumor one morning circulated through the town

to the effect that, on the representations of the prefect and in

consideration of the services rendered by him to the country, Father

Madeleine was to be appointed by the King, mayor of M. sur M. Those who

had pronounced this newcomer to be “an ambitious fellow,” seized with

delight on this opportunity which all men desire, to exclaim, “There!

what did we say!” All M. sur M. was in an uproar. The rumor was well

founded. Several days later the appointment appeared in the \_Moniteur\_.

On the following day Father Madeleine refused.

In this same year of 1819 the products of the new process invented by

Madeleine figured in the industrial exhibition; when the jury made

their report, the King appointed the inventor a chevalier of the Legion

of Honor. A fresh excitement in the little town. Well, so it was the

cross that he wanted! Father Madeleine refused the cross.

Decidedly this man was an enigma. The good souls got out of their

predicament by saying, “After all, he is some sort of an adventurer.”

We have seen that the country owed much to him; the poor owed him

everything; he was so useful and he was so gentle that people had been

obliged to honor and respect him. His workmen, in particular, adored

him, and he endured this adoration with a sort of melancholy gravity.

When he was known to be rich, “people in society” bowed to him, and he

received invitations in the town; he was called, in town, Monsieur

Madeleine; his workmen and the children continued to call him Father

Madeleine, and that was what was most adapted to make him smile. In

proportion as he mounted, throve, invitations rained down upon him.

“Society” claimed him for its own. The prim little drawing-rooms on M.

sur M., which, of course, had at first been closed to the artisan,

opened both leaves of their folding-doors to the millionnaire. They

made a thousand advances to him. He refused.

This time the good gossips had no trouble. “He is an ignorant man, of

no education. No one knows where he came from. He would not know how to

behave in society. It has not been absolutely proved that he knows how

to read.”

When they saw him making money, they said, “He is a man of business.”

When they saw him scattering his money about, they said, “He is an

ambitious man.” When he was seen to decline honors, they said, “He is

an adventurer.” When they saw him repulse society, they said, “He is a

brute.”

In 1820, five years after his arrival in M. sur M., the services which

he had rendered to the district were so dazzling, the opinion of the

whole country round about was so unanimous, that the King again

appointed him mayor of the town. He again declined; but the prefect

resisted his refusal, all the notabilities of the place came to implore

him, the people in the street besought him; the urging was so vigorous

that he ended by accepting. It was noticed that the thing which seemed

chiefly to bring him to a decision was the almost irritated apostrophe

addressed to him by an old woman of the people, who called to him from

her threshold, in an angry way: \_“A good mayor is a useful thing. Is he

drawing back before the good which he can do?”\_

This was the third phase of his ascent. Father Madeleine had become

Monsieur Madeleine. Monsieur Madeleine became Monsieur le Maire.

CHAPTER III—SUMS DEPOSITED WITH LAFFITTE

On the other hand, he remained as simple as on the first day. He had

gray hair, a serious eye, the sunburned complexion of a laborer, the

thoughtful visage of a philosopher. He habitually wore a hat with a

wide brim, and a long coat of coarse cloth, buttoned to the chin. He

fulfilled his duties as mayor; but, with that exception, he lived in

solitude. He spoke to but few people. He avoided polite attentions; he

escaped quickly; he smiled to relieve himself of the necessity of

talking; he gave, in order to get rid of the necessity for smiling. The

women said of him, “What a good-natured bear!” His pleasure consisted

in strolling in the fields.

He always took his meals alone, with an open book before him, which he

read. He had a well-selected little library. He loved books; books are

cold but safe friends. In proportion as leisure came to him with

fortune, he seemed to take advantage of it to cultivate his mind. It

had been observed that, ever since his arrival at M. sur M., his

language had grown more polished, more choice, and more gentle with

every passing year. He liked to carry a gun with him on his strolls,

but he rarely made use of it. When he did happen to do so, his shooting

was something so infallible as to inspire terror. He never killed an

inoffensive animal. He never shot at a little bird.

Although he was no longer young, it was thought that he was still

prodigiously strong. He offered his assistance to any one who was in

need of it, lifted a horse, released a wheel clogged in the mud, or

stopped a runaway bull by the horns. He always had his pockets full of

money when he went out; but they were empty on his return. When he

passed through a village, the ragged brats ran joyously after him, and

surrounded him like a swarm of gnats.

It was thought that he must, in the past, have lived a country life,

since he knew all sorts of useful secrets, which he taught to the

peasants. He taught them how to destroy scurf on wheat, by sprinkling

it and the granary and inundating the cracks in the floor with a

solution of common salt; and how to chase away weevils by hanging up

orviot in bloom everywhere, on the walls and the ceilings, among the

grass and in the houses.

He had “recipes” for exterminating from a field, blight, tares,

foxtail, and all parasitic growths which destroy the wheat. He defended

a rabbit warren against rats, simply by the odor of a guinea-pig which

he placed in it.

One day he saw some country people busily engaged in pulling up

nettles; he examined the plants, which were uprooted and already dried,

and said: “They are dead. Nevertheless, it would be a good thing to

know how to make use of them. When the nettle is young, the leaf makes

an excellent vegetable; when it is older, it has filaments and fibres

like hemp and flax. Nettle cloth is as good as linen cloth. Chopped up,

nettles are good for poultry; pounded, they are good for horned cattle.

The seed of the nettle, mixed with fodder, gives gloss to the hair of

animals; the root, mixed with salt, produces a beautiful yellow

coloring-matter. Moreover, it is an excellent hay, which can be cut

twice. And what is required for the nettle? A little soil, no care, no

culture. Only the seed falls as it is ripe, and it is difficult to

collect it. That is all. With the exercise of a little care, the nettle

could be made useful; it is neglected and it becomes hurtful. It is

exterminated. How many men resemble the nettle!” He added, after a

pause: “Remember this, my friends: there are no such things as bad

plants or bad men. There are only bad cultivators.”

The children loved him because he knew how to make charming little

trifles of straw and cocoanuts.

When he saw the door of a church hung in black, he entered: he sought

out funerals as other men seek christenings. Widowhood and the grief of

others attracted him, because of his great gentleness; he mingled with

the friends clad in mourning, with families dressed in black, with the

priests groaning around a coffin. He seemed to like to give to his

thoughts for text these funereal psalmodies filled with the vision of

the other world. With his eyes fixed on heaven, he listened with a sort

of aspiration towards all the mysteries of the infinite, those sad

voices which sing on the verge of the obscure abyss of death.

He performed a multitude of good actions, concealing his agency in them

as a man conceals himself because of evil actions. He penetrated houses

privately, at night; he ascended staircases furtively. A poor wretch on

returning to his attic would find that his door had been opened,

sometimes even forced, during his absence. The poor man made a clamor

over it: some malefactor had been there! He entered, and the first

thing he beheld was a piece of gold lying forgotten on some piece of

furniture. The “malefactor” who had been there was Father Madeleine.

He was affable and sad. The people said: “There is a rich man who has

not a haughty air. There is a happy man who has not a contented air.”

Some people maintained that he was a mysterious person, and that no one

ever entered his chamber, which was a regular anchorite’s cell,

furnished with winged hour-glasses and enlivened by cross-bones and

skulls of dead men! This was much talked of, so that one of the elegant

and malicious young women of M. sur M. came to him one day, and asked:

“Monsieur le Maire, pray show us your chamber. It is said to be a

grotto.” He smiled, and introduced them instantly into this “grotto.”

They were well punished for their curiosity. The room was very simply

furnished in mahogany, which was rather ugly, like all furniture of

that sort, and hung with paper worth twelve sous. They could see

nothing remarkable about it, except two candlesticks of antique pattern

which stood on the chimney-piece and appeared to be silver, “for they

were hall-marked,” an observation full of the type of wit of petty

towns.

Nevertheless, people continued to say that no one ever got into the

room, and that it was a hermit’s cave, a mysterious retreat, a hole, a

tomb.

It was also whispered about that he had “immense” sums deposited with

Laffitte, with this peculiar feature, that they were always at his

immediate disposal, so that, it was added, M. Madeleine could make his

appearance at Laffitte’s any morning, sign a receipt, and carry off his

two or three millions in ten minutes. In reality, “these two or three

millions” were reducible, as we have said, to six hundred and thirty or

forty thousand francs.

CHAPTER IV—M. MADELEINE IN MOURNING

At the beginning of 1820 the newspapers announced the death of M.

Myriel, Bishop of D——, surnamed “Monseigneur Bienvenu,” who had died in

the odor of sanctity at the age of eighty-two.

The Bishop of D—— to supply here a detail which the papers omitted—had

been blind for many years before his death, and content to be blind, as

his sister was beside him.

Let us remark by the way, that to be blind and to be loved, is, in

fact, one of the most strangely exquisite forms of happiness upon this

earth, where nothing is complete. To have continually at one’s side a

woman, a daughter, a sister, a charming being, who is there because you

need her and because she cannot do without you; to know that we are

indispensable to a person who is necessary to us; to be able to

incessantly measure one’s affection by the amount of her presence which

she bestows on us, and to say to ourselves, “Since she consecrates the

whole of her time to me, it is because I possess the whole of her

heart”; to behold her thought in lieu of her face; to be able to verify

the fidelity of one being amid the eclipse of the world; to regard the

rustle of a gown as the sound of wings; to hear her come and go,

retire, speak, return, sing, and to think that one is the centre of

these steps, of this speech; to manifest at each instant one’s personal

attraction; to feel one’s self all the more powerful because of one’s

infirmity; to become in one’s obscurity, and through one’s obscurity,

the star around which this angel gravitates,—few felicities equal this.

The supreme happiness of life consists in the conviction that one is

loved; loved for one’s own sake—let us say rather, loved in spite of

one’s self; this conviction the blind man possesses. To be served in

distress is to be caressed. Does he lack anything? No. One does not

lose the sight when one has love. And what love! A love wholly

constituted of virtue! There is no blindness where there is certainty.

Soul seeks soul, gropingly, and finds it. And this soul, found and

tested, is a woman. A hand sustains you; it is hers: a mouth lightly

touches your brow; it is her mouth: you hear a breath very near you; it

is hers. To have everything of her, from her worship to her pity, never

to be left, to have that sweet weakness aiding you, to lean upon that

immovable reed, to touch Providence with one’s hands, and to be able to

take it in one’s arms,—God made tangible,—what bliss! The heart, that

obscure, celestial flower, undergoes a mysterious blossoming. One would

not exchange that shadow for all brightness! The angel soul is there,

uninterruptedly there; if she departs, it is but to return again; she

vanishes like a dream, and reappears like reality. One feels warmth

approaching, and behold! she is there. One overflows with serenity,

with gayety, with ecstasy; one is a radiance amid the night. And there

are a thousand little cares. Nothings, which are enormous in that void.

The most ineffable accents of the feminine voice employed to lull you,

and supplying the vanished universe to you. One is caressed with the

soul. One sees nothing, but one feels that one is adored. It is a

paradise of shadows.

It was from this paradise that Monseigneur Welcome had passed to the

other.

The announcement of his death was reprinted by the local journal of M.

sur M. On the following day, M. Madeleine appeared clad wholly in

black, and with crape on his hat.

This mourning was noticed in the town, and commented on. It seemed to

throw a light on M. Madeleine’s origin. It was concluded that some

relationship existed between him and the venerable Bishop. \_“He has

gone into mourning for the Bishop of D——”\_ said the drawing-rooms; this

raised M. Madeleine’s credit greatly, and procured for him, instantly

and at one blow, a certain consideration in the noble world of M. sur

M. The microscopic Faubourg Saint-Germain of the place meditated

raising the quarantine against M. Madeleine, the probable relative of a

bishop. M. Madeleine perceived the advancement which he had obtained,

by the more numerous courtesies of the old women and the more plentiful

smiles of the young ones. One evening, a ruler in that petty great

world, who was curious by right of seniority, ventured to ask him, “M.

le Maire is doubtless a cousin of the late Bishop of D——?”

He said, “No, Madame.”

“But,” resumed the dowager, “you are wearing mourning for him.”

He replied, “It is because I was a servant in his family in my youth.”

Another thing which was remarked, was, that every time that he

encountered in the town a young Savoyard who was roaming about the

country and seeking chimneys to sweep, the mayor had him summoned,

inquired his name, and gave him money. The little Savoyards told each

other about it: a great many of them passed that way.

CHAPTER V—VAGUE FLASHES ON THE HORIZON

Little by little, and in the course of time, all this opposition

subsided. There had at first been exercised against M. Madeleine, in

virtue of a sort of law which all those who rise must submit to,

blackening and calumnies; then they grew to be nothing more than

ill-nature, then merely malicious remarks, then even this entirely

disappeared; respect became complete, unanimous, cordial, and towards

1821 the moment arrived when the word “Monsieur le Maire” was

pronounced at M. sur M. with almost the same accent as “Monseigneur the

Bishop” had been pronounced in D—— in 1815. People came from a distance

of ten leagues around to consult M. Madeleine. He put an end to

differences, he prevented lawsuits, he reconciled enemies. Every one

took him for the judge, and with good reason. It seemed as though he

had for a soul the book of the natural law. It was like an epidemic of

veneration, which in the course of six or seven years gradually took

possession of the whole district.

One single man in the town, in the arrondissement, absolutely escaped

this contagion, and, whatever Father Madeleine did, remained his

opponent as though a sort of incorruptible and imperturbable instinct

kept him on the alert and uneasy. It seems, in fact, as though there

existed in certain men a veritable bestial instinct, though pure and

upright, like all instincts, which creates antipathies and sympathies,

which fatally separates one nature from another nature, which does not

hesitate, which feels no disquiet, which does not hold its peace, and

which never belies itself, clear in its obscurity, infallible,

imperious, intractable, stubborn to all counsels of the intelligence

and to all the dissolvents of reason, and which, in whatever manner

destinies are arranged, secretly warns the man-dog of the presence of

the man-cat, and the man-fox of the presence of the man-lion.

It frequently happened that when M. Madeleine was passing along a

street, calm, affectionate, surrounded by the blessings of all, a man

of lofty stature, clad in an iron-gray frock-coat, armed with a heavy

cane, and wearing a battered hat, turned round abruptly behind him, and

followed him with his eyes until he disappeared, with folded arms and a

slow shake of the head, and his upper lip raised in company with his

lower to his nose, a sort of significant grimace which might be

translated by: “What is that man, after all? I certainly have seen him

somewhere. In any case, I am not his dupe.”

This person, grave with a gravity which was almost menacing, was one of

those men who, even when only seen by a rapid glimpse, arrest the

spectator’s attention.

His name was Javert, and he belonged to the police.

At M. sur M. he exercised the unpleasant but useful functions of an

inspector. He had not seen Madeleine’s beginnings. Javert owed the post

which he occupied to the protection of M. Chabouillet, the secretary of

the Minister of State, Comte Anglès, then prefect of police at Paris.

When Javert arrived at M. sur M. the fortune of the great manufacturer

was already made, and Father Madeleine had become Monsieur Madeleine.

Certain police officers have a peculiar physiognomy, which is

complicated with an air of baseness mingled with an air of authority.

Javert possessed this physiognomy minus the baseness.

It is our conviction that if souls were visible to the eyes, we should

be able to see distinctly that strange thing that each one individual

of the human race corresponds to some one of the species of the animal

creation; and we could easily recognize this truth, hardly perceived by

the thinker, that from the oyster to the eagle, from the pig to the

tiger, all animals exist in man, and that each one of them is in a man.

Sometimes even several of them at a time.

Animals are nothing else than the figures of our virtues and our vices,

straying before our eyes, the visible phantoms of our souls. God shows

them to us in order to induce us to reflect. Only since animals are

mere shadows, God has not made them capable of education in the full

sense of the word; what is the use? On the contrary, our souls being

realities and having a goal which is appropriate to them, God has

bestowed on them intelligence; that is to say, the possibility of

education. Social education, when well done, can always draw from a

soul, of whatever sort it may be, the utility which it contains.

This, be it said, is of course from the restricted point of view of the

terrestrial life which is apparent, and without prejudging the profound

question of the anterior or ulterior personality of the beings which

are not man. The visible \_I\_ in nowise authorizes the thinker to deny

the latent \_I\_. Having made this reservation, let us pass on.

Now, if the reader will admit, for a moment, with us, that in every man

there is one of the animal species of creation, it will be easy for us

to say what there was in Police Officer Javert.

The peasants of Asturias are convinced that in every litter of wolves

there is one dog, which is killed by the mother because, otherwise, as

he grew up, he would devour the other little ones.

Give to this dog-son of a wolf a human face, and the result will be

Javert.

Javert had been born in prison, of a fortune-teller, whose husband was

in the galleys. As he grew up, he thought that he was outside the pale

of society, and he despaired of ever re-entering it. He observed that

society unpardoningly excludes two classes of men,—those who attack it

and those who guard it; he had no choice except between these two

classes; at the same time, he was conscious of an indescribable

foundation of rigidity, regularity, and probity, complicated with an

inexpressible hatred for the race of bohemians whence he was sprung. He

entered the police; he succeeded there. At forty years of age he was an

inspector.

During his youth he had been employed in the convict establishments of

the South.

Before proceeding further, let us come to an understanding as to the

words, “human face,” which we have just applied to Javert.

The human face of Javert consisted of a flat nose, with two deep

nostrils, towards which enormous whiskers ascended on his cheeks. One

felt ill at ease when he saw these two forests and these two caverns

for the first time. When Javert laughed,—and his laugh was rare and

terrible,—his thin lips parted and revealed to view not only his teeth,

but his gums, and around his nose there formed a flattened and savage

fold, as on the muzzle of a wild beast. Javert, serious, was a

watchdog; when he laughed, he was a tiger. As for the rest, he had very

little skull and a great deal of jaw; his hair concealed his forehead

and fell over his eyebrows; between his eyes there was a permanent,

central frown, like an imprint of wrath; his gaze was obscure; his

mouth pursed up and terrible; his air that of ferocious command.

This man was composed of two very simple and two very good sentiments,

comparatively; but he rendered them almost bad, by dint of exaggerating

them,—respect for authority, hatred of rebellion; and in his eyes,

murder, robbery, all crimes, are only forms of rebellion. He enveloped

in a blind and profound faith every one who had a function in the

state, from the prime minister to the rural policeman. He covered with

scorn, aversion, and disgust every one who had once crossed the legal

threshold of evil. He was absolute, and admitted no exceptions. On the

one hand, he said, “The functionary can make no mistake; the magistrate

is never the wrong.” On the other hand, he said, “These men are

irremediably lost. Nothing good can come from them.” He fully shared

the opinion of those extreme minds which attribute to human law I know

not what power of making, or, if the reader will have it so, of

authenticating, demons, and who place a Styx at the base of society. He

was stoical, serious, austere; a melancholy dreamer, humble and

haughty, like fanatics. His glance was like a gimlet, cold and

piercing. His whole life hung on these two words: watchfulness and

supervision. He had introduced a straight line into what is the most

crooked thing in the world; he possessed the conscience of his

usefulness, the religion of his functions, and he was a spy as other

men are priests. Woe to the man who fell into his hands! He would have

arrested his own father, if the latter had escaped from the galleys,

and would have denounced his mother, if she had broken her ban. And he

would have done it with that sort of inward satisfaction which is

conferred by virtue. And, withal, a life of privation, isolation,

abnegation, chastity, with never a diversion. It was implacable duty;

the police understood, as the Spartans understood Sparta, a pitiless

lying in wait, a ferocious honesty, a marble informer, Brutus in

Vidocq.

Javert’s whole person was expressive of the man who spies and who

withdraws himself from observation. The mystical school of Joseph de

Maistre, which at that epoch seasoned with lofty cosmogony those things

which were called the ultra newspapers, would not have failed to

declare that Javert was a symbol. His brow was not visible; it

disappeared beneath his hat: his eyes were not visible, since they were

lost under his eyebrows: his chin was not visible, for it was plunged

in his cravat: his hands were not visible; they were drawn up in his

sleeves: and his cane was not visible; he carried it under his coat.

But when the occasion presented itself, there was suddenly seen to

emerge from all this shadow, as from an ambuscade, a narrow and angular

forehead, a baleful glance, a threatening chin, enormous hands, and a

monstrous cudgel.

In his leisure moments, which were far from frequent, he read, although

he hated books; this caused him to be not wholly illiterate. This could

be recognized by some emphasis in his speech.

As we have said, he had no vices. When he was pleased with himself, he

permitted himself a pinch of snuff. Therein lay his connection with

humanity.

The reader will have no difficulty in understanding that Javert was the

terror of that whole class which the annual statistics of the Ministry

of Justice designates under the rubric, Vagrants. The name of Javert

routed them by its mere utterance; the face of Javert petrified them at

sight.

Such was this formidable man.

Javert was like an eye constantly fixed on M. Madeleine. An eye full of

suspicion and conjecture. M. Madeleine had finally perceived the fact;

but it seemed to be of no importance to him. He did not even put a

question to Javert; he neither sought nor avoided him; he bore that

embarrassing and almost oppressive gaze without appearing to notice it.

He treated Javert with ease and courtesy, as he did all the rest of the

world.

It was divined, from some words which escaped Javert, that he had

secretly investigated, with that curiosity which belongs to the race,

and into which there enters as much instinct as will, all the anterior

traces which Father Madeleine might have left elsewhere. He seemed to

know, and he sometimes said in covert words, that some one had gleaned

certain information in a certain district about a family which had

disappeared. Once he chanced to say, as he was talking to himself, “I

think I have him!” Then he remained pensive for three days, and uttered

not a word. It seemed that the thread which he thought he held had

broken.

Moreover, and this furnishes the necessary corrective for the too

absolute sense which certain words might present, there can be nothing

really infallible in a human creature, and the peculiarity of instinct

is that it can become confused, thrown off the track, and defeated.

Otherwise, it would be superior to intelligence, and the beast would be

found to be provided with a better light than man.

Javert was evidently somewhat disconcerted by the perfect naturalness

and tranquillity of M. Madeleine.

One day, nevertheless, his strange manner appeared to produce an

impression on M. Madeleine. It was on the following occasion.

CHAPTER VI—FATHER FAUCHELEVENT

One morning M. Madeleine was passing through an unpaved alley of M. sur

M.; he heard a noise, and saw a group some distance away. He

approached. An old man named Father Fauchelevent had just fallen

beneath his cart, his horse having tumbled down.

This Fauchelevent was one of the few enemies whom M. Madeleine had at

that time. When Madeleine arrived in the neighborhood, Fauchelevent, an

ex-notary and a peasant who was almost educated, had a business which

was beginning to be in a bad way. Fauchelevent had seen this simple

workman grow rich, while he, a lawyer, was being ruined. This had

filled him with jealousy, and he had done all he could, on every

occasion, to injure Madeleine. Then bankruptcy had come; and as the old

man had nothing left but a cart and a horse, and neither family nor

children, he had turned carter.

The horse had two broken legs and could not rise. The old man was

caught in the wheels. The fall had been so unlucky that the whole

weight of the vehicle rested on his breast. The cart was quite heavily

laden. Father Fauchelevent was rattling in the throat in the most

lamentable manner. They had tried, but in vain, to drag him out. An

unmethodical effort, aid awkwardly given, a wrong shake, might kill

him. It was impossible to disengage him otherwise than by lifting the

vehicle off of him. Javert, who had come up at the moment of the

accident, had sent for a jack-screw.

M. Madeleine arrived. People stood aside respectfully.

“Help!” cried old Fauchelevent. “Who will be good and save the old

man?”

M. Madeleine turned towards those present:—

“Is there a jack-screw to be had?”

“One has been sent for,” answered the peasant.

“How long will it take to get it?”

“They have gone for the nearest, to Flachot’s place, where there is a

farrier; but it makes no difference; it will take a good quarter of an

hour.”

“A quarter of an hour!” exclaimed Madeleine.

It had rained on the preceding night; the soil was soaked.

The cart was sinking deeper into the earth every moment, and crushing

the old carter’s breast more and more. It was evident that his ribs

would be broken in five minutes more.

“It is impossible to wait another quarter of an hour,” said Madeleine

to the peasants, who were staring at him.

“We must!”

“But it will be too late then! Don’t you see that the cart is sinking?”

“Well!”

“Listen,” resumed Madeleine; “there is still room enough under the cart

to allow a man to crawl beneath it and raise it with his back. Only

half a minute, and the poor man can be taken out. Is there any one here

who has stout loins and heart? There are five louis d’or to be earned!”

Not a man in the group stirred.

“Ten louis,” said Madeleine.

The persons present dropped their eyes. One of them muttered: “A man

would need to be devilish strong. And then he runs the risk of getting

crushed!”

“Come,” began Madeleine again, “twenty louis.”

The same silence.

“It is not the will which is lacking,” said a voice.

M. Madeleine turned round, and recognized Javert. He had not noticed

him on his arrival.

Javert went on:—

“It is strength. One would have to be a terrible man to do such a thing

as lift a cart like that on his back.”

Then, gazing fixedly at M. Madeleine, he went on, emphasizing every

word that he uttered:—

“Monsieur Madeleine, I have never known but one man capable of doing

what you ask.”

Madeleine shuddered.

Javert added, with an air of indifference, but without removing his

eyes from Madeleine:—

“He was a convict.”

“Ah!” said Madeleine.

“In the galleys at Toulon.”

Madeleine turned pale.

Meanwhile, the cart continued to sink slowly. Father Fauchelevent

rattled in the throat, and shrieked:—

“I am strangling! My ribs are breaking! a screw! something! Ah!”

Madeleine glanced about him.

“Is there, then, no one who wishes to earn twenty louis and save the

life of this poor old man?”

No one stirred. Javert resumed:—

“I have never known but one man who could take the place of a screw,

and he was that convict.”

“Ah! It is crushing me!” cried the old man.

Madeleine raised his head, met Javert’s falcon eye still fixed upon

him, looked at the motionless peasants, and smiled sadly. Then, without

saying a word, he fell on his knees, and before the crowd had even had

time to utter a cry, he was underneath the vehicle.

A terrible moment of expectation and silence ensued.

They beheld Madeleine, almost flat on his stomach beneath that terrible

weight, make two vain efforts to bring his knees and his elbows

together. They shouted to him, “Father Madeleine, come out!” Old

Fauchelevent himself said to him, “Monsieur Madeleine, go away! You see

that I am fated to die! Leave me! You will get yourself crushed also!”

Madeleine made no reply.

All the spectators were panting. The wheels had continued to sink, and

it had become almost impossible for Madeleine to make his way from

under the vehicle.

Suddenly the enormous mass was seen to quiver, the cart rose slowly,

the wheels half emerged from the ruts. They heard a stifled voice

crying, “Make haste! Help!” It was Madeleine, who had just made a final

effort.

They rushed forwards. The devotion of a single man had given force and

courage to all. The cart was raised by twenty arms. Old Fauchelevent

was saved.

Madeleine rose. He was pale, though dripping with perspiration. His

clothes were torn and covered with mud. All wept. The old man kissed

his knees and called him the good God. As for him, he bore upon his

countenance an indescribable expression of happy and celestial

suffering, and he fixed his tranquil eye on Javert, who was still

staring at him.

CHAPTER VII—FAUCHELEVENT BECOMES A GARDENER IN PARIS

Fauchelevent had dislocated his kneepan in his fall. Father Madeleine

had him conveyed to an infirmary which he had established for his

workmen in the factory building itself, and which was served by two

sisters of charity. On the following morning the old man found a

thousand-franc bank-note on his night-stand, with these words in Father

Madeleine’s writing: \_“I purchase your horse and cart.”\_ The cart was

broken, and the horse was dead. Fauchelevent recovered, but his knee

remained stiff. M. Madeleine, on the recommendation of the sisters of

charity and of his priest, got the good man a place as gardener in a

female convent in the Rue Saint-Antoine in Paris.

Some time afterwards, M. Madeleine was appointed mayor. The first time

that Javert beheld M. Madeleine clothed in the scarf which gave him

authority over the town, he felt the sort of shudder which a watch-dog

might experience on smelling a wolf in his master’s clothes. From that

time forth he avoided him as much as he possibly could. When the

requirements of the service imperatively demanded it, and he could not

do otherwise than meet the mayor, he addressed him with profound

respect.

This prosperity created at M. sur M. by Father Madeleine had, besides

the visible signs which we have mentioned, another symptom which was

nonetheless significant for not being visible. This never deceives.

When the population suffers, when work is lacking, when there is no

commerce, the tax-payer resists imposts through penury, he exhausts and

oversteps his respite, and the state expends a great deal of money in

the charges for compelling and collection. When work is abundant, when

the country is rich and happy, the taxes are paid easily and cost the

state nothing. It may be said, that there is one infallible thermometer

of the public misery and riches,—the cost of collecting the taxes. In

the course of seven years the expense of collecting the taxes had

diminished three-fourths in the arrondissement of M. sur M., and this

led to this arrondissement being frequently cited from all the rest by

M. de Villèle, then Minister of Finance.

Such was the condition of the country when Fantine returned thither. No

one remembered her. Fortunately, the door of M. Madeleine’s factory was

like the face of a friend. She presented herself there, and was

admitted to the women’s workroom. The trade was entirely new to

Fantine; she could not be very skilful at it, and she therefore earned

but little by her day’s work; but it was sufficient; the problem was

solved; she was earning her living.

CHAPTER VIII—MADAME VICTURNIEN EXPENDS THIRTY FRANCS ON MORALITY

When Fantine saw that she was making her living, she felt joyful for a

moment. To live honestly by her own labor, what mercy from heaven! The

taste for work had really returned to her. She bought a looking-glass,

took pleasure in surveying in it her youth, her beautiful hair, her

fine teeth; she forgot many things; she thought only of Cosette and of

the possible future, and was almost happy. She hired a little room and

furnished on credit on the strength of her future work—a lingering

trace of her improvident ways. As she was not able to say that she was

married she took good care, as we have seen, not to mention her little

girl.

At first, as the reader has seen, she paid the Thénardiers promptly. As

she only knew how to sign her name, she was obliged to write through a

public letter-writer.

She wrote often, and this was noticed. It began to be said in an

undertone, in the women’s workroom, that Fantine “wrote letters” and

that “she had ways about her.”

There is no one for spying on people’s actions like those who are not

concerned in them. Why does that gentleman never come except at

nightfall? Why does Mr. So-and-So never hang his key on its nail on

Tuesday? Why does he always take the narrow streets? Why does Madame

always descend from her hackney-coach before reaching her house? Why

does she send out to purchase six sheets of note paper, when she has a

“whole stationer’s shop full of it?” etc. There exist beings who, for

the sake of obtaining the key to these enigmas, which are, moreover, of

no consequence whatever to them, spend more money, waste more time,

take more trouble, than would be required for ten good actions, and

that gratuitously, for their own pleasure, without receiving any other

payment for their curiosity than curiosity. They will follow up such

and such a man or woman for whole days; they will do sentry duty for

hours at a time on the corners of the streets, under alley-way doors at

night, in cold and rain; they will bribe errand-porters, they will make

the drivers of hackney-coaches and lackeys tipsy, buy a waiting-maid,

suborn a porter. Why? For no reason. A pure passion for seeing,

knowing, and penetrating into things. A pure itch for talking. And

often these secrets once known, these mysteries made public, these

enigmas illuminated by the light of day, bring on catastrophies, duels,

failures, the ruin of families, and broken lives, to the great joy of

those who have “found out everything,” without any interest in the

matter, and by pure instinct. A sad thing.

Certain persons are malicious solely through a necessity for talking.

Their conversation, the chat of the drawing-room, gossip of the

anteroom, is like those chimneys which consume wood rapidly; they need

a great amount of combustibles; and their combustibles are furnished by

their neighbors.

So Fantine was watched.

In addition, many a one was jealous of her golden hair and of her white

teeth.

It was remarked that in the workroom she often turned aside, in the

midst of the rest, to wipe away a tear. These were the moments when she

was thinking of her child; perhaps, also, of the man whom she had

loved.

Breaking the gloomy bonds of the past is a mournful task.

It was observed that she wrote twice a month at least, and that she

paid the carriage on the letter. They managed to obtain the address:

\_Monsieur, Monsieur Thénardier, inn-keeper at Montfermeil\_. The public

writer, a good old man who could not fill his stomach with red wine

without emptying his pocket of secrets, was made to talk in the

wine-shop. In short, it was discovered that Fantine had a child. “She

must be a pretty sort of a woman.” An old gossip was found, who made

the trip to Montfermeil, talked to the Thénardiers, and said on her

return: “For my five and thirty francs I have freed my mind. I have

seen the child.”

The gossip who did this thing was a gorgon named Madame Victurnien, the

guardian and door-keeper of every one’s virtue. Madame Victurnien was

fifty-six, and re-enforced the mask of ugliness with the mask of age. A

quavering voice, a whimsical mind. This old dame had once been

young—astonishing fact! In her youth, in ’93, she had married a monk

who had fled from his cloister in a red cap, and passed from the

Bernardines to the Jacobins. She was dry, rough, peevish, sharp,

captious, almost venomous; all this in memory of her monk, whose widow

she was, and who had ruled over her masterfully and bent her to his

will. She was a nettle in which the rustle of the cassock was visible.

At the Restoration she had turned bigot, and that with so much energy

that the priests had forgiven her her monk. She had a small property,

which she bequeathed with much ostentation to a religious community.

She was in high favor at the episcopal palace of Arras. So this Madame

Victurnien went to Montfermeil, and returned with the remark, “I have

seen the child.”

All this took time. Fantine had been at the factory for more than a

year, when, one morning, the superintendent of the workroom handed her

fifty francs from the mayor, told her that she was no longer employed

in the shop, and requested her, in the mayor’s name, to leave the

neighborhood.

This was the very month when the Thénardiers, after having demanded

twelve francs instead of six, had just exacted fifteen francs instead

of twelve.

Fantine was overwhelmed. She could not leave the neighborhood; she was

in debt for her rent and furniture. Fifty francs was not sufficient to

cancel this debt. She stammered a few supplicating words. The

superintendent ordered her to leave the shop on the instant. Besides,

Fantine was only a moderately good workwoman. Overcome with shame, even

more than with despair, she quitted the shop, and returned to her room.

So her fault was now known to every one.

She no longer felt strong enough to say a word. She was advised to see

the mayor; she did not dare. The mayor had given her fifty francs

because he was good, and had dismissed her because he was just. She

bowed before the decision.

CHAPTER IX—MADAME VICTURNIEN’S SUCCESS

So the monk’s widow was good for something.

But M. Madeleine had heard nothing of all this. Life is full of just

such combinations of events. M. Madeleine was in the habit of almost

never entering the women’s workroom.

At the head of this room he had placed an elderly spinster, whom the

priest had provided for him, and he had full confidence in this

superintendent,—a truly respectable person, firm, equitable, upright,

full of the charity which consists in giving, but not having in the

same degree that charity which consists in understanding and in

forgiving. M. Madeleine relied wholly on her. The best men are often

obliged to delegate their authority. It was with this full power, and

the conviction that she was doing right, that the superintendent had

instituted the suit, judged, condemned, and executed Fantine.

As regards the fifty francs, she had given them from a fund which M.

Madeleine had intrusted to her for charitable purposes, and for giving

assistance to the workwomen, and of which she rendered no account.

Fantine tried to obtain a situation as a servant in the neighborhood;

she went from house to house. No one would have her. She could not

leave town. The second-hand dealer, to whom she was in debt for her

furniture—and what furniture!—said to her, “If you leave, I will have

you arrested as a thief.” The householder, whom she owed for her rent,

said to her, “You are young and pretty; you can pay.” She divided the

fifty francs between the landlord and the furniture-dealer, returned to

the latter three-quarters of his goods, kept only necessaries, and

found herself without work, without a trade, with nothing but her bed,

and still about fifty francs in debt.

She began to make coarse shirts for soldiers of the garrison, and

earned twelve sous a day. Her daughter cost her ten. It was at this

point that she began to pay the Thénardiers irregularly.

However, the old woman who lighted her candle for her when she returned

at night, taught her the art of living in misery. Back of living on

little, there is the living on nothing. These are the two chambers; the

first is dark, the second is black.

Fantine learned how to live without fire entirely in the winter; how to

give up a bird which eats a half a farthing’s worth of millet every two

days; how to make a coverlet of one’s petticoat, and a petticoat of

one’s coverlet; how to save one’s candle, by taking one’s meals by the

light of the opposite window. No one knows all that certain feeble

creatures, who have grown old in privation and honesty, can get out of

a sou. It ends by being a talent. Fantine acquired this sublime talent,

and regained a little courage.

At this epoch she said to a neighbor, “Bah! I say to myself, by only

sleeping five hours, and working all the rest of the time at my sewing,

I shall always manage to nearly earn my bread. And, then, when one is

sad, one eats less. Well, sufferings, uneasiness, a little bread on one

hand, trouble on the other,—all this will support me.”

It would have been a great happiness to have her little girl with her

in this distress. She thought of having her come. But what then! Make

her share her own destitution! And then, she was in debt to the

Thénardiers! How could she pay them? And the journey! How pay for that?

The old woman who had given her lessons in what may be called the life

of indigence, was a sainted spinster named Marguerite, who was pious

with a true piety, poor and charitable towards the poor, and even

towards the rich, knowing how to write just sufficiently to sign

herself Marguerite, and believing in God, which is science.

There are many such virtuous people in this lower world; some day they

will be in the world above. This life has a morrow.

At first, Fantine had been so ashamed that she had not dared to go out.

When she was in the street, she divined that people turned round behind

her, and pointed at her; every one stared at her and no one greeted

her; the cold and bitter scorn of the passers-by penetrated her very

flesh and soul like a north wind.

It seems as though an unfortunate woman were utterly bare beneath the

sarcasm and the curiosity of all in small towns. In Paris, at least, no

one knows you, and this obscurity is a garment. Oh! how she would have

liked to betake herself to Paris! Impossible!

She was obliged to accustom herself to disrepute, as she had accustomed

herself to indigence. Gradually she decided on her course. At the

expiration of two or three months she shook off her shame, and began to

go about as though there were nothing the matter. “It is all the same

to me,” she said.

She went and came, bearing her head well up, with a bitter smile, and

was conscious that she was becoming brazen-faced.

Madame Victurnien sometimes saw her passing, from her window, noticed

the distress of “that creature” who, “thanks to her,” had been “put

back in her proper place,” and congratulated herself. The happiness of

the evil-minded is black.

Excess of toil wore out Fantine, and the little dry cough which

troubled her increased. She sometimes said to her neighbor, Marguerite,

“Just feel how hot my hands are!”

Nevertheless, when she combed her beautiful hair in the morning with an

old broken comb, and it flowed about her like floss silk, she

experienced a moment of happy coquetry.

CHAPTER X—RESULT OF THE SUCCESS

She had been dismissed towards the end of the winter; the summer

passed, but winter came again. Short days, less work. Winter: no

warmth, no light, no noonday, the evening joining on to the morning,

fogs, twilight; the window is gray; it is impossible to see clearly at

it. The sky is but a vent-hole. The whole day is a cavern. The sun has

the air of a beggar. A frightful season! Winter changes the water of

heaven and the heart of man into a stone. Her creditors harrassed her.

Fantine earned too little. Her debts had increased. The Thénardiers,

who were not promptly paid, wrote to her constantly letters whose

contents drove her to despair, and whose carriage ruined her. One day

they wrote to her that her little Cosette was entirely naked in that

cold weather, that she needed a woollen skirt, and that her mother must

send at least ten francs for this. She received the letter, and crushed

it in her hands all day long. That evening she went into a barber’s

shop at the corner of the street, and pulled out her comb. Her

admirable golden hair fell to her knees.

“What splendid hair!” exclaimed the barber.

“How much will you give me for it?” said she.

“Ten francs.”

“Cut it off.”

She purchased a knitted petticoat and sent it to the Thénardiers. This

petticoat made the Thénardiers furious. It was the money that they

wanted. They gave the petticoat to Éponine. The poor Lark continued to

shiver.

Fantine thought: “My child is no longer cold. I have clothed her with

my hair.” She put on little round caps which concealed her shorn head,

and in which she was still pretty.

Dark thoughts held possession of Fantine’s heart.

When she saw that she could no longer dress her hair, she began to hate

every one about her. She had long shared the universal veneration for

Father Madeleine; yet, by dint of repeating to herself that it was he

who had discharged her, that he was the cause of her unhappiness, she

came to hate him also, and most of all. When she passed the factory in

working hours, when the workpeople were at the door, she affected to

laugh and sing.

An old workwoman who once saw her laughing and singing in this fashion

said, “There’s a girl who will come to a bad end.”

She took a lover, the first who offered, a man whom she did not love,

out of bravado and with rage in her heart. He was a miserable scamp, a

sort of mendicant musician, a lazy beggar, who beat her, and who

abandoned her as she had taken him, in disgust.

She adored her child.

The lower she descended, the darker everything grew about her, the more

radiant shone that little angel at the bottom of her heart. She said,

“When I get rich, I will have my Cosette with me;” and she laughed. Her

cough did not leave her, and she had sweats on her back.

One day she received from the Thénardiers a letter couched in the

following terms: “Cosette is ill with a malady which is going the

rounds of the neighborhood. A miliary fever, they call it. Expensive

drugs are required. This is ruining us, and we can no longer pay for

them. If you do not send us forty francs before the week is out, the

little one will be dead.”

She burst out laughing, and said to her old neighbor: “Ah! they are

good! Forty francs! the idea! That makes two napoleons! Where do they

think I am to get them? These peasants are stupid, truly.”

Nevertheless she went to a dormer window in the staircase and read the

letter once more. Then she descended the stairs and emerged, running

and leaping and still laughing.

Some one met her and said to her, “What makes you so gay?”

She replied: “A fine piece of stupidity that some country people have

written to me. They demand forty francs of me. So much for you, you

peasants!”

As she crossed the square, she saw a great many people collected around

a carriage of eccentric shape, upon the top of which stood a man

dressed in red, who was holding forth. He was a quack dentist on his

rounds, who was offering to the public full sets of teeth, opiates,

powders and elixirs.

Fantine mingled in the group, and began to laugh with the rest at the

harangue, which contained slang for the populace and jargon for

respectable people. The tooth-puller espied the lovely, laughing girl,

and suddenly exclaimed: “You have beautiful teeth, you girl there, who

are laughing; if you want to sell me your palettes, I will give you a

gold napoleon apiece for them.”

“What are my palettes?” asked Fantine.

“The palettes,” replied the dental professor, “are the front teeth, the

two upper ones.”

“How horrible!” exclaimed Fantine.

“Two napoleons!” grumbled a toothless old woman who was present.

“Here’s a lucky girl!”

Fantine fled and stopped her ears that she might not hear the hoarse

voice of the man shouting to her: “Reflect, my beauty! two napoleons;

they may prove of service. If your heart bids you, come this evening to

the inn of the \_Tillac d’Argent\_; you will find me there.”

Fantine returned home. She was furious, and related the occurrence to

her good neighbor Marguerite: “Can you understand such a thing? Is he

not an abominable man? How can they allow such people to go about the

country! Pull out my two front teeth! Why, I should be horrible! My

hair will grow again, but my teeth! Ah! what a monster of a man! I

should prefer to throw myself head first on the pavement from the fifth

story! He told me that he should be at the \_Tillac d’Argent\_ this

evening.”

“And what did he offer?” asked Marguerite.

“Two napoleons.”

“That makes forty francs.”

“Yes,” said Fantine; “that makes forty francs.”

She remained thoughtful, and began her work. At the expiration of a

quarter of an hour she left her sewing and went to read the

Thénardiers’ letter once more on the staircase.

On her return, she said to Marguerite, who was at work beside her:—

“What is a miliary fever? Do you know?”

“Yes,” answered the old spinster; “it is a disease.”

“Does it require many drugs?”

“Oh! terrible drugs.”

“How does one get it?”

“It is a malady that one gets without knowing how.”

“Then it attacks children?”

“Children in particular.”

“Do people die of it?”

“They may,” said Marguerite.

Fantine left the room and went to read her letter once more on the

staircase.

That evening she went out, and was seen to turn her steps in the

direction of the Rue de Paris, where the inns are situated.

The next morning, when Marguerite entered Fantine’s room before

daylight,—for they always worked together, and in this manner used only

one candle for the two,—she found Fantine seated on her bed, pale and

frozen. She had not lain down. Her cap had fallen on her knees. Her

candle had burned all night, and was almost entirely consumed.

Marguerite halted on the threshold, petrified at this tremendous

wastefulness, and exclaimed:—

“Lord! the candle is all burned out! Something has happened.”

Then she looked at Fantine, who turned toward her her head bereft of

its hair.

Fantine had grown ten years older since the preceding night.

“Jesus!” said Marguerite, “what is the matter with you, Fantine?”

“Nothing,” replied Fantine. “Quite the contrary. My child will not die

of that frightful malady, for lack of succor. I am content.”

So saying, she pointed out to the spinster two napoleons which were

glittering on the table.

“Ah! Jesus God!” cried Marguerite. “Why, it is a fortune! Where did you

get those louis d’or?”

“I got them,” replied Fantine.

At the same time she smiled. The candle illuminated her countenance. It

was a bloody smile. A reddish saliva soiled the corners of her lips,

and she had a black hole in her mouth.

The two teeth had been extracted.

She sent the forty francs to Montfermeil.

After all it was a ruse of the Thénardiers to obtain money. Cosette was

not ill.

Fantine threw her mirror out of the window. She had long since quitted

her cell on the second floor for an attic with only a latch to fasten

it, next the roof; one of those attics whose extremity forms an angle

with the floor, and knocks you on the head every instant. The poor

occupant can reach the end of his chamber as he can the end of his

destiny, only by bending over more and more.

She had no longer a bed; a rag which she called her coverlet, a

mattress on the floor, and a seatless chair still remained. A little

rosebush which she had, had dried up, forgotten, in one corner. In the

other corner was a butter-pot to hold water, which froze in winter, and

in which the various levels of the water remained long marked by these

circles of ice. She had lost her shame; she lost her coquetry. A final

sign. She went out, with dirty caps. Whether from lack of time or from

indifference, she no longer mended her linen. As the heels wore out,

she dragged her stockings down into her shoes. This was evident from

the perpendicular wrinkles. She patched her bodice, which was old and

worn out, with scraps of calico which tore at the slightest movement.

The people to whom she was indebted made “scenes” and gave her no

peace. She found them in the street, she found them again on her

staircase. She passed many a night weeping and thinking. Her eyes were

very bright, and she felt a steady pain in her shoulder towards the top

of the left shoulder-blade. She coughed a great deal. She deeply hated

Father Madeleine, but made no complaint. She sewed seventeen hours a

day; but a contractor for the work of prisons, who made the prisoners

work at a discount, suddenly made prices fall, which reduced the daily

earnings of working-women to nine sous. Seventeen hours of toil, and

nine sous a day! Her creditors were more pitiless than ever. The

second-hand dealer, who had taken back nearly all his furniture, said

to her incessantly, “When will you pay me, you hussy?” What did they

want of her, good God! She felt that she was being hunted, and

something of the wild beast developed in her. About the same time,

Thénardier wrote to her that he had waited with decidedly too much

amiability and that he must have a hundred francs at once; otherwise he

would turn little Cosette out of doors, convalescent as she was from

her heavy illness, into the cold and the streets, and that she might do

what she liked with herself, and die if she chose. “A hundred francs,”

thought Fantine. “But in what trade can one earn a hundred sous a day?”

“Come!” said she, “let us sell what is left.”

The unfortunate girl became a woman of the town.

CHAPTER XI—CHRISTUS NOS LIBERAVIT

What is this history of Fantine? It is society purchasing a slave.

From whom? From misery.

From hunger, cold, isolation, destitution. A dolorous bargain. A soul

for a morsel of bread. Misery offers; society accepts.

The sacred law of Jesus Christ governs our civilization, but it does

not, as yet, permeate it; it is said that slavery has disappeared from

European civilization. This is a mistake. It still exists; but it

weighs only upon the woman, and it is called prostitution.

It weighs upon the woman, that is to say, upon grace, weakness, beauty,

maternity. This is not one of the least of man’s disgraces.

At the point in this melancholy drama which we have now reached,

nothing is left to Fantine of that which she had formerly been.

She has become marble in becoming mire. Whoever touches her feels cold.

She passes; she endures you; she ignores you; she is the severe and

dishonored figure. Life and the social order have said their last word

for her. All has happened to her that will happen to her. She has felt

everything, borne everything, experienced everything, suffered

everything, lost everything, mourned everything. She is resigned, with

that resignation which resembles indifference, as death resembles

sleep. She no longer avoids anything. Let all the clouds fall upon her,

and all the ocean sweep over her! What matters it to her? She is a

sponge that is soaked.

At least, she believes it to be so; but it is an error to imagine that

fate can be exhausted, and that one has reached the bottom of anything

whatever.

Alas! What are all these fates, driven on pell-mell? Whither are they

going? Why are they thus?

He who knows that sees the whole of the shadow.

He is alone. His name is God.

CHAPTER XII—M. BAMATABOIS’S INACTIVITY

There is in all small towns, and there was at M. sur M. in particular,

a class of young men who nibble away an income of fifteen hundred

francs with the same air with which their prototypes devour two hundred

thousand francs a year in Paris. These are beings of the great neuter

species: impotent men, parasites, cyphers, who have a little land, a

little folly, a little wit; who would be rustics in a drawing-room, and

who think themselves gentlemen in the dram-shop; who say, “My fields,

my peasants, my woods”; who hiss actresses at the theatre to prove that

they are persons of taste; quarrel with the officers of the garrison to

prove that they are men of war; hunt, smoke, yawn, drink, smell of

tobacco, play billiards, stare at travellers as they descend from the

diligence, live at the café, dine at the inn, have a dog which eats the

bones under the table, and a mistress who eats the dishes on the table;

who stick at a sou, exaggerate the fashions, admire tragedy, despise

women, wear out their old boots, copy London through Paris, and Paris

through the medium of Pont-à-Mousson, grow old as dullards, never work,

serve no use, and do no great harm.

M. Félix Tholomyès, had he remained in his own province and never

beheld Paris, would have been one of these men.

If they were richer, one would say, “They are dandies;” if they were

poorer, one would say, “They are idlers.” They are simply men without

employment. Among these unemployed there are bores, the bored,

dreamers, and some knaves.

At that period a dandy was composed of a tall collar, a big cravat, a

watch with trinkets, three vests of different colors, worn one on top

of the other—the red and blue inside; of a short-waisted olive coat,

with a codfish tail, a double row of silver buttons set close to each

other and running up to the shoulder; and a pair of trousers of a

lighter shade of olive, ornamented on the two seams with an indefinite,

but always uneven, number of lines, varying from one to eleven—a limit

which was never exceeded. Add to this, high shoes with little irons on

the heels, a tall hat with a narrow brim, hair worn in a tuft, an

enormous cane, and conversation set off by puns of Potier. Over all,

spurs and a moustache. At that epoch moustaches indicated the

bourgeois, and spurs the pedestrian.

The provincial dandy wore the longest of spurs and the fiercest of

moustaches.

It was the period of the conflict of the republics of South America

with the King of Spain, of Bolivar against Morillo. Narrow-brimmed hats

were royalist, and were called \_morillos\_; liberals wore hats with wide

brims, which were called \_bolivars\_.

Eight or ten months, then, after that which is related in the preceding

pages, towards the first of January, 1823, on a snowy evening, one of

these dandies, one of these unemployed, a “right thinker,” for he wore

a morillo, and was, moreover, warmly enveloped in one of those large

cloaks which completed the fashionable costume in cold weather, was

amusing himself by tormenting a creature who was prowling about in a

ball-dress, with neck uncovered and flowers in her hair, in front of

the officers’ café. This dandy was smoking, for he was decidedly

fashionable.

Each time that the woman passed in front of him, he bestowed on her,

together with a puff from his cigar, some apostrophe which he

considered witty and mirthful, such as, “How ugly you are!—Will you get

out of my sight?—You have no teeth!” etc., etc. This gentleman was

known as M. Bamatabois. The woman, a melancholy, decorated spectre

which went and came through the snow, made him no reply, did not even

glance at him, and nevertheless continued her promenade in silence, and

with a sombre regularity, which brought her every five minutes within

reach of this sarcasm, like the condemned soldier who returns under the

rods. The small effect which he produced no doubt piqued the lounger;

and taking advantage of a moment when her back was turned, he crept up

behind her with the gait of a wolf, and stifling his laugh, bent down,

picked up a handful of snow from the pavement, and thrust it abruptly

into her back, between her bare shoulders. The woman uttered a roar,

whirled round, gave a leap like a panther, and hurled herself upon the

man, burying her nails in his face, with the most frightful words which

could fall from the guard-room into the gutter. These insults, poured

forth in a voice roughened by brandy, did, indeed, proceed in hideous

wise from a mouth which lacked its two front teeth. It was Fantine.

At the noise thus produced, the officers ran out in throngs from the

café, passers-by collected, and a large and merry circle, hooting and

applauding, was formed around this whirlwind composed of two beings,

whom there was some difficulty in recognizing as a man and a woman: the

man struggling, his hat on the ground; the woman striking out with feet

and fists, bareheaded, howling, minus hair and teeth, livid with wrath,

horrible.

Suddenly a man of lofty stature emerged vivaciously from the crowd,

seized the woman by her satin bodice, which was covered with mud, and

said to her, “Follow me!”

The woman raised her head; her furious voice suddenly died away. Her

eyes were glassy; she turned pale instead of livid, and she trembled

with a quiver of terror. She had recognized Javert.

The dandy took advantage of the incident to make his escape.

CHAPTER XIII—THE SOLUTION OF SOME QUESTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE

MUNICIPAL POLICE

Javert thrust aside the spectators, broke the circle, and set out with

long strides towards the police station, which is situated at the

extremity of the square, dragging the wretched woman after him. She

yielded mechanically. Neither he nor she uttered a word. The cloud of

spectators followed, jesting, in a paroxysm of delight. Supreme misery

an occasion for obscenity.

On arriving at the police station, which was a low room, warmed by a

stove, with a glazed and grated door opening on the street, and guarded

by a detachment, Javert opened the door, entered with Fantine, and shut

the door behind him, to the great disappointment of the curious, who

raised themselves on tiptoe, and craned their necks in front of the

thick glass of the station-house, in their effort to see. Curiosity is

a sort of gluttony. To see is to devour.

On entering, Fantine fell down in a corner, motionless and mute,

crouching down like a terrified dog.

The sergeant of the guard brought a lighted candle to the table. Javert

seated himself, drew a sheet of stamped paper from his pocket, and

began to write.

This class of women is consigned by our laws entirely to the discretion

of the police. The latter do what they please, punish them, as seems

good to them, and confiscate at their will those two sorry things which

they entitle their industry and their liberty. Javert was impassive;

his grave face betrayed no emotion whatever. Nevertheless, he was

seriously and deeply preoccupied. It was one of those moments when he

was exercising without control, but subject to all the scruples of a

severe conscience, his redoubtable discretionary power. At that moment

he was conscious that his police agent’s stool was a tribunal. He was

entering judgment. He judged and condemned. He summoned all the ideas

which could possibly exist in his mind, around the great thing which he

was doing. The more he examined the deed of this woman, the more

shocked he felt. It was evident that he had just witnessed the

commission of a crime. He had just beheld, yonder, in the street,

society, in the person of a freeholder and an elector, insulted and

attacked by a creature who was outside all pales. A prostitute had made

an attempt on the life of a citizen. He had seen that, he, Javert. He

wrote in silence.

When he had finished he signed the paper, folded it, and said to the

sergeant of the guard, as he handed it to him, “Take three men and

conduct this creature to jail.”

Then, turning to Fantine, “You are to have six months of it.” The

unhappy woman shuddered.

“Six months! six months of prison!” she exclaimed. “Six months in which

to earn seven sous a day! But what will become of Cosette? My daughter!

my daughter! But I still owe the Thénardiers over a hundred francs; do

you know that, Monsieur Inspector?”

She dragged herself across the damp floor, among the muddy boots of all

those men, without rising, with clasped hands, and taking great strides

on her knees.

“Monsieur Javert,” said she, “I beseech your mercy. I assure you that I

was not in the wrong. If you had seen the beginning, you would have

seen. I swear to you by the good God that I was not to blame! That

gentleman, the bourgeois, whom I do not know, put snow in my back. Has

any one the right to put snow down our backs when we are walking along

peaceably, and doing no harm to any one? I am rather ill, as you see.

And then, he had been saying impertinent things to me for a long time:

‘You are ugly! you have no teeth!’ I know well that I have no longer

those teeth. I did nothing; I said to myself, ‘The gentleman is amusing

himself.’ I was honest with him; I did not speak to him. It was at that

moment that he put the snow down my back. Monsieur Javert, good

Monsieur Inspector! is there not some person here who saw it and can

tell you that this is quite true? Perhaps I did wrong to get angry. You

know that one is not master of one’s self at the first moment. One

gives way to vivacity; and then, when some one puts something cold down

your back just when you are not expecting it! I did wrong to spoil that

gentleman’s hat. Why did he go away? I would ask his pardon. Oh, my

God! It makes no difference to me whether I ask his pardon. Do me the

favor to-day, for this once, Monsieur Javert. Hold! you do not know

that in prison one can earn only seven sous a day; it is not the

government’s fault, but seven sous is one’s earnings; and just fancy, I

must pay one hundred francs, or my little girl will be sent to me. Oh,

my God! I cannot have her with me. What I do is so vile! Oh, my

Cosette! Oh, my little angel of the Holy Virgin! what will become of

her, poor creature? I will tell you: it is the Thénardiers,

inn-keepers, peasants; and such people are unreasonable. They want

money. Don’t put me in prison! You see, there is a little girl who will

be turned out into the street to get along as best she may, in the very

heart of the winter; and you must have pity on such a being, my good

Monsieur Javert. If she were older, she might earn her living; but it

cannot be done at that age. I am not a bad woman at bottom. It is not

cowardliness and gluttony that have made me what I am. If I have drunk

brandy, it was out of misery. I do not love it; but it benumbs the

senses. When I was happy, it was only necessary to glance into my

closets, and it would have been evident that I was not a coquettish and

untidy woman. I had linen, a great deal of linen. Have pity on me,

Monsieur Javert!”

She spoke thus, rent in twain, shaken with sobs, blinded with tears,

her neck bare, wringing her hands, and coughing with a dry, short

cough, stammering softly with a voice of agony. Great sorrow is a

divine and terrible ray, which transfigures the unhappy. At that moment

Fantine had become beautiful once more. From time to time she paused,

and tenderly kissed the police agent’s coat. She would have softened a

heart of granite; but a heart of wood cannot be softened.

“Come!” said Javert, “I have heard you out. Have you entirely finished?

You will get six months. Now march! The Eternal Father in person could

do nothing more.”

At these solemn words, \_“the Eternal Father in person could do nothing

more,”\_ she understood that her fate was sealed. She sank down,

murmuring, “Mercy!”

Javert turned his back.

The soldiers seized her by the arms.

A few moments earlier a man had entered, but no one had paid any heed

to him. He shut the door, leaned his back against it, and listened to

Fantine’s despairing supplications.

At the instant when the soldiers laid their hands upon the unfortunate

woman, who would not rise, he emerged from the shadow, and said:—

“One moment, if you please.”

Javert raised his eyes and recognized M. Madeleine. He removed his hat,

and, saluting him with a sort of aggrieved awkwardness:—

“Excuse me, Mr. Mayor—”

The words “Mr. Mayor” produced a curious effect upon Fantine. She rose

to her feet with one bound, like a spectre springing from the earth,

thrust aside the soldiers with both arms, walked straight up to M.

Madeleine before any one could prevent her, and gazing intently at him,

with a bewildered air, she cried:—

“Ah! so it is you who are M. le Maire!”

Then she burst into a laugh, and spit in his face.

M. Madeleine wiped his face, and said:—

“Inspector Javert, set this woman at liberty.”

Javert felt that he was on the verge of going mad. He experienced at

that moment, blow upon blow and almost simultaneously, the most violent

emotions which he had ever undergone in all his life. To see a woman of

the town spit in the mayor’s face was a thing so monstrous that, in his

most daring flights of fancy, he would have regarded it as a sacrilege

to believe it possible. On the other hand, at the very bottom of his

thought, he made a hideous comparison as to what this woman was, and as

to what this mayor might be; and then he, with horror, caught a glimpse

of I know not what simple explanation of this prodigious attack. But

when he beheld that mayor, that magistrate, calmly wipe his face and

say, \_“Set this woman at liberty,”\_ he underwent a sort of intoxication

of amazement; thought and word failed him equally; the sum total of

possible astonishment had been exceeded in his case. He remained mute.

The words had produced no less strange an effect on Fantine. She raised

her bare arm, and clung to the damper of the stove, like a person who

is reeling. Nevertheless, she glanced about her, and began to speak in

a low voice, as though talking to herself:—

“At liberty! I am to be allowed to go! I am not to go to prison for six

months! Who said that? It is not possible that any one could have said

that. I did not hear aright. It cannot have been that monster of a

mayor! Was it you, my good Monsieur Javert, who said that I was to be

set free? Oh, see here! I will tell you about it, and you will let me

go. That monster of a mayor, that old blackguard of a mayor, is the

cause of all. Just imagine, Monsieur Javert, he turned me out! all

because of a pack of rascally women, who gossip in the workroom. If

that is not a horror, what is? To dismiss a poor girl who is doing her

work honestly! Then I could no longer earn enough, and all this misery

followed. In the first place, there is one improvement which these

gentlemen of the police ought to make, and that is, to prevent prison

contractors from wronging poor people. I will explain it to you, you

see: you are earning twelve sous at shirt-making, the price falls to

nine sous; and it is not enough to live on. Then one has to become

whatever one can. As for me, I had my little Cosette, and I was

actually forced to become a bad woman. Now you understand how it is

that that blackguard of a mayor caused all the mischief. After that I

stamped on that gentleman’s hat in front of the officers’ café; but he

had spoiled my whole dress with snow. We women have but one silk dress

for evening wear. You see that I did not do wrong deliberately—truly,

Monsieur Javert; and everywhere I behold women who are far more wicked

than I, and who are much happier. O Monsieur Javert! it was you who

gave orders that I am to be set free, was it not? Make inquiries, speak

to my landlord; I am paying my rent now; they will tell you that I am

perfectly honest. Ah! my God! I beg your pardon; I have unintentionally

touched the damper of the stove, and it has made it smoke.”

M. Madeleine listened to her with profound attention. While she was

speaking, he fumbled in his waistcoat, drew out his purse and opened

it. It was empty. He put it back in his pocket. He said to Fantine,

“How much did you say that you owed?”

Fantine, who was looking at Javert only, turned towards him:—

“Was I speaking to you?”

Then, addressing the soldiers:—

“Say, you fellows, did you see how I spit in his face? Ah! you old

wretch of a mayor, you came here to frighten me, but I’m not afraid of

you. I am afraid of Monsieur Javert. I am afraid of my good Monsieur

Javert!”

So saying, she turned to the inspector again:—

“And yet, you see, Mr. Inspector, it is necessary to be just. I

understand that you are just, Mr. Inspector; in fact, it is perfectly

simple: a man amuses himself by putting snow down a woman’s back, and

that makes the officers laugh; one must divert themselves in some way;

and we—well, we are here for them to amuse themselves with, of course!

And then, you, you come; you are certainly obliged to preserve order,

you lead off the woman who is in the wrong; but on reflection, since

you are a good man, you say that I am to be set at liberty; it is for

the sake of the little one, for six months in prison would prevent my

supporting my child. ‘Only, don’t do it again, you hussy!’ Oh! I won’t

do it again, Monsieur Javert! They may do whatever they please to me

now; I will not stir. But to-day, you see, I cried because it hurt me.

I was not expecting that snow from the gentleman at all; and then as I

told you, I am not well; I have a cough; I seem to have a burning ball

in my stomach, and the doctor tells me, ‘Take care of yourself.’ Here,

feel, give me your hand; don’t be afraid—it is here.”

She no longer wept, her voice was caressing; she placed Javert’s coarse

hand on her delicate, white throat and looked smilingly at him.

All at once she rapidly adjusted her disordered garments, dropped the

folds of her skirt, which had been pushed up as she dragged herself

along, almost to the height of her knee, and stepped towards the door,

saying to the soldiers in a low voice, and with a friendly nod:—

“Children, Monsieur l’Inspecteur has said that I am to be released, and

I am going.”

She laid her hand on the latch of the door. One step more and she would

be in the street.

Javert up to that moment had remained erect, motionless, with his eyes

fixed on the ground, cast athwart this scene like some displaced

statue, which is waiting to be put away somewhere.

The sound of the latch roused him. He raised his head with an

expression of sovereign authority, an expression all the more alarming

in proportion as the authority rests on a low level, ferocious in the

wild beast, atrocious in the man of no estate.

“Sergeant!” he cried, “don’t you see that that jade is walking off! Who

bade you let her go?”

“I,” said Madeleine.

Fantine trembled at the sound of Javert’s voice, and let go of the

latch as a thief relinquishes the article which he has stolen. At the

sound of Madeleine’s voice she turned around, and from that moment

forth she uttered no word, nor dared so much as to breathe freely, but

her glance strayed from Madeleine to Javert, and from Javert to

Madeleine in turn, according to which was speaking.

It was evident that Javert must have been exasperated beyond measure

before he would permit himself to apostrophize the sergeant as he had

done, after the mayor’s suggestion that Fantine should be set at

liberty. Had he reached the point of forgetting the mayor’s presence?

Had he finally declared to himself that it was impossible that any

“authority” should have given such an order, and that the mayor must

certainly have said one thing by mistake for another, without intending

it? Or, in view of the enormities of which he had been a witness for

the past two hours, did he say to himself, that it was necessary to

recur to supreme resolutions, that it was indispensable that the small

should be made great, that the police spy should transform himself into

a magistrate, that the policeman should become a dispenser of justice,

and that, in this prodigious extremity, order, law, morality,

government, society in its entirety, was personified in him, Javert?

However that may be, when M. Madeleine uttered that word, \_I\_, as we

have just heard, Police Inspector Javert was seen to turn toward the

mayor, pale, cold, with blue lips, and a look of despair, his whole

body agitated by an imperceptible quiver and an unprecedented

occurrence, and say to him, with downcast eyes but a firm voice:—

“Mr. Mayor, that cannot be.”

“Why not?” said M. Madeleine.

“This miserable woman has insulted a citizen.”

“Inspector Javert,” replied the mayor, in a calm and conciliating tone,

“listen. You are an honest man, and I feel no hesitation in explaining

matters to you. Here is the true state of the case: I was passing

through the square just as you were leading this woman away; there were

still groups of people standing about, and I made inquiries and learned

everything; it was the townsman who was in the wrong and who should

have been arrested by properly conducted police.”

Javert retorted:—

“This wretch has just insulted Monsieur le Maire.”

“That concerns me,” said M. Madeleine. “My own insult belongs to me, I

think. I can do what I please about it.”

“I beg Monsieur le Maire’s pardon. The insult is not to him but to the

law.”

“Inspector Javert,” replied M. Madeleine, “the highest law is

conscience. I have heard this woman; I know what I am doing.”

“And I, Mr. Mayor, do not know what I see.”

“Then content yourself with obeying.”

“I am obeying my duty. My duty demands that this woman shall serve six

months in prison.”

M. Madeleine replied gently:—

“Heed this well; she will not serve a single day.”

At this decisive word, Javert ventured to fix a searching look on the

mayor and to say, but in a tone of voice that was still profoundly

respectful:—

“I am sorry to oppose Monsieur le Maire; it is for the first time in my

life, but he will permit me to remark that I am within the bounds of my

authority. I confine myself, since Monsieur le Maire desires it, to the

question of the gentleman. I was present. This woman flung herself on

Monsieur Bamatabois, who is an elector and the proprietor of that

handsome house with a balcony, which forms the corner of the esplanade,

three stories high and entirely of cut stone. Such things as there are

in the world! In any case, Monsieur le Maire, this is a question of

police regulations in the streets, and concerns me, and I shall detain

this woman Fantine.”

Then M. Madeleine folded his arms, and said in a severe voice which no

one in the town had heard hitherto:—

“The matter to which you refer is one connected with the municipal

police. According to the terms of articles nine, eleven, fifteen, and

sixty-six of the code of criminal examination, I am the judge. I order

that this woman shall be set at liberty.”

Javert ventured to make a final effort.

“But, Mr. Mayor—”

“I refer you to article eighty-one of the law of the 13th of December,

1799, in regard to arbitrary detention.”

“Monsieur le Maire, permit me—”

“Not another word.”

“But—”

“Leave the room,” said M. Madeleine.

Javert received the blow erect, full in the face, in his breast, like a

Russian soldier. He bowed to the very earth before the mayor and left

the room.

Fantine stood aside from the door and stared at him in amazement as he

passed.

Nevertheless, she also was the prey to a strange confusion. She had

just seen herself a subject of dispute between two opposing powers. She

had seen two men who held in their hands her liberty, her life, her

soul, her child, in combat before her very eyes; one of these men was

drawing her towards darkness, the other was leading her back towards

the light. In this conflict, viewed through the exaggerations of

terror, these two men had appeared to her like two giants; the one

spoke like her demon, the other like her good angel. The angel had

conquered the demon, and, strange to say, that which made her shudder

from head to foot was the fact that this angel, this liberator, was the

very man whom she abhorred, that mayor whom she had so long regarded as

the author of all her woes, that Madeleine! And at the very moment when

she had insulted him in so hideous a fashion, he had saved her! Had

she, then, been mistaken? Must she change her whole soul? She did not

know; she trembled. She listened in bewilderment, she looked on in

affright, and at every word uttered by M. Madeleine she felt the

frightful shades of hatred crumble and melt within her, and something

warm and ineffable, indescribable, which was both joy, confidence and

love, dawn in her heart.

When Javert had taken his departure, M. Madeleine turned to her and

said to her in a deliberate voice, like a serious man who does not wish

to weep and who finds some difficulty in speaking:—

“I have heard you. I knew nothing about what you have mentioned. I

believe that it is true, and I feel that it is true. I was even

ignorant of the fact that you had left my shop. Why did you not apply

to me? But here; I will pay your debts, I will send for your child, or

you shall go to her. You shall live here, in Paris, or where you

please. I undertake the care of your child and yourself. You shall not

work any longer if you do not like. I will give all the money you

require. You shall be honest and happy once more. And listen! I declare

to you that if all is as you say,—and I do not doubt it,—you have never

ceased to be virtuous and holy in the sight of God. Oh! poor woman.”

This was more than Fantine could bear. To have Cosette! To leave this

life of infamy. To live free, rich, happy, respectable with Cosette; to

see all these realities of paradise blossom of a sudden in the midst of

her misery. She stared stupidly at this man who was talking to her, and

could only give vent to two or three sobs, “Oh! Oh! Oh!”

Her limbs gave way beneath her, she knelt in front of M. Madeleine, and

before he could prevent her he felt her grasp his hand and press her

lips to it.

Then she fainted.

BOOK SIXTH—JAVERT

CHAPTER I—THE BEGINNING OF REPOSE

M. Madeleine had Fantine removed to that infirmary which he had

established in his own house. He confided her to the sisters, who put

her to bed. A burning fever had come on. She passed a part of the night

in delirium and raving. At length, however, she fell asleep.

On the morrow, towards midday, Fantine awoke. She heard some one

breathing close to her bed; she drew aside the curtain and saw M.

Madeleine standing there and looking at something over her head. His

gaze was full of pity, anguish, and supplication. She followed its

direction, and saw that it was fixed on a crucifix which was nailed to

the wall.

Thenceforth, M. Madeleine was transfigured in Fantine’s eyes. He seemed

to her to be clothed in light. He was absorbed in a sort of prayer. She

gazed at him for a long time without daring to interrupt him. At last

she said timidly:—

“What are you doing?”

M. Madeleine had been there for an hour. He had been waiting for

Fantine to awake. He took her hand, felt of her pulse, and replied:—

“How do you feel?”

“Well, I have slept,” she replied; “I think that I am better. It is

nothing.”

He answered, responding to the first question which she had put to him

as though he had just heard it:—

“I was praying to the martyr there on high.”

And he added in his own mind, “For the martyr here below.”

M. Madeleine had passed the night and the morning in making inquiries.

He knew all now. He knew Fantine’s history in all its heart-rending

details. He went on:—

“You have suffered much, poor mother. Oh! do not complain; you now have

the dowry of the elect. It is thus that men are transformed into

angels. It is not their fault they do not know how to go to work

otherwise. You see this hell from which you have just emerged is the

first form of heaven. It was necessary to begin there.”

He sighed deeply. But she smiled on him with that sublime smile in

which two teeth were lacking.

That same night, Javert wrote a letter. The next morning be posted it

himself at the office of M. sur M. It was addressed to Paris, and the

superscription ran: \_To Monsieur Chabouillet, Secretary of Monsieur le

Préfet of Police\_. As the affair in the station-house had been bruited

about, the post-mistress and some other persons who saw the letter

before it was sent off, and who recognized Javert’s handwriting on the

cover, thought that he was sending in his resignation.

M. Madeleine made haste to write to the Thénardiers. Fantine owed them

one hundred and twenty francs. He sent them three hundred francs,

telling them to pay themselves from that sum, and to fetch the child

instantly to M. sur M., where her sick mother required her presence.

This dazzled Thénardier. “The devil!” said the man to his wife; “don’t

let’s allow the child to go. This lark is going to turn into a milch

cow. I see through it. Some ninny has taken a fancy to the mother.”

He replied with a very well drawn-up bill for five hundred and some odd

francs. In this memorandum two indisputable items figured up over three

hundred francs,—one for the doctor, the other for the apothecary who

had attended and physicked Éponine and Azelma through two long

illnesses. Cosette, as we have already said, had not been ill. It was

only a question of a trifling substitution of names. At the foot of the

memorandum Thénardier wrote, \_Received on account, three hundred

francs\_.

M. Madeleine immediately sent three hundred francs more, and wrote,

“Make haste to bring Cosette.”

“Christi!” said Thénardier, “let’s not give up the child.”

In the meantime, Fantine did not recover. She still remained in the

infirmary.

The sisters had at first only received and nursed “that woman” with

repugnance. Those who have seen the bas-reliefs of Rheims will recall

the inflation of the lower lip of the wise virgins as they survey the

foolish virgins. The ancient scorn of the vestals for the ambubajæ is

one of the most profound instincts of feminine dignity; the sisters

felt it with the double force contributed by religion. But in a few

days Fantine disarmed them. She said all kinds of humble and gentle

things, and the mother in her provoked tenderness. One day the sisters

heard her say amid her fever: “I have been a sinner; but when I have my

child beside me, it will be a sign that God has pardoned me. While I

was leading a bad life, I should not have liked to have my Cosette with

me; I could not have borne her sad, astonished eyes. It was for her

sake that I did evil, and that is why God pardons me. I shall feel the

benediction of the good God when Cosette is here. I shall gaze at her;

it will do me good to see that innocent creature. She knows nothing at

all. She is an angel, you see, my sisters. At that age the wings have

not fallen off.”

M. Madeleine went to see her twice a day, and each time she asked him:—

“Shall I see my Cosette soon?”

He answered:—

“To-morrow, perhaps. She may arrive at any moment. I am expecting her.”

And the mother’s pale face grew radiant.

“Oh!” she said, “how happy I am going to be!”

We have just said that she did not recover her health. On the contrary,

her condition seemed to become more grave from week to week. That

handful of snow applied to her bare skin between her shoulder-blades

had brought about a sudden suppression of perspiration, as a

consequence of which the malady which had been smouldering within her

for many years was violently developed at last. At that time people

were beginning to follow the fine Laënnec’s fine suggestions in the

study and treatment of chest maladies. The doctor sounded Fantine’s

chest and shook his head.

M. Madeleine said to the doctor:—

“Well?”

“Has she not a child which she desires to see?” said the doctor.

“Yes.”

“Well! Make haste and get it here!”

M. Madeleine shuddered.

Fantine inquired:—

“What did the doctor say?”

M. Madeleine forced himself to smile.

“He said that your child was to be brought speedily. That that would

restore your health.”

“Oh!” she rejoined, “he is right! But what do those Thénardiers mean by

keeping my Cosette from me! Oh! she is coming. At last I behold

happiness close beside me!”

In the meantime Thénardier did not “let go of the child,” and gave a

hundred insufficient reasons for it. Cosette was not quite well enough

to take a journey in the winter. And then, there still remained some

petty but pressing debts in the neighborhood, and they were collecting

the bills for them, etc., etc.

“I shall send some one to fetch Cosette!” said Father Madeleine. “If

necessary, I will go myself.”

He wrote the following letter to Fantine’s dictation, and made her sign

it:—

“MONSIEUR THÉNARDIER:—

You will deliver Cosette to this person.

You will be paid for all the little things.

I have the honor to salute you with respect.

“FANTINE.”

In the meantime a serious incident occurred. Carve as we will the

mysterious block of which our life is made, the black vein of destiny

constantly reappears in it.

CHAPTER II—HOW JEAN MAY BECOME CHAMP

One morning M. Madeleine was in his study, occupied in arranging in

advance some pressing matters connected with the mayor’s office, in

case he should decide to take the trip to Montfermeil, when he was

informed that Police Inspector Javert was desirous of speaking with

him. Madeleine could not refrain from a disagreeable impression on

hearing this name. Javert had avoided him more than ever since the

affair of the police-station, and M. Madeleine had not seen him.

“Admit him,” he said.

Javert entered.

M. Madeleine had retained his seat near the fire, pen in hand, his eyes

fixed on the docket which he was turning over and annotating, and which

contained the trials of the commission on highways for the infraction

of police regulations. He did not disturb himself on Javert’s account.

He could not help thinking of poor Fantine, and it suited him to be

glacial in his manner.

Javert bestowed a respectful salute on the mayor, whose back was turned

to him. The mayor did not look at him, but went on annotating this

docket.

Javert advanced two or three paces into the study, and halted, without

breaking the silence.

If any physiognomist who had been familiar with Javert, and who had

made a lengthy study of this savage in the service of civilization,

this singular composite of the Roman, the Spartan, the monk, and the

corporal, this spy who was incapable of a lie, this unspotted police

agent—if any physiognomist had known his secret and long-cherished

aversion for M. Madeleine, his conflict with the mayor on the subject

of Fantine, and had examined Javert at that moment, he would have said

to himself, “What has taken place?” It was evident to any one

acquainted with that clear, upright, sincere, honest, austere, and

ferocious conscience, that Javert had but just gone through some great

interior struggle. Javert had nothing in his soul which he had not also

in his countenance. Like violent people in general, he was subject to

abrupt changes of opinion. His physiognomy had never been more peculiar

and startling. On entering he bowed to M. Madeleine with a look in

which there was neither rancor, anger, nor distrust; he halted a few

paces in the rear of the mayor’s armchair, and there he stood,

perfectly erect, in an attitude almost of discipline, with the cold,

ingenuous roughness of a man who has never been gentle and who has

always been patient; he waited without uttering a word, without making

a movement, in genuine humility and tranquil resignation, calm,

serious, hat in hand, with eyes cast down, and an expression which was

half-way between that of a soldier in the presence of his officer and a

criminal in the presence of his judge, until it should please the mayor

to turn round. All the sentiments as well as all the memories which one

might have attributed to him had disappeared. That face, as

impenetrable and simple as granite, no longer bore any trace of

anything but a melancholy depression. His whole person breathed

lowliness and firmness and an indescribable courageous despondency.

At last the mayor laid down his pen and turned half round.

“Well! What is it? What is the matter, Javert?”

Javert remained silent for an instant as though collecting his ideas,

then raised his voice with a sort of sad solemnity, which did not,

however, preclude simplicity.

“This is the matter, Mr. Mayor; a culpable act has been committed.”

“What act?”

“An inferior agent of the authorities has failed in respect, and in the

gravest manner, towards a magistrate. I have come to bring the fact to

your knowledge, as it is my duty to do.”

“Who is the agent?” asked M. Madeleine.

“I,” said Javert.

“You?”

“I.”

“And who is the magistrate who has reason to complain of the agent?”

“You, Mr. Mayor.”

M. Madeleine sat erect in his armchair. Javert went on, with a severe

air and his eyes still cast down.

“Mr. Mayor, I have come to request you to instigate the authorities to

dismiss me.”

M. Madeleine opened his mouth in amazement. Javert interrupted him:—

“You will say that I might have handed in my resignation, but that does

not suffice. Handing in one’s resignation is honorable. I have failed

in my duty; I ought to be punished; I must be turned out.”

And after a pause he added:—

“Mr. Mayor, you were severe with me the other day, and unjustly. Be so

to-day, with justice.”

“Come, now! Why?” exclaimed M. Madeleine. “What nonsense is this? What

is the meaning of this? What culpable act have you been guilty of

towards me? What have you done to me? What are your wrongs with regard

to me? You accuse yourself; you wish to be superseded—”

“Turned out,” said Javert.

“Turned out; so it be, then. That is well. I do not understand.”

“You shall understand, Mr. Mayor.”

Javert sighed from the very bottom of his chest, and resumed, still

coldly and sadly:—

“Mr. Mayor, six weeks ago, in consequence of the scene over that woman,

I was furious, and I informed against you.”

“Informed against me!”

“At the Prefecture of Police in Paris.”

M. Madeleine, who was not in the habit of laughing much oftener than

Javert himself, burst out laughing now:—

“As a mayor who had encroached on the province of the police?”

“As an ex-convict.”

The mayor turned livid.

Javert, who had not raised his eyes, went on:—

“I thought it was so. I had had an idea for a long time; a resemblance;

inquiries which you had caused to be made at Faverolles; the strength

of your loins; the adventure with old Fauchelevant; your skill in

marksmanship; your leg, which you drag a little;—I hardly know what

all,—absurdities! But, at all events, I took you for a certain Jean

Valjean.”

“A certain—What did you say the name was?”

“Jean Valjean. He was a convict whom I was in the habit of seeing

twenty years ago, when I was adjutant-guard of convicts at Toulon. On

leaving the galleys, this Jean Valjean, as it appears, robbed a bishop;

then he committed another theft, accompanied with violence, on a public

highway on the person of a little Savoyard. He disappeared eight years

ago, no one knows how, and he has been sought, I fancied. In short, I

did this thing! Wrath impelled me; I denounced you at the Prefecture!”

M. Madeleine, who had taken up the docket again several moments before

this, resumed with an air of perfect indifference:—

“And what reply did you receive?”

“That I was mad.”

“Well?”

“Well, they were right.”

“It is lucky that you recognize the fact.”

“I am forced to do so, since the real Jean Valjean has been found.”

The sheet of paper which M. Madeleine was holding dropped from his

hand; he raised his head, gazed fixedly at Javert, and said with his

indescribable accent:—

“Ah!”

Javert continued:—

“This is the way it is, Mr. Mayor. It seems that there was in the

neighborhood near Ailly-le-Haut-Clocher an old fellow who was called

Father Champmathieu. He was a very wretched creature. No one paid any

attention to him. No one knows what such people subsist on. Lately,

last autumn, Father Champmathieu was arrested for the theft of some

cider apples from—Well, no matter, a theft had been committed, a wall

scaled, branches of trees broken. My Champmathieu was arrested. He

still had the branch of apple-tree in his hand. The scamp is locked up.

Up to this point it was merely an affair of a misdemeanor. But here is

where Providence intervened.

“The jail being in a bad condition, the examining magistrate finds it

convenient to transfer Champmathieu to Arras, where the departmental

prison is situated. In this prison at Arras there is an ex-convict

named Brevet, who is detained for I know not what, and who has been

appointed turnkey of the house, because of good behavior. Mr. Mayor, no

sooner had Champmathieu arrived than Brevet exclaims: ‘Eh! Why, I know

that man! He is a \_fagot!\_4 Take a good look at me, my good man! You

are Jean Valjean!’ ‘Jean Valjean! who’s Jean Valjean?’ Champmathieu

feigns astonishment. ‘Don’t play the innocent dodge,’ says Brevet. ‘You

are Jean Valjean! You have been in the galleys of Toulon; it was twenty

years ago; we were there together.’ Champmathieu denies it. Parbleu!

You understand. The case is investigated. The thing was well ventilated

for me. This is what they discovered: This Champmathieu had been,

thirty years ago, a pruner of trees in various localities, notably at

Faverolles. There all trace of him was lost. A long time afterwards he

was seen again in Auvergne; then in Paris, where he is said to have

been a wheelwright, and to have had a daughter, who was a laundress;

but that has not been proved. Now, before going to the galleys for

theft, what was Jean Valjean? A pruner of trees. Where? At Faverolles.

Another fact. This Valjean’s Christian name was Jean, and his mother’s

surname was Mathieu. What more natural to suppose than that, on

emerging from the galleys, he should have taken his mother’s name for

the purpose of concealing himself, and have called himself Jean

Mathieu? He goes to Auvergne. The local pronunciation turns \_Jean\_ into

\_Chan\_—he is called Chan Mathieu. Our man offers no opposition, and

behold him transformed into Champmathieu. You follow me, do you not?

Inquiries were made at Faverolles. The family of Jean Valjean is no

longer there. It is not known where they have gone. You know that among

those classes a family often disappears. Search was made, and nothing

was found. When such people are not mud, they are dust. And then, as

the beginning of the story dates thirty years back, there is no longer

any one at Faverolles who knew Jean Valjean. Inquiries were made at

Toulon. Besides Brevet, there are only two convicts in existence who

have seen Jean Valjean; they are Cochepaille and Chenildieu, and are

sentenced for life. They are taken from the galleys and confronted with

the pretended Champmathieu. They do not hesitate; he is Jean Valjean

for them as well as for Brevet. The same age,—he is fifty-four,—the

same height, the same air, the same man; in short, it is he. It was

precisely at this moment that I forwarded my denunciation to the

Prefecture in Paris. I was told that I had lost my reason, and that

Jean Valjean is at Arras, in the power of the authorities. You can

imagine whether this surprised me, when I thought that I had that same

Jean Valjean here. I write to the examining judge; he sends for me;

Champmathieu is conducted to me—”

“Well?” interposed M. Madeleine.

Javert replied, his face incorruptible, and as melancholy as ever:—

“Mr. Mayor, the truth is the truth. I am sorry; but that man is Jean

Valjean. I recognized him also.”

M. Madeleine resumed in, a very low voice:—

“You are sure?”

Javert began to laugh, with that mournful laugh which comes from

profound conviction.

“O! Sure!”

He stood there thoughtfully for a moment, mechanically taking pinches

of powdered wood for blotting ink from the wooden bowl which stood on

the table, and he added:—

“And even now that I have seen the real Jean Valjean, I do not see how

I could have thought otherwise. I beg your pardon, Mr. Mayor.”

Javert, as he addressed these grave and supplicating words to the man,

who six weeks before had humiliated him in the presence of the whole

station-house, and bade him “leave the room,”—Javert, that haughty man,

was unconsciously full of simplicity and dignity,—M. Madeleine made no

other reply to his prayer than the abrupt question:—

“And what does this man say?”

“Ah! Indeed, Mr. Mayor, it’s a bad business. If he is Jean Valjean, he

has his previous conviction against him. To climb a wall, to break a

branch, to purloin apples, is a mischievous trick in a child; for a man

it is a misdemeanor; for a convict it is a crime. Robbing and

housebreaking—it is all there. It is no longer a question of

correctional police; it is a matter for the Court of Assizes. It is no

longer a matter of a few days in prison; it is the galleys for life.

And then, there is the affair with the little Savoyard, who will

return, I hope. The deuce! there is plenty to dispute in the matter, is

there not? Yes, for any one but Jean Valjean. But Jean Valjean is a sly

dog. That is the way I recognized him. Any other man would have felt

that things were getting hot for him; he would struggle, he would cry

out—the kettle sings before the fire; he would not be Jean Valjean, \_et

cetera\_. But he has not the appearance of understanding; he says, ‘I am

Champmathieu, and I won’t depart from that!’ He has an astonished air,

he pretends to be stupid; it is far better. Oh! the rogue is clever!

But it makes no difference. The proofs are there. He has been

recognized by four persons; the old scamp will be condemned. The case

has been taken to the Assizes at Arras. I shall go there to give my

testimony. I have been summoned.”

M. Madeleine had turned to his desk again, and taken up his docket, and

was turning over the leaves tranquilly, reading and writing by turns,

like a busy man. He turned to Javert:—

“That will do, Javert. In truth, all these details interest me but

little. We are wasting our time, and we have pressing business on hand.

Javert, you will betake yourself at once to the house of the woman

Buseaupied, who sells herbs at the corner of the Rue Saint-Saulve. You

will tell her that she must enter her complaint against carter Pierre

Chesnelong. The man is a brute, who came near crushing this woman and

her child. He must be punished. You will then go to M. Charcellay, Rue

Montre-de-Champigny. He complained that there is a gutter on the

adjoining house which discharges rain-water on his premises, and is

undermining the foundations of his house. After that, you will verify

the infractions of police regulations which have been reported to me in

the Rue Guibourg, at Widow Doris’s, and Rue du Garraud-Blanc, at Madame

Renée le Bossé’s, and you will prepare documents. But I am giving you a

great deal of work. Are you not to be absent? Did you not tell me that

you were going to Arras on that matter in a week or ten days?”

“Sooner than that, Mr. Mayor.”

“On what day, then?”

“Why, I thought that I had said to Monsieur le Maire that the case was

to be tried to-morrow, and that I am to set out by diligence to-night.”

M. Madeleine made an imperceptible movement.

“And how long will the case last?”

“One day, at the most. The judgment will be pronounced to-morrow

evening at latest. But I shall not wait for the sentence, which is

certain; I shall return here as soon as my deposition has been taken.”

“That is well,” said M. Madeleine.

And he dismissed Javert with a wave of the hand.

Javert did not withdraw.

“Excuse me, Mr. Mayor,” said he.

“What is it now?” demanded M. Madeleine.

“Mr. Mayor, there is still something of which I must remind you.”

“What is it?”

“That I must be dismissed.”

M. Madeleine rose.

“Javert, you are a man of honor, and I esteem you. You exaggerate your

fault. Moreover, this is an offence which concerns me. Javert, you

deserve promotion instead of degradation. I wish you to retain your

post.”

Javert gazed at M. Madeleine with his candid eyes, in whose depths his

not very enlightened but pure and rigid conscience seemed visible, and

said in a tranquil voice:—

“Mr. Mayor, I cannot grant you that.”

“I repeat,” replied M. Madeleine, “that the matter concerns me.”

But Javert, heeding his own thought only, continued:—

“So far as exaggeration is concerned, I am not exaggerating. This is

the way I reason: I have suspected you unjustly. That is nothing. It is

our right to cherish suspicion, although suspicion directed above

ourselves is an abuse. But without proofs, in a fit of rage, with the

object of wreaking my vengeance, I have denounced you as a convict,

you, a respectable man, a mayor, a magistrate! That is serious, very

serious. I have insulted authority in your person, I, an agent of the

authorities! If one of my subordinates had done what I have done, I

should have declared him unworthy of the service, and have expelled

him. Well? Stop, Mr. Mayor; one word more. I have often been severe in

the course of my life towards others. That is just. I have done well.

Now, if I were not severe towards myself, all the justice that I have

done would become injustice. Ought I to spare myself more than others?

No! What! I should be good for nothing but to chastise others, and not

myself! Why, I should be a blackguard! Those who say, ‘That blackguard

of a Javert!’ would be in the right. Mr. Mayor, I do not desire that

you should treat me kindly; your kindness roused sufficient bad blood

in me when it was directed to others. I want none of it for myself. The

kindness which consists in upholding a woman of the town against a

citizen, the police agent against the mayor, the man who is down

against the man who is up in the world, is what I call false kindness.

That is the sort of kindness which disorganizes society. Good God! it

is very easy to be kind; the difficulty lies in being just. Come! if

you had been what I thought you, I should not have been kind to you,

not I! You would have seen! Mr. Mayor, I must treat myself as I would

treat any other man. When I have subdued malefactors, when I have

proceeded with vigor against rascals, I have often said to myself, ‘If

you flinch, if I ever catch you in fault, you may rest at your ease!’ I

have flinched, I have caught myself in a fault. So much the worse!

Come, discharged, cashiered, expelled! That is well. I have arms. I

will till the soil; it makes no difference to me. Mr. Mayor, the good

of the service demands an example. I simply require the discharge of

Inspector Javert.”

All this was uttered in a proud, humble, despairing, yet convinced

tone, which lent indescribable grandeur to this singular, honest man.

“We shall see,” said M. Madeleine.

And he offered him his hand.

Javert recoiled, and said in a wild voice:—

“Excuse me, Mr. Mayor, but this must not be. A mayor does not offer his

hand to a police spy.”

He added between his teeth:—

“A police spy, yes; from the moment when I have misused the police. I

am no more than a police spy.”

Then he bowed profoundly, and directed his steps towards the door.

There he wheeled round, and with eyes still downcast:—

“Mr. Mayor,” he said, “I shall continue to serve until I am

superseded.”

He withdrew. M. Madeleine remained thoughtfully listening to the firm,

sure step, which died away on the pavement of the corridor.

BOOK SEVENTH—THE CHAMPMATHIEU AFFAIR

CHAPTER I—SISTER SIMPLICE

The incidents the reader is about to peruse were not all known at M.

sur M. But the small portion of them which became known left such a

memory in that town that a serious gap would exist in this book if we

did not narrate them in their most minute details. Among these details

the reader will encounter two or three improbable circumstances, which

we preserve out of respect for the truth.

On the afternoon following the visit of Javert, M. Madeleine went to

see Fantine according to his wont.

Before entering Fantine’s room, he had Sister Simplice summoned.

The two nuns who performed the services of nurse in the infirmary,

Lazariste ladies, like all sisters of charity, bore the names of Sister

Perpétue and Sister Simplice.

Sister Perpétue was an ordinary villager, a sister of charity in a

coarse style, who had entered the service of God as one enters any

other service. She was a nun as other women are cooks. This type is not

so very rare. The monastic orders gladly accept this heavy peasant

earthenware, which is easily fashioned into a Capuchin or an Ursuline.

These rustics are utilized for the rough work of devotion. The

transition from a drover to a Carmelite is not in the least violent;

the one turns into the other without much effort; the fund of ignorance

common to the village and the cloister is a preparation ready at hand,

and places the boor at once on the same footing as the monk: a little

more amplitude in the smock, and it becomes a frock. Sister Perpétue

was a robust nun from Marines near Pontoise, who chattered her patois,

droned, grumbled, sugared the potion according to the bigotry or the

hypocrisy of the invalid, treated her patients abruptly, roughly, was

crabbed with the dying, almost flung God in their faces, stoned their

death agony with prayers mumbled in a rage; was bold, honest, and

ruddy.

Sister Simplice was white, with a waxen pallor. Beside Sister Perpétue,

she was the taper beside the candle. Vincent de Paul has divinely

traced the features of the Sister of Charity in these admirable words,

in which he mingles as much freedom as servitude: “They shall have for

their convent only the house of the sick; for cell only a hired room;

for chapel only their parish church; for cloister only the streets of

the town and the wards of the hospitals; for enclosure only obedience;

for gratings only the fear of God; for veil only modesty.” This ideal

was realized in the living person of Sister Simplice: she had never

been young, and it seemed as though she would never grow old. No one

could have told Sister Simplice’s age. She was a person—we dare not say

a woman—who was gentle, austere, well-bred, cold, and who had never

lied. She was so gentle that she appeared fragile; but she was more

solid than granite. She touched the unhappy with fingers that were

charmingly pure and fine. There was, so to speak, silence in her

speech; she said just what was necessary, and she possessed a tone of

voice which would have equally edified a confessional or enchanted a

drawing-room. This delicacy accommodated itself to the serge gown,

finding in this harsh contact a continual reminder of heaven and of

God. Let us emphasize one detail. Never to have lied, never to have

said, for any interest whatever, even in indifference, any single thing

which was not the truth, the sacred truth, was Sister Simplice’s

distinctive trait; it was the accent of her virtue. She was almost

renowned in the congregation for this imperturbable veracity. The Abbé

Sicard speaks of Sister Simplice in a letter to the deaf-mute Massieu.

However pure and sincere we may be, we all bear upon our candor the

crack of the little, innocent lie. She did not. Little lie, innocent

lie—does such a thing exist? To lie is the absolute form of evil. To

lie a little is not possible: he who lies, lies the whole lie. To lie

is the very face of the demon. Satan has two names; he is called Satan

and Lying. That is what she thought; and as she thought, so she did.

The result was the whiteness which we have mentioned—a whiteness which

covered even her lips and her eyes with radiance. Her smile was white,

her glance was white. There was not a single spider’s web, not a grain

of dust, on the glass window of that conscience. On entering the order

of Saint Vincent de Paul, she had taken the name of Simplice by special

choice. Simplice of Sicily, as we know, is the saint who preferred to

allow both her breasts to be torn off rather than to say that she had

been born at Segesta when she had been born at Syracuse—a lie which

would have saved her. This patron saint suited this soul.

Sister Simplice, on her entrance into the order, had had two faults

which she had gradually corrected: she had a taste for dainties, and

she liked to receive letters. She never read anything but a book of

prayers printed in Latin, in coarse type. She did not understand Latin,

but she understood the book.

This pious woman had conceived an affection for Fantine, probably

feeling a latent virtue there, and she had devoted herself almost

exclusively to her care.

M. Madeleine took Sister Simplice apart and recommended Fantine to her

in a singular tone, which the sister recalled later on.

On leaving the sister, he approached Fantine.

Fantine awaited M. Madeleine’s appearance every day as one awaits a ray

of warmth and joy. She said to the sisters, “I only live when Monsieur

le Maire is here.”

She had a great deal of fever that day. As soon as she saw M. Madeleine

she asked him:—

“And Cosette?”

He replied with a smile:—

“Soon.”

M. Madeleine was the same as usual with Fantine. Only he remained an

hour instead of half an hour, to Fantine’s great delight. He urged

every one repeatedly not to allow the invalid to want for anything. It

was noticed that there was a moment when his countenance became very

sombre. But this was explained when it became known that the doctor had

bent down to his ear and said to him, “She is losing ground fast.”

Then he returned to the town-hall, and the clerk observed him

attentively examining a road map of France which hung in his study. He

wrote a few figures on a bit of paper with a pencil.

CHAPTER II—THE PERSPICACITY OF MASTER SCAUFFLAIRE

From the town-hall he betook himself to the extremity of the town, to a

Fleming named Master Scaufflaer, French Scaufflaire, who let out

“horses and cabriolets as desired.”

In order to reach this Scaufflaire, the shortest way was to take the

little-frequented street in which was situated the parsonage of the

parish in which M. Madeleine resided. The curé was, it was said, a

worthy, respectable, and sensible man. At the moment when M. Madeleine

arrived in front of the parsonage there was but one passer-by in the

street, and this person noticed this: After the mayor had passed the

priest’s house he halted, stood motionless, then turned about, and

retraced his steps to the door of the parsonage, which had an iron

knocker. He laid his hand quickly on the knocker and lifted it; then he

paused again and stopped short, as though in thought, and after the

lapse of a few seconds, instead of allowing the knocker to fall

abruptly, he placed it gently, and resumed his way with a sort of haste

which had not been apparent previously.

M. Madeleine found Master Scaufflaire at home, engaged in stitching a

harness over.

“Master Scaufflaire,” he inquired, “have you a good horse?”

“Mr. Mayor,” said the Fleming, “all my horses are good. What do you

mean by a good horse?”

“I mean a horse which can travel twenty leagues in a day.”

“The deuce!” said the Fleming. “Twenty leagues!”

“Yes.”

“Hitched to a cabriolet?”

“Yes.”

“And how long can he rest at the end of his journey?”

“He must be able to set out again on the next day if necessary.”

“To traverse the same road?”

“Yes.”

“The deuce! the deuce! And it is twenty leagues?”

M. Madeleine drew from his pocket the paper on which he had pencilled

some figures. He showed it to the Fleming. The figures were 5, 6, 8½.

“You see,” he said, “total, nineteen and a half; as well say twenty

leagues.”

“Mr. Mayor,” returned the Fleming, “I have just what you want. My

little white horse—you may have seen him pass occasionally; he is a

small beast from Lower Boulonnais. He is full of fire. They wanted to

make a saddle-horse of him at first. Bah! He reared, he kicked, he laid

everybody flat on the ground. He was thought to be vicious, and no one

knew what to do with him. I bought him. I harnessed him to a carriage.

That is what he wanted, sir; he is as gentle as a girl; he goes like

the wind. Ah! indeed he must not be mounted. It does not suit his ideas

to be a saddle-horse. Every one has his ambition. ‘Draw? Yes. Carry?

No.’ We must suppose that is what he said to himself.”

“And he will accomplish the trip?”

“Your twenty leagues all at a full trot, and in less than eight hours.

But here are the conditions.”

“State them.”

“In the first place, you will give him half an hour’s breathing spell

midway of the road; he will eat; and some one must be by while he is

eating to prevent the stable boy of the inn from stealing his oats; for

I have noticed that in inns the oats are more often drunk by the stable

men than eaten by the horses.”

“Some one will be by.”

“In the second place—is the cabriolet for Monsieur le Maire?”

“Yes.”

“Does Monsieur le Maire know how to drive?”

“Yes.”

“Well, Monsieur le Maire will travel alone and without baggage, in

order not to overload the horse?”

“Agreed.”

“But as Monsieur le Maire will have no one with him, he will be obliged

to take the trouble himself of seeing that the oats are not stolen.”

“That is understood.”

“I am to have thirty francs a day. The days of rest to be paid for

also—not a farthing less; and the beast’s food to be at Monsieur le

Maire’s expense.”

M. Madeleine drew three napoleons from his purse and laid them on the

table.

“Here is the pay for two days in advance.”

“Fourthly, for such a journey a cabriolet would be too heavy, and would

fatigue the horse. Monsieur le Maire must consent to travel in a little

tilbury that I own.”

“I consent to that.”

“It is light, but it has no cover.”

“That makes no difference to me.”

“Has Monsieur le Maire reflected that we are in the middle of winter?”

M. Madeleine did not reply. The Fleming resumed:—

“That it is very cold?”

M. Madeleine preserved silence.

Master Scaufflaire continued:—

“That it may rain?”

M. Madeleine raised his head and said:—

“The tilbury and the horse will be in front of my door to-morrow

morning at half-past four o’clock.”

“Of course, Monsieur le Maire,” replied Scaufflaire; then, scratching a

speck in the wood of the table with his thumb-nail, he resumed with

that careless air which the Flemings understand so well how to mingle

with their shrewdness:—

“But this is what I am thinking of now: Monsieur le Maire has not told

me where he is going. Where is Monsieur le Maire going?”

He had been thinking of nothing else since the beginning of the

conversation, but he did not know why he had not dared to put the

question.

“Are your horse’s forelegs good?” said M. Madeleine.

“Yes, Monsieur le Maire. You must hold him in a little when going down

hill. Are there many descends between here and the place whither you

are going?”

“Do not forget to be at my door at precisely half-past four o’clock

to-morrow morning,” replied M. Madeleine; and he took his departure.

The Fleming remained “utterly stupid,” as he himself said some time

afterwards.

The mayor had been gone two or three minutes when the door opened

again; it was the mayor once more.

He still wore the same impassive and preoccupied air.

“Monsieur Scaufflaire,” said he, “at what sum do you estimate the value

of the horse and tilbury which you are to let to me,—the one bearing

the other?”

“The one dragging the other, Monsieur le Maire,” said the Fleming, with

a broad smile.

“So be it. Well?”

“Does Monsieur le Maire wish to purchase them or me?”

“No; but I wish to guarantee you in any case. You shall give me back

the sum at my return. At what value do you estimate your horse and

cabriolet?”

“Five hundred francs, Monsieur le Maire.”

“Here it is.”

M. Madeleine laid a bank-bill on the table, then left the room; and

this time he did not return.

Master Scaufflaire experienced a frightful regret that he had not said

a thousand francs. Besides the horse and tilbury together were worth

but a hundred crowns.

The Fleming called his wife, and related the affair to her. “Where the

devil could Monsieur le Maire be going?” They held counsel together.

“He is going to Paris,” said the wife. “I don’t believe it,” said the

husband.

M. Madeleine had forgotten the paper with the figures on it, and it lay

on the chimney-piece. The Fleming picked it up and studied it. “Five,

six, eight and a half? That must designate the posting relays.” He

turned to his wife:—

“I have found out.”

“What?”

“It is five leagues from here to Hesdin, six from Hesdin to Saint-Pol,

eight and a half from Saint-Pol to Arras. He is going to Arras.”

Meanwhile, M. Madeleine had returned home. He had taken the longest way

to return from Master Scaufflaire’s, as though the parsonage door had

been a temptation for him, and he had wished to avoid it. He ascended

to his room, and there he shut himself up, which was a very simple act,

since he liked to go to bed early. Nevertheless, the portress of the

factory, who was, at the same time, M. Madeleine’s only servant,

noticed that the latter’s light was extinguished at half-past eight,

and she mentioned it to the cashier when he came home, adding:—

“Is Monsieur le Maire ill? I thought he had a rather singular air.”

This cashier occupied a room situated directly under M. Madeleine’s

chamber. He paid no heed to the portress’s words, but went to bed and

to sleep. Towards midnight he woke up with a start; in his sleep he had

heard a noise above his head. He listened; it was a footstep pacing

back and forth, as though some one were walking in the room above him.

He listened more attentively, and recognized M. Madeleine’s step. This

struck him as strange; usually, there was no noise in M. Madeleine’s

chamber until he rose in the morning. A moment later the cashier heard

a noise which resembled that of a cupboard being opened, and then shut

again; then a piece of furniture was disarranged; then a pause ensued;

then the step began again. The cashier sat up in bed, quite awake now,

and staring; and through his window-panes he saw the reddish gleam of a

lighted window reflected on the opposite wall; from the direction of

the rays, it could only come from the window of M. Madeleine’s chamber.

The reflection wavered, as though it came rather from a fire which had

been lighted than from a candle. The shadow of the window-frame was not

shown, which indicated that the window was wide open. The fact that

this window was open in such cold weather was surprising. The cashier

fell asleep again. An hour or two later he waked again. The same step

was still passing slowly and regularly back and forth overhead.

The reflection was still visible on the wall, but now it was pale and

peaceful, like the reflection of a lamp or of a candle. The window was

still open.

This is what had taken place in M. Madeleine’s room.

CHAPTER III—A TEMPEST IN A SKULL

The reader has, no doubt, already divined that M. Madeleine is no other

than Jean Valjean.

We have already gazed into the depths of this conscience; the moment

has now come when we must take another look into it. We do so not

without emotion and trepidation. There is nothing more terrible in

existence than this sort of contemplation. The eye of the spirit can

nowhere find more dazzling brilliance and more shadow than in man; it

can fix itself on no other thing which is more formidable, more

complicated, more mysterious, and more infinite. There is a spectacle

more grand than the sea; it is heaven: there is a spectacle more grand

than heaven; it is the inmost recesses of the soul.

To make the poem of the human conscience, were it only with reference

to a single man, were it only in connection with the basest of men,

would be to blend all epics into one superior and definitive epic.

Conscience is the chaos of chimæras, of lusts, and of temptations; the

furnace of dreams; the lair of ideas of which we are ashamed; it is the

pandemonium of sophisms; it is the battlefield of the passions.

Penetrate, at certain hours, past the livid face of a human being who

is engaged in reflection, and look behind, gaze into that soul, gaze

into that obscurity. There, beneath that external silence, battles of

giants, like those recorded in Homer, are in progress; skirmishes of

dragons and hydras and swarms of phantoms, as in Milton; visionary

circles, as in Dante. What a solemn thing is this infinity which every

man bears within him, and which he measures with despair against the

caprices of his brain and the actions of his life!

Alighieri one day met with a sinister-looking door, before which he

hesitated. Here is one before us, upon whose threshold we hesitate. Let

us enter, nevertheless.

We have but little to add to what the reader already knows of what had

happened to Jean Valjean after the adventure with Little Gervais. From

that moment forth he was, as we have seen, a totally different man.

What the Bishop had wished to make of him, that he carried out. It was

more than a transformation; it was a transfiguration.

He succeeded in disappearing, sold the Bishop’s silver, reserving only

the candlesticks as a souvenir, crept from town to town, traversed

France, came to M. sur M., conceived the idea which we have mentioned,

accomplished what we have related, succeeded in rendering himself safe

from seizure and inaccessible, and, thenceforth, established at M. sur

M., happy in feeling his conscience saddened by the past and the first

half of his existence belied by the last, he lived in peace, reassured

and hopeful, having henceforth only two thoughts,—to conceal his name

and to sanctify his life; to escape men and to return to God.

These two thoughts were so closely intertwined in his mind that they

formed but a single one there; both were equally absorbing and

imperative and ruled his slightest actions. In general, they conspired

to regulate the conduct of his life; they turned him towards the gloom;

they rendered him kindly and simple; they counselled him to the same

things. Sometimes, however, they conflicted. In that case, as the

reader will remember, the man whom all the country of M. sur M. called

M. Madeleine did not hesitate to sacrifice the first to the second—his

security to his virtue. Thus, in spite of all his reserve and all his

prudence, he had preserved the Bishop’s candlesticks, worn mourning for

him, summoned and interrogated all the little Savoyards who passed that

way, collected information regarding the families at Faverolles, and

saved old Fauchelevent’s life, despite the disquieting insinuations of

Javert. It seemed, as we have already remarked, as though he thought,

following the example of all those who have been wise, holy, and just,

that his first duty was not towards himself.

At the same time, it must be confessed, nothing just like this had yet

presented itself.

Never had the two ideas which governed the unhappy man whose sufferings

we are narrating, engaged in so serious a struggle. He understood this

confusedly but profoundly at the very first words pronounced by Javert,

when the latter entered his study. At the moment when that name, which

he had buried beneath so many layers, was so strangely articulated, he

was struck with stupor, and as though intoxicated with the sinister

eccentricity of his destiny; and through this stupor he felt that

shudder which precedes great shocks. He bent like an oak at the

approach of a storm, like a soldier at the approach of an assault. He

felt shadows filled with thunders and lightnings descending upon his

head. As he listened to Javert, the first thought which occurred to him

was to go, to run and denounce himself, to take that Champmathieu out

of prison and place himself there; this was as painful and as poignant

as an incision in the living flesh. Then it passed away, and he said to

himself, “We will see! We will see!” He repressed this first, generous

instinct, and recoiled before heroism.

It would be beautiful, no doubt, after the Bishop’s holy words, after

so many years of repentance and abnegation, in the midst of a penitence

admirably begun, if this man had not flinched for an instant, even in

the presence of so terrible a conjecture, but had continued to walk

with the same step towards this yawning precipice, at the bottom of

which lay heaven; that would have been beautiful; but it was not thus.

We must render an account of the things which went on in this soul, and

we can only tell what there was there. He was carried away, at first,

by the instinct of self-preservation; he rallied all his ideas in

haste, stifled his emotions, took into consideration Javert’s presence,

that great danger, postponed all decision with the firmness of terror,

shook off thought as to what he had to do, and resumed his calmness as

a warrior picks up his buckler.

He remained in this state during the rest of the day, a whirlwind

within, a profound tranquillity without. He took no “preservative

measures,” as they may be called. Everything was still confused, and

jostling together in his brain. His trouble was so great that he could

not perceive the form of a single idea distinctly, and he could have

told nothing about himself, except that he had received a great blow.

He repaired to Fantine’s bed of suffering, as usual, and prolonged his

visit, through a kindly instinct, telling himself that he must behave

thus, and recommend her well to the sisters, in case he should be

obliged to be absent himself. He had a vague feeling that he might be

obliged to go to Arras; and without having the least in the world made

up his mind to this trip, he said to himself that being, as he was,

beyond the shadow of any suspicion, there could be nothing out of the

way in being a witness to what was to take place, and he engaged the

tilbury from Scaufflaire in order to be prepared in any event.

He dined with a good deal of appetite.

On returning to his room, he communed with himself.

He examined the situation, and found it unprecedented; so unprecedented

that in the midst of his reverie he rose from his chair, moved by some

inexplicable impulse of anxiety, and bolted his door. He feared lest

something more should enter. He was barricading himself against

possibilities.

A moment later he extinguished his light; it embarrassed him.

It seemed to him as though he might be seen.

By whom?

Alas! That on which he desired to close the door had already entered;

that which he desired to blind was staring him in the face,—his

conscience.

His conscience; that is to say, God.

Nevertheless, he deluded himself at first; he had a feeling of security

and of solitude; the bolt once drawn, he thought himself impregnable;

the candle extinguished, he felt himself invisible. Then he took

possession of himself: he set his elbows on the table, leaned his head

on his hand, and began to meditate in the dark.

“Where do I stand? Am not I dreaming? What have I heard? Is it really

true that I have seen that Javert, and that he spoke to me in that

manner? Who can that Champmathieu be? So he resembles me! Is it

possible? When I reflect that yesterday I was so tranquil, and so far

from suspecting anything! What was I doing yesterday at this hour? What

is there in this incident? What will the end be? What is to be done?”

This was the torment in which he found himself. His brain had lost its

power of retaining ideas; they passed like waves, and he clutched his

brow in both hands to arrest them.

Nothing but anguish extricated itself from this tumult which

overwhelmed his will and his reason, and from which he sought to draw

proof and resolution.

His head was burning. He went to the window and threw it wide open.

There were no stars in the sky. He returned and seated himself at the

table.

The first hour passed in this manner.

Gradually, however, vague outlines began to take form and to fix

themselves in his meditation, and he was able to catch a glimpse with

precision of the reality,—not the whole situation, but some of the

details. He began by recognizing the fact that, critical and

extraordinary as was this situation, he was completely master of it.

This only caused an increase of his stupor.

Independently of the severe and religious aim which he had assigned to

his actions, all that he had made up to that day had been nothing but a

hole in which to bury his name. That which he had always feared most of

all in his hours of self-communion, during his sleepless nights, was to

ever hear that name pronounced; he had said to himself, that that would

be the end of all things for him; that on the day when that name made

its reappearance it would cause his new life to vanish from about him,

and—who knows?—perhaps even his new soul within him, also. He shuddered

at the very thought that this was possible. Assuredly, if any one had

said to him at such moments that the hour would come when that name

would ring in his ears, when the hideous words, Jean Valjean, would

suddenly emerge from the darkness and rise in front of him, when that

formidable light, capable of dissipating the mystery in which he had

enveloped himself, would suddenly blaze forth above his head, and that

that name would not menace him, that that light would but produce an

obscurity more dense, that this rent veil would but increase the

mystery, that this earthquake would solidify his edifice, that this

prodigious incident would have no other result, so far as he was

concerned, if so it seemed good to him, than that of rendering his

existence at once clearer and more impenetrable, and that, out of his

confrontation with the phantom of Jean Valjean, the good and worthy

citizen Monsieur Madeleine would emerge more honored, more peaceful,

and more respected than ever—if any one had told him that, he would

have tossed his head and regarded the words as those of a madman. Well,

all this was precisely what had just come to pass; all that

accumulation of impossibilities was a fact, and God had permitted these

wild fancies to become real things!

His reverie continued to grow clearer. He came more and more to an

understanding of his position.

It seemed to him that he had but just waked up from some inexplicable

dream, and that he found himself slipping down a declivity in the

middle of the night, erect, shivering, holding back all in vain, on the

very brink of the abyss. He distinctly perceived in the darkness a

stranger, a man unknown to him, whom destiny had mistaken for him, and

whom she was thrusting into the gulf in his stead; in order that the

gulf might close once more, it was necessary that some one, himself or

that other man, should fall into it: he had only let things take their

course.

The light became complete, and he acknowledged this to himself: That

his place was empty in the galleys; that do what he would, it was still

awaiting him; that the theft from little Gervais had led him back to

it; that this vacant place would await him, and draw him on until he

filled it; that this was inevitable and fatal; and then he said to

himself, “that, at this moment, he had a substitute; that it appeared

that a certain Champmathieu had that ill luck, and that, as regards

himself, being present in the galleys in the person of that

Champmathieu, present in society under the name of M. Madeleine, he had

nothing more to fear, provided that he did not prevent men from sealing

over the head of that Champmathieu this stone of infamy which, like the

stone of the sepulchre, falls once, never to rise again.”

All this was so strange and so violent, that there suddenly took place

in him that indescribable movement, which no man feels more than two or

three times in the course of his life, a sort of convulsion of the

conscience which stirs up all that there is doubtful in the heart,

which is composed of irony, of joy, and of despair, and which may be

called an outburst of inward laughter.

He hastily relighted his candle.

“Well, what then?” he said to himself; “what am I afraid of? What is

there in all that for me to think about? I am safe; all is over. I had

but one partly open door through which my past might invade my life,

and behold that door is walled up forever! That Javert, who has been

annoying me so long; that terrible instinct which seemed to have

divined me, which had divined me—good God! and which followed me

everywhere; that frightful hunting-dog, always making a point at me, is

thrown off the scent, engaged elsewhere, absolutely turned from the

trail: henceforth he is satisfied; he will leave me in peace; he has

his Jean Valjean. Who knows? it is even probable that he will wish to

leave town! And all this has been brought about without any aid from

me, and I count for nothing in it! Ah! but where is the misfortune in

this? Upon my honor, people would think, to see me, that some

catastrophe had happened to me! After all, if it does bring harm to

some one, that is not my fault in the least: it is Providence which has

done it all; it is because it wishes it so to be, evidently. Have I the

right to disarrange what it has arranged? What do I ask now? Why should

I meddle? It does not concern me; what! I am not satisfied: but what

more do I want? The goal to which I have aspired for so many years, the

dream of my nights, the object of my prayers to Heaven,—security,—I

have now attained; it is God who wills it; I can do nothing against the

will of God, and why does God will it? In order that I may continue

what I have begun, that I may do good, that I may one day be a grand

and encouraging example, that it may be said at last, that a little

happiness has been attached to the penance which I have undergone, and

to that virtue to which I have returned. Really, I do not understand

why I was afraid, a little while ago, to enter the house of that good

curé, and to ask his advice; this is evidently what he would have said

to me: It is settled; let things take their course; let the good God do

as he likes!”

Thus did he address himself in the depths of his own conscience,

bending over what may be called his own abyss; he rose from his chair,

and began to pace the room: “Come,” said he, “let us think no more

about it; my resolve is taken!” but he felt no joy.

Quite the reverse.

One can no more prevent thought from recurring to an idea than one can

the sea from returning to the shore: the sailor calls it the tide; the

guilty man calls it remorse; God upheaves the soul as he does the

ocean.

After the expiration of a few moments, do what he would, he resumed the

gloomy dialogue in which it was he who spoke and he who listened,

saying that which he would have preferred to ignore, and listened to

that which he would have preferred not to hear, yielding to that

mysterious power which said to him: “Think!” as it said to another

condemned man, two thousand years ago, “March on!”

Before proceeding further, and in order to make ourselves fully

understood, let us insist upon one necessary observation.

It is certain that people do talk to themselves; there is no living

being who has not done it. It may even be said that the word is never a

more magnificent mystery than when it goes from thought to conscience

within a man, and when it returns from conscience to thought; it is in

this sense only that the words so often employed in this chapter, \_he

said, he exclaimed\_, must be understood; one speaks to one’s self,

talks to one’s self, exclaims to one’s self without breaking the

external silence; there is a great tumult; everything about us talks

except the mouth. The realities of the soul are nonetheless realities

because they are not visible and palpable.

So he asked himself where he stood. He interrogated himself upon that

“settled resolve.” He confessed to himself that all that he had just

arranged in his mind was monstrous, that “to let things take their

course, to let the good God do as he liked,” was simply horrible; to

allow this error of fate and of men to be carried out, not to hinder

it, to lend himself to it through his silence, to do nothing, in short,

was to do everything! that this was hypocritical baseness in the last

degree! that it was a base, cowardly, sneaking, abject, hideous crime!

For the first time in eight years, the wretched man had just tasted the

bitter savor of an evil thought and of an evil action.

He spit it out with disgust.

He continued to question himself. He asked himself severely what he had

meant by this, “My object is attained!” He declared to himself that his

life really had an object; but what object? To conceal his name? To

deceive the police? Was it for so petty a thing that he had done all

that he had done? Had he not another and a grand object, which was the

true one—to save, not his person, but his soul; to become honest and

good once more; to be a just man? Was it not that above all, that

alone, which he had always desired, which the Bishop had enjoined upon

him—to shut the door on his past? But he was not shutting it! great

God! he was re-opening it by committing an infamous action! He was

becoming a thief once more, and the most odious of thieves! He was

robbing another of his existence, his life, his peace, his place in the

sunshine. He was becoming an assassin. He was murdering, morally

murdering, a wretched man. He was inflicting on him that frightful

living death, that death beneath the open sky, which is called the

galleys. On the other hand, to surrender himself to save that man,

struck down with so melancholy an error, to resume his own name, to

become once more, out of duty, the convict Jean Valjean, that was, in

truth, to achieve his resurrection, and to close forever that hell

whence he had just emerged; to fall back there in appearance was to

escape from it in reality. This must be done! He had done nothing if he

did not do all this; his whole life was useless; all his penitence was

wasted. There was no longer any need of saying, “What is the use?” He

felt that the Bishop was there, that the Bishop was present all the

more because he was dead, that the Bishop was gazing fixedly at him,

that henceforth Mayor Madeleine, with all his virtues, would be

abominable to him, and that the convict Jean Valjean would be pure and

admirable in his sight; that men beheld his mask, but that the Bishop

saw his face; that men saw his life, but that the Bishop beheld his

conscience. So he must go to Arras, deliver the false Jean Valjean, and

denounce the real one. Alas! that was the greatest of sacrifices, the

most poignant of victories, the last step to take; but it must be done.

Sad fate! he would enter into sanctity only in the eyes of God when he

returned to infamy in the eyes of men.

“Well,” said he, “let us decide upon this; let us do our duty; let us

save this man.” He uttered these words aloud, without perceiving that

he was speaking aloud.

He took his books, verified them, and put them in order. He flung in

the fire a bundle of bills which he had against petty and embarrassed

tradesmen. He wrote and sealed a letter, and on the envelope it might

have been read, had there been any one in his chamber at the moment,

\_To Monsieur Laffitte, Banker, Rue d’Artois, Paris\_. He drew from his

secretary a pocket-book which contained several bank-notes and the

passport of which he had made use that same year when he went to the

elections.

Any one who had seen him during the execution of these various acts,

into which there entered such grave thought, would have had no

suspicion of what was going on within him. Only occasionally did his

lips move; at other times he raised his head and fixed his gaze upon

some point of the wall, as though there existed at that point something

which he wished to elucidate or interrogate.

When he had finished the letter to M. Laffitte, he put it into his

pocket, together with the pocket-book, and began his walk once more.

His reverie had not swerved from its course. He continued to see his

duty clearly, written in luminous letters, which flamed before his eyes

and changed its place as he altered the direction of his glance:—

\_“Go! Tell your name! Denounce yourself!”\_

In the same way he beheld, as though they had passed before him in

visible forms, the two ideas which had, up to that time, formed the

double rule of his soul,—the concealment of his name, the

sanctification of his life. For the first time they appeared to him as

absolutely distinct, and he perceived the distance which separated

them. He recognized the fact that one of these ideas was, necessarily,

good, while the other might become bad; that the first was

self-devotion, and that the other was personality; that the one said,

\_my neighbour\_, and that the other said, \_myself\_; that one emanated

from the light, and the other from darkness.

They were antagonistic. He saw them in conflict. In proportion as he

meditated, they grew before the eyes of his spirit. They had now

attained colossal statures, and it seemed to him that he beheld within

himself, in that infinity of which we were recently speaking, in the

midst of the darkness and the lights, a goddess and a giant contending.

He was filled with terror; but it seemed to him that the good thought

was getting the upper hand.

He felt that he was on the brink of the second decisive crisis of his

conscience and of his destiny; that the Bishop had marked the first

phase of his new life, and that Champmathieu marked the second. After

the grand crisis, the grand test.

But the fever, allayed for an instant, gradually resumed possession of

him. A thousand thoughts traversed his mind, but they continued to

fortify him in his resolution.

One moment he said to himself that he was, perhaps, taking the matter

too keenly; that, after all, this Champmathieu was not interesting, and

that he had actually been guilty of theft.

He answered himself: “If this man has, indeed, stolen a few apples,

that means a month in prison. It is a long way from that to the

galleys. And who knows? Did he steal? Has it been proved? The name of

Jean Valjean overwhelms him, and seems to dispense with proofs. Do not

the attorneys for the Crown always proceed in this manner? He is

supposed to be a thief because he is known to be a convict.”

In another instant the thought had occurred to him that, when he

denounced himself, the heroism of his deed might, perhaps, be taken

into consideration, and his honest life for the last seven years, and

what he had done for the district, and that they would have mercy on

him.

But this supposition vanished very quickly, and he smiled bitterly as

he remembered that the theft of the forty sous from little Gervais put

him in the position of a man guilty of a second offence after

conviction, that this affair would certainly come up, and, according to

the precise terms of the law, would render him liable to penal

servitude for life.

He turned aside from all illusions, detached himself more and more from

earth, and sought strength and consolation elsewhere. He told himself

that he must do his duty; that perhaps he should not be more unhappy

after doing his duty than after having avoided it; that if he \_allowed

things to take their own course\_, if he remained at M. sur M., his

consideration, his good name, his good works, the deference and

veneration paid to him, his charity, his wealth, his popularity, his

virtue, would be seasoned with a crime. And what would be the taste of

all these holy things when bound up with this hideous thing? while, if

he accomplished his sacrifice, a celestial idea would be mingled with

the galleys, the post, the iron necklet, the green cap, unceasing toil,

and pitiless shame.

At length he told himself that it must be so, that his destiny was thus

allotted, that he had not authority to alter the arrangements made on

high, that, in any case, he must make his choice: virtue without and

abomination within, or holiness within and infamy without.

The stirring up of these lugubrious ideas did not cause his courage to

fail, but his brain grow weary. He began to think of other things, of

indifferent matters, in spite of himself.

The veins in his temples throbbed violently; he still paced to and fro;

midnight sounded first from the parish church, then from the town-hall;

he counted the twelve strokes of the two clocks, and compared the

sounds of the two bells; he recalled in this connection the fact that,

a few days previously, he had seen in an ironmonger’s shop an ancient

clock for sale, upon which was written the name, \_Antoine-Albin de

Romainville\_.

He was cold; he lighted a small fire; it did not occur to him to close

the window.

In the meantime he had relapsed into his stupor; he was obliged to make

a tolerably vigorous effort to recall what had been the subject of his

thoughts before midnight had struck; he finally succeeded in doing

this.

“Ah! yes,” he said to himself, “I had resolved to inform against

myself.”

And then, all of a sudden, he thought of Fantine.

“Hold!” said he, “and what about that poor woman?”

Here a fresh crisis declared itself.

Fantine, by appearing thus abruptly in his reverie, produced the effect

of an unexpected ray of light; it seemed to him as though everything

about him were undergoing a change of aspect: he exclaimed:—

“Ah! but I have hitherto considered no one but myself; it is proper for

me to hold my tongue or to denounce myself, to conceal my person or to

save my soul, to be a despicable and respected magistrate, or an

infamous and venerable convict; it is I, it is always I and nothing but

I: but, good God! all this is egotism; these are diverse forms of

egotism, but it is egotism all the same. What if I were to think a

little about others? The highest holiness is to think of others; come,

let us examine the matter. The \_I\_ excepted, the \_I\_ effaced, the \_I\_

forgotten, what would be the result of all this? What if I denounce

myself? I am arrested; this Champmathieu is released; I am put back in

the galleys; that is well—and what then? What is going on here? Ah!

here is a country, a town, here are factories, an industry, workers,

both men and women, aged grandsires, children, poor people! All this I

have created; all these I provide with their living; everywhere where

there is a smoking chimney, it is I who have placed the brand on the

hearth and meat in the pot; I have created ease, circulation, credit;

before me there was nothing; I have elevated, vivified, informed with

life, fecundated, stimulated, enriched the whole country-side; lacking

me, the soul is lacking; I take myself off, everything dies: and this

woman, who has suffered so much, who possesses so many merits in spite

of her fall; the cause of all whose misery I have unwittingly been! And

that child whom I meant to go in search of, whom I have promised to her

mother; do I not also owe something to this woman, in reparation for

the evil which I have done her? If I disappear, what happens? The

mother dies; the child becomes what it can; that is what will take

place, if I denounce myself. If I do not denounce myself? come, let us

see how it will be if I do not denounce myself.”

After putting this question to himself, he paused; he seemed to undergo

a momentary hesitation and trepidation; but it did not last long, and

he answered himself calmly:—

“Well, this man is going to the galleys; it is true, but what the

deuce! he has stolen! There is no use in my saying that he has not been

guilty of theft, for he has! I remain here; I go on: in ten years I

shall have made ten millions; I scatter them over the country; I have

nothing of my own; what is that to me? It is not for myself that I am

doing it; the prosperity of all goes on augmenting; industries are

aroused and animated; factories and shops are multiplied; families, a

hundred families, a thousand families, are happy; the district becomes

populated; villages spring up where there were only farms before; farms

rise where there was nothing; wretchedness disappears, and with

wretchedness debauchery, prostitution, theft, murder; all vices

disappear, all crimes: and this poor mother rears her child; and behold

a whole country rich and honest! Ah! I was a fool! I was absurd! what

was that I was saying about denouncing myself? I really must pay

attention and not be precipitate about anything. What! because it would

have pleased me to play the grand and generous; this is melodrama,

after all; because I should have thought of no one but myself, the

idea! for the sake of saving from a punishment, a trifle exaggerated,

perhaps, but just at bottom, no one knows whom, a thief, a

good-for-nothing, evidently, a whole country-side must perish! a poor

woman must die in the hospital! a poor little girl must die in the

street! like dogs; ah, this is abominable! And without the mother even

having seen her child once more, almost without the child’s having

known her mother; and all that for the sake of an old wretch of an

apple-thief who, most assuredly, has deserved the galleys for something

else, if not for that; fine scruples, indeed, which save a guilty man

and sacrifice the innocent, which save an old vagabond who has only a

few years to live at most, and who will not be more unhappy in the

galleys than in his hovel, and which sacrifice a whole population,

mothers, wives, children. This poor little Cosette who has no one in

the world but me, and who is, no doubt, blue with cold at this moment

in the den of those Thénardiers; those peoples are rascals; and I was

going to neglect my duty towards all these poor creatures; and I was

going off to denounce myself; and I was about to commit that

unspeakable folly! Let us put it at the worst: suppose that there is a

wrong action on my part in this, and that my conscience will reproach

me for it some day, to accept, for the good of others, these reproaches

which weigh only on myself; this evil action which compromises my soul

alone; in that lies self-sacrifice; in that alone there is virtue.”

He rose and resumed his march; this time, he seemed to be content.

Diamonds are found only in the dark places of the earth; truths are

found only in the depths of thought. It seemed to him, that, after

having descended into these depths, after having long groped among the

darkest of these shadows, he had at last found one of these diamonds,

one of these truths, and that he now held it in his hand, and he was

dazzled as he gazed upon it.

“Yes,” he thought, “this is right; I am on the right road; I have the

solution; I must end by holding fast to something; my resolve is taken;

let things take their course; let us no longer vacillate; let us no

longer hang back; this is for the interest of all, not for my own; I am

Madeleine, and Madeleine I remain. Woe to the man who is Jean Valjean!

I am no longer he; I do not know that man; I no longer know anything;

it turns out that some one is Jean Valjean at the present moment; let

him look out for himself; that does not concern me; it is a fatal name

which was floating abroad in the night; if it halts and descends on a

head, so much the worse for that head.”

He looked into the little mirror which hung above his chimney-piece,

and said:—

“Hold! it has relieved me to come to a decision; I am quite another man

now.”

He proceeded a few paces further, then he stopped short.

“Come!” he said, “I must not flinch before any of the consequences of

the resolution which I have once adopted; there are still threads which

attach me to that Jean Valjean; they must be broken; in this very room

there are objects which would betray me, dumb things which would bear

witness against me; it is settled; all these things must disappear.”

He fumbled in his pocket, drew out his purse, opened it, and took out a

small key; he inserted the key in a lock whose aperture could hardly be

seen, so hidden was it in the most sombre tones of the design which

covered the wall-paper; a secret receptacle opened, a sort of false

cupboard constructed in the angle between the wall and the

chimney-piece; in this hiding-place there were some rags—a blue linen

blouse, an old pair of trousers, an old knapsack, and a huge thorn

cudgel shod with iron at both ends. Those who had seen Jean Valjean at

the epoch when he passed through D—— in October, 1815, could easily

have recognized all the pieces of this miserable outfit.

He had preserved them as he had preserved the silver candlesticks, in

order to remind himself continually of his starting-point, but he had

concealed all that came from the galleys, and he had allowed the

candlesticks which came from the Bishop to be seen.

He cast a furtive glance towards the door, as though he feared that it

would open in spite of the bolt which fastened it; then, with a quick

and abrupt movement, he took the whole in his arms at once, without

bestowing so much as a glance on the things which he had so religiously

and so perilously preserved for so many years, and flung them all,

rags, cudgel, knapsack, into the fire.

[Illustration: Candlesticks Into the Fire]

He closed the false cupboard again, and with redoubled precautions,

henceforth unnecessary, since it was now empty, he concealed the door

behind a heavy piece of furniture, which he pushed in front of it.

After the lapse of a few seconds, the room and the opposite wall were

lighted up with a fierce, red, tremulous glow. Everything was on fire;

the thorn cudgel snapped and threw out sparks to the middle of the

chamber.

As the knapsack was consumed, together with the hideous rags which it

contained, it revealed something which sparkled in the ashes. By

bending over, one could have readily recognized a coin,—no doubt the

forty-sou piece stolen from the little Savoyard.

He did not look at the fire, but paced back and forth with the same

step.

All at once his eye fell on the two silver candlesticks, which shone

vaguely on the chimney-piece, through the glow.

“Hold!” he thought; “the whole of Jean Valjean is still in them. They

must be destroyed also.”

He seized the two candlesticks.

There was still fire enough to allow of their being put out of shape,

and converted into a sort of unrecognizable bar of metal.

He bent over the hearth and warmed himself for a moment. He felt a

sense of real comfort. “How good warmth is!” said he.

He stirred the live coals with one of the candlesticks.

A minute more, and they were both in the fire.

At that moment it seemed to him that he heard a voice within him

shouting: “Jean Valjean! Jean Valjean!”

His hair rose upright: he became like a man who is listening to some

terrible thing.

“Yes, that’s it! finish!” said the voice. “Complete what you are about!

Destroy these candlesticks! Annihilate this souvenir! Forget the

Bishop! Forget everything! Destroy this Champmathieu, do! That is

right! Applaud yourself! So it is settled, resolved, fixed, agreed:

here is an old man who does not know what is wanted of him, who has,

perhaps, done nothing, an innocent man, whose whole misfortune lies in

your name, upon whom your name weighs like a crime, who is about to be

taken for you, who will be condemned, who will finish his days in

abjectness and horror. That is good! Be an honest man yourself; remain

Monsieur le Maire; remain honorable and honored; enrich the town;

nourish the indigent; rear the orphan; live happy, virtuous, and

admired; and, during this time, while you are here in the midst of joy

and light, there will be a man who will wear your red blouse, who will

bear your name in ignominy, and who will drag your chain in the

galleys. Yes, it is well arranged thus. Ah, wretch!”

The perspiration streamed from his brow. He fixed a haggard eye on the

candlesticks. But that within him which had spoken had not finished.

The voice continued:—

“Jean Valjean, there will be around you many voices, which will make a

great noise, which will talk very loud, and which will bless you, and

only one which no one will hear, and which will curse you in the dark.

Well! listen, infamous man! All those benedictions will fall back

before they reach heaven, and only the malediction will ascend to God.”

This voice, feeble at first, and which had proceeded from the most

obscure depths of his conscience, had gradually become startling and

formidable, and he now heard it in his very ear. It seemed to him that

it had detached itself from him, and that it was now speaking outside

of him. He thought that he heard the last words so distinctly, that he

glanced around the room in a sort of terror.

“Is there any one here?” he demanded aloud, in utter bewilderment.

Then he resumed, with a laugh which resembled that of an idiot:—

“How stupid I am! There can be no one!”

There was some one; but the person who was there was of those whom the

human eye cannot see.

He placed the candlesticks on the chimney-piece.

Then he resumed his monotonous and lugubrious tramp, which troubled the

dreams of the sleeping man beneath him, and awoke him with a start.

This tramping to and fro soothed and at the same time intoxicated him.

It sometimes seems, on supreme occasions, as though people moved about

for the purpose of asking advice of everything that they may encounter

by change of place. After the lapse of a few minutes he no longer knew

his position.

He now recoiled in equal terror before both the resolutions at which he

had arrived in turn. The two ideas which counselled him appeared to him

equally fatal. What a fatality! What conjunction that that Champmathieu

should have been taken for him; to be overwhelmed by precisely the

means which Providence seemed to have employed, at first, to strengthen

his position!

There was a moment when he reflected on the future. Denounce himself,

great God! Deliver himself up! With immense despair he faced all that

he should be obliged to leave, all that he should be obliged to take up

once more. He should have to bid farewell to that existence which was

so good, so pure, so radiant, to the respect of all, to honor, to

liberty. He should never more stroll in the fields; he should never

more hear the birds sing in the month of May; he should never more

bestow alms on the little children; he should never more experience the

sweetness of having glances of gratitude and love fixed upon him; he

should quit that house which he had built, that little chamber!

Everything seemed charming to him at that moment. Never again should he

read those books; never more should he write on that little table of

white wood; his old portress, the only servant whom he kept, would

never more bring him his coffee in the morning. Great God! instead of

that, the convict gang, the iron necklet, the red waistcoat, the chain

on his ankle, fatigue, the cell, the camp bed all those horrors which

he knew so well! At his age, after having been what he was! If he were

only young again! but to be addressed in his old age as “thou” by any

one who pleased; to be searched by the convict-guard; to receive the

galley-sergeant’s cudgellings; to wear iron-bound shoes on his bare

feet; to have to stretch out his leg night and morning to the hammer of

the roundsman who visits the gang; to submit to the curiosity of

strangers, who would be told: “That man yonder is the famous Jean

Valjean, who was mayor of M. sur M.”; and at night, dripping with

perspiration, overwhelmed with lassitude, their green caps drawn over

their eyes, to remount, two by two, the ladder staircase of the galleys

beneath the sergeant’s whip. Oh, what misery! Can destiny, then, be as

malicious as an intelligent being, and become as monstrous as the human

heart?

And do what he would, he always fell back upon the heartrending dilemma

which lay at the foundation of his reverie: “Should he remain in

paradise and become a demon? Should he return to hell and become an

angel?”

What was to be done? Great God! what was to be done?

The torment from which he had escaped with so much difficulty was

unchained afresh within him. His ideas began to grow confused once

more; they assumed a kind of stupefied and mechanical quality which is

peculiar to despair. The name of Romainville recurred incessantly to

his mind, with the two verses of a song which he had heard in the past.

He thought that Romainville was a little grove near Paris, where young

lovers go to pluck lilacs in the month of April.

He wavered outwardly as well as inwardly. He walked like a little child

who is permitted to toddle alone.

At intervals, as he combated his lassitude, he made an effort to

recover the mastery of his mind. He tried to put to himself, for the

last time, and definitely, the problem over which he had, in a manner,

fallen prostrate with fatigue: Ought he to denounce himself? Ought he

to hold his peace? He could not manage to see anything distinctly. The

vague aspects of all the courses of reasoning which had been sketched

out by his meditations quivered and vanished, one after the other, into

smoke. He only felt that, to whatever course of action he made up his

mind, something in him must die, and that of necessity, and without his

being able to escape the fact; that he was entering a sepulchre on the

right hand as much as on the left; that he was passing through a death

agony,—the agony of his happiness, or the agony of his virtue.

Alas! all his resolution had again taken possession of him. He was no

further advanced than at the beginning.

Thus did this unhappy soul struggle in its anguish. Eighteen hundred

years before this unfortunate man, the mysterious Being in whom are

summed up all the sanctities and all the sufferings of humanity had

also long thrust aside with his hand, while the olive-trees quivered in

the wild wind of the infinite, the terrible cup which appeared to Him

dripping with darkness and overflowing with shadows in the depths all

studded with stars.

CHAPTER IV—FORMS ASSUMED BY SUFFERING DURING SLEEP

Three o’clock in the morning had just struck, and he had been walking

thus for five hours, almost uninterruptedly, when he at length allowed

himself to drop into his chair.

There he fell asleep and had a dream.

This dream, like the majority of dreams, bore no relation to the

situation, except by its painful and heart-rending character, but it

made an impression on him. This nightmare struck him so forcibly that

he wrote it down later on. It is one of the papers in his own

handwriting which he has bequeathed to us. We think that we have here

reproduced the thing in strict accordance with the text.

Of whatever nature this dream may be, the history of this night would

be incomplete if we were to omit it: it is the gloomy adventure of an

ailing soul.

Here it is. On the envelope we find this line inscribed, “The Dream I

had that Night.”

“I was in a plain; a vast, gloomy plain, where there was no grass. It

did not seem to me to be daylight nor yet night.

“I was walking with my brother, the brother of my childish years, the

brother of whom, I must say, I never think, and whom I now hardly

remember.

“We were conversing and we met some passers-by. We were talking of a

neighbor of ours in former days, who had always worked with her window

open from the time when she came to live on the street. As we talked we

felt cold because of that open window.

“There were no trees in the plain. We saw a man passing close to us. He

was entirely nude, of the hue of ashes, and mounted on a horse which

was earth color. The man had no hair; we could see his skull and the

veins on it. In his hand he held a switch which was as supple as a

vine-shoot and as heavy as iron. This horseman passed and said nothing

to us.

“My brother said to me, ‘Let us take to the hollow road.’

“There existed a hollow way wherein one saw neither a single shrub nor

a spear of moss. Everything was dirt-colored, even the sky. After

proceeding a few paces, I received no reply when I spoke: I perceived

that my brother was no longer with me.

“I entered a village which I espied. I reflected that it must be

Romainville. (Why Romainville?)5

“The first street that I entered was deserted. I entered a second

street. Behind the angle formed by the two streets, a man was standing

erect against the wall. I said to this man:—

“‘What country is this? Where am I?’ The man made no reply. I saw the

door of a house open, and I entered.

“The first chamber was deserted. I entered the second. Behind the door

of this chamber a man was standing erect against the wall. I inquired

of this man, ‘Whose house is this? Where am I?’ The man replied not.

“The house had a garden. I quitted the house and entered the garden.

The garden was deserted. Behind the first tree I found a man standing

upright. I said to this man, ‘What garden is this? Where am I?’ The man

did not answer.

“I strolled into the village, and perceived that it was a town. All the

streets were deserted, all the doors were open. Not a single living

being was passing in the streets, walking through the chambers or

strolling in the gardens. But behind each angle of the walls, behind

each door, behind each tree, stood a silent man. Only one was to be

seen at a time. These men watched me pass.

“I left the town and began to ramble about the fields.

“After the lapse of some time I turned back and saw a great crowd

coming up behind me. I recognized all the men whom I had seen in that

town. They had strange heads. They did not seem to be in a hurry, yet

they walked faster than I did. They made no noise as they walked. In an

instant this crowd had overtaken and surrounded me. The faces of these

men were earthen in hue.

“Then the first one whom I had seen and questioned on entering the town

said to me:—

“‘Whither are you going! Do you not know that you have been dead this

long time?’

“I opened my mouth to reply, and I perceived that there was no one near

me.”

He woke. He was icy cold. A wind which was chill like the breeze of

dawn was rattling the leaves of the window, which had been left open on

their hinges. The fire was out. The candle was nearing its end. It was

still black night.

He rose, he went to the window. There were no stars in the sky even

yet.

From his window the yard of the house and the street were visible. A

sharp, harsh noise, which made him drop his eyes, resounded from the

earth.

Below him he perceived two red stars, whose rays lengthened and

shortened in a singular manner through the darkness.

As his thoughts were still half immersed in the mists of sleep, “Hold!”

said he, “there are no stars in the sky. They are on earth now.”

But this confusion vanished; a second sound similar to the first roused

him thoroughly; he looked and recognized the fact that these two stars

were the lanterns of a carriage. By the light which they cast he was

able to distinguish the form of this vehicle. It was a tilbury

harnessed to a small white horse. The noise which he had heard was the

trampling of the horse’s hoofs on the pavement.

“What vehicle is this?” he said to himself. “Who is coming here so

early in the morning?”

At that moment there came a light tap on the door of his chamber.

He shuddered from head to foot, and cried in a terrible voice:—

“Who is there?”

Some one said:—

“I, Monsieur le Maire.”

He recognized the voice of the old woman who was his portress.

“Well!” he replied, “what is it?”

“Monsieur le Maire, it is just five o’clock in the morning.”

“What is that to me?”

“The cabriolet is here, Monsieur le Maire.”

“What cabriolet?”

“The tilbury.”

“What tilbury?”

“Did not Monsieur le Maire order a tilbury?”

“No,” said he.

“The coachman says that he has come for Monsieur le Maire.”

“What coachman?”

“M. Scaufflaire’s coachman.”

“M. Scaufflaire?”

That name sent a shudder over him, as though a flash of lightning had

passed in front of his face.

“Ah! yes,” he resumed; “M. Scaufflaire!”

If the old woman could have seen him at that moment, she would have

been frightened.

A tolerably long silence ensued. He examined the flame of the candle

with a stupid air, and from around the wick he took some of the burning

wax, which he rolled between his fingers. The old woman waited for him.

She even ventured to uplift her voice once more:—

“What am I to say, Monsieur le Maire?”

“Say that it is well, and that I am coming down.”

CHAPTER V—HINDRANCES

The posting service from Arras to M. sur M. was still operated at this

period by small mail-wagons of the time of the Empire. These

mail-wagons were two-wheeled cabriolets, upholstered inside with

fawn-colored leather, hung on springs, and having but two seats, one

for the postboy, the other for the traveller. The wheels were armed

with those long, offensive axles which keep other vehicles at a

distance, and which may still be seen on the road in Germany. The

despatch box, an immense oblong coffer, was placed behind the vehicle

and formed a part of it. This coffer was painted black, and the

cabriolet yellow.

These vehicles, which have no counterparts nowadays, had something

distorted and hunchbacked about them; and when one saw them passing in

the distance, and climbing up some road to the horizon, they resembled

the insects which are called, I think, termites, and which, though with

but little corselet, drag a great train behind them. But they travelled

at a very rapid rate. The post-wagon which set out from Arras at one

o’clock every night, after the mail from Paris had passed, arrived at

M. sur M. a little before five o’clock in the morning.

That night the wagon which was descending to M. sur M. by the Hesdin

road, collided at the corner of a street, just as it was entering the

town, with a little tilbury harnessed to a white horse, which was going

in the opposite direction, and in which there was but one person, a man

enveloped in a mantle. The wheel of the tilbury received quite a

violent shock. The postman shouted to the man to stop, but the

traveller paid no heed and pursued his road at full gallop.

“That man is in a devilish hurry!” said the postman.

The man thus hastening on was the one whom we have just seen struggling

in convulsions which are certainly deserving of pity.

Whither was he going? He could not have told. Why was he hastening? He

did not know. He was driving at random, straight ahead. Whither? To

Arras, no doubt; but he might have been going elsewhere as well. At

times he was conscious of it, and he shuddered. He plunged into the

night as into a gulf. Something urged him forward; something drew him

on. No one could have told what was taking place within him; every one

will understand it. What man is there who has not entered, at least

once in his life, into that obscure cavern of the unknown?

However, he had resolved on nothing, decided nothing, formed no plan,

done nothing. None of the actions of his conscience had been decisive.

He was, more than ever, as he had been at the first moment.

Why was he going to Arras?

He repeated what he had already said to himself when he had hired

Scaufflaire’s cabriolet: that, whatever the result was to be, there was

no reason why he should not see with his own eyes, and judge of matters

for himself; that this was even prudent; that he must know what took

place; that no decision could be arrived at without having observed and

scrutinized; that one made mountains out of everything from a distance;

that, at any rate, when he should have seen that Champmathieu, some

wretch, his conscience would probably be greatly relieved to allow him

to go to the galleys in his stead; that Javert would indeed be there;

and that Brevet, that Chenildieu, that Cochepaille, old convicts who

had known him; but they certainly would not recognize him;—bah! what an

idea! that Javert was a hundred leagues from suspecting the truth; that

all conjectures and all suppositions were fixed on Champmathieu, and

that there is nothing so headstrong as suppositions and conjectures;

that accordingly there was no danger.

That it was, no doubt, a dark moment, but that he should emerge from

it; that, after all, he held his destiny, however bad it might be, in

his own hand; that he was master of it. He clung to this thought.

At bottom, to tell the whole truth, he would have preferred not to go

to Arras.

Nevertheless, he was going thither.

As he meditated, he whipped up his horse, which was proceeding at that

fine, regular, and even trot which accomplishes two leagues and a half

an hour.

In proportion as the cabriolet advanced, he felt something within him

draw back.

At daybreak he was in the open country; the town of M. sur M. lay far

behind him. He watched the horizon grow white; he stared at all the

chilly figures of a winter’s dawn as they passed before his eyes, but

without seeing them. The morning has its spectres as well as the

evening. He did not see them; but without his being aware of it, and by

means of a sort of penetration which was almost physical, these black

silhouettes of trees and of hills added some gloomy and sinister

quality to the violent state of his soul.

Each time that he passed one of those isolated dwellings which

sometimes border on the highway, he said to himself, “And yet there are

people there within who are sleeping!”

The trot of the horse, the bells on the harness, the wheels on the

road, produced a gentle, monotonous noise. These things are charming

when one is joyous, and lugubrious when one is sad.

It was broad daylight when he arrived at Hesdin. He halted in front of

the inn, to allow the horse a breathing spell, and to have him given

some oats.

The horse belonged, as Scaufflaire had said, to that small race of the

Boulonnais, which has too much head, too much belly, and not enough

neck and shoulders, but which has a broad chest, a large crupper, thin,

fine legs, and solid hoofs—a homely, but a robust and healthy race. The

excellent beast had travelled five leagues in two hours, and had not a

drop of sweat on his loins.

He did not get out of the tilbury. The stableman who brought the oats

suddenly bent down and examined the left wheel.

“Are you going far in this condition?” said the man.

He replied, with an air of not having roused himself from his reverie:—

“Why?”

“Have you come from a great distance?” went on the man.

“Five leagues.”

“Ah!”

“Why do you say, ‘Ah?’”

The man bent down once more, was silent for a moment, with his eyes

fixed on the wheel; then he rose erect and said:—

“Because, though this wheel has travelled five leagues, it certainly

will not travel another quarter of a league.”

He sprang out of the tilbury.

“What is that you say, my friend?”

“I say that it is a miracle that you should have travelled five leagues

without you and your horse rolling into some ditch on the highway. Just

see here!”

The wheel really had suffered serious damage. The shock administered by

the mail-wagon had split two spokes and strained the hub, so that the

nut no longer held firm.

“My friend,” he said to the stableman, “is there a wheelwright here?”

“Certainly, sir.”

“Do me the service to go and fetch him.”

“He is only a step from here. Hey! Master Bourgaillard!”

Master Bourgaillard, the wheelwright, was standing on his own

threshold. He came, examined the wheel and made a grimace like a

surgeon when the latter thinks a limb is broken.

“Can you repair this wheel immediately?”

“Yes, sir.”

“When can I set out again?”

“To-morrow.”

“To-morrow!”

“There is a long day’s work on it. Are you in a hurry, sir?”

“In a very great hurry. I must set out again in an hour at the latest.”

“Impossible, sir.”

“I will pay whatever you ask.”

“Impossible.”

“Well, in two hours, then.”

“Impossible to-day. Two new spokes and a hub must be made. Monsieur

will not be able to start before to-morrow morning.”

“The matter cannot wait until to-morrow. What if you were to replace

this wheel instead of repairing it?”

“How so?”

“You are a wheelwright?”

“Certainly, sir.”

“Have you not a wheel that you can sell me? Then I could start again at

once.”

“A spare wheel?”

“Yes.”

“I have no wheel on hand that would fit your cabriolet. Two wheels make

a pair. Two wheels cannot be put together hap-hazard.”

“In that case, sell me a pair of wheels.”

“Not all wheels fit all axles, sir.”

“Try, nevertheless.”

“It is useless, sir. I have nothing to sell but cart-wheels. We are but

a poor country here.”

“Have you a cabriolet that you can let me have?”

The wheelwright had seen at the first glance that the tilbury was a

hired vehicle. He shrugged his shoulders.

“You treat the cabriolets that people let you so well! If I had one, I

would not let it to you!”

“Well, sell it to me, then.”

“I have none.”

“What! not even a spring-cart? I am not hard to please, as you see.”

“We live in a poor country. There is, in truth,” added the wheelwright,

“an old calash under the shed yonder, which belongs to a bourgeois of

the town, who gave it to me to take care of, and who only uses it on

the thirty-sixth of the month—never, that is to say. I might let that

to you, for what matters it to me? But the bourgeois must not see it

pass—and then, it is a calash; it would require two horses.”

“I will take two post-horses.”

“Where is Monsieur going?”

“To Arras.”

“And Monsieur wishes to reach there to-day?”

“Yes, of course.”

“By taking two post-horses?”

“Why not?”

“Does it make any difference whether Monsieur arrives at four o’clock

to-morrow morning?”

“Certainly not.”

“There is one thing to be said about that, you see, by taking

post-horses—Monsieur has his passport?”

“Yes.”

“Well, by taking post-horses, Monsieur cannot reach Arras before

to-morrow. We are on a crossroad. The relays are badly served, the

horses are in the fields. The season for ploughing is just beginning;

heavy teams are required, and horses are seized upon everywhere, from

the post as well as elsewhere. Monsieur will have to wait three or four

hours at the least at every relay. And, then, they drive at a walk.

There are many hills to ascend.”

“Come then, I will go on horseback. Unharness the cabriolet. Some one

can surely sell me a saddle in the neighborhood.”

“Without doubt. But will this horse bear the saddle?”

“That is true; you remind me of that; he will not bear it.”

“Then—”

“But I can surely hire a horse in the village?”

“A horse to travel to Arras at one stretch?”

“Yes.”

“That would require such a horse as does not exist in these parts. You

would have to buy it to begin with, because no one knows you. But you

will not find one for sale nor to let, for five hundred francs, or for

a thousand.”

“What am I to do?”

“The best thing is to let me repair the wheel like an honest man, and

set out on your journey to-morrow.”

“To-morrow will be too late.”

“The deuce!”

“Is there not a mail-wagon which runs to Arras? When will it pass?”

“To-night. Both the posts pass at night; the one going as well as the

one coming.”

“What! It will take you a day to mend this wheel?”

“A day, and a good long one.”

“If you set two men to work?”

“If I set ten men to work.”

“What if the spokes were to be tied together with ropes?”

“That could be done with the spokes, not with the hub; and the felly is

in a bad state, too.”

“Is there any one in this village who lets out teams?”

“No.”

“Is there another wheelwright?”

The stableman and the wheelwright replied in concert, with a toss of

the head.

“No.”

He felt an immense joy.

It was evident that Providence was intervening. That it was it who had

broken the wheel of the tilbury and who was stopping him on the road.

He had not yielded to this sort of first summons; he had just made

every possible effort to continue the journey; he had loyally and

scrupulously exhausted all means; he had been deterred neither by the

season, nor fatigue, nor by the expense; he had nothing with which to

reproach himself. If he went no further, that was no fault of his. It

did not concern him further. It was no longer his fault. It was not the

act of his own conscience, but the act of Providence.

He breathed again. He breathed freely and to the full extent of his

lungs for the first time since Javert’s visit. It seemed to him that

the hand of iron which had held his heart in its grasp for the last

twenty hours had just released him.

It seemed to him that God was for him now, and was manifesting Himself.

He said to himself that he had done all he could, and that now he had

nothing to do but retrace his steps quietly.

If his conversation with the wheelwright had taken place in a chamber

of the inn, it would have had no witnesses, no one would have heard

him, things would have rested there, and it is probable that we should

not have had to relate any of the occurrences which the reader is about

to peruse; but this conversation had taken place in the street. Any

colloquy in the street inevitably attracts a crowd. There are always

people who ask nothing better than to become spectators. While he was

questioning the wheelwright, some people who were passing back and

forth halted around them. After listening for a few minutes, a young

lad, to whom no one had paid any heed, detached himself from the group

and ran off.

At the moment when the traveller, after the inward deliberation which

we have just described, resolved to retrace his steps, this child

returned. He was accompanied by an old woman.

“Monsieur,” said the woman, “my boy tells me that you wish to hire a

cabriolet.”

These simple words uttered by an old woman led by a child made the

perspiration trickle down his limbs. He thought that he beheld the hand

which had relaxed its grasp reappear in the darkness behind him, ready

to seize him once more.

He answered:—

“Yes, my good woman; I am in search of a cabriolet which I can hire.”

And he hastened to add:—

“But there is none in the place.”

“Certainly there is,” said the old woman.

“Where?” interpolated the wheelwright.

“At my house,” replied the old woman.

He shuddered. The fatal hand had grasped him again.

The old woman really had in her shed a sort of basket spring-cart. The

wheelwright and the stable-man, in despair at the prospect of the

traveller escaping their clutches, interfered.

“It was a frightful old trap; it rests flat on the axle; it is an

actual fact that the seats were suspended inside it by leather thongs;

the rain came into it; the wheels were rusted and eaten with moisture;

it would not go much further than the tilbury; a regular ramshackle old

stage-wagon; the gentleman would make a great mistake if he trusted

himself to it,” etc., etc.

All this was true; but this trap, this ramshackle old vehicle, this

thing, whatever it was, ran on its two wheels and could go to Arras.

He paid what was asked, left the tilbury with the wheelwright to be

repaired, intending to reclaim it on his return, had the white horse

put to the cart, climbed into it, and resumed the road which he had

been travelling since morning.

At the moment when the cart moved off, he admitted that he had felt, a

moment previously, a certain joy in the thought that he should not go

whither he was now proceeding. He examined this joy with a sort of

wrath, and found it absurd. Why should he feel joy at turning back?

After all, he was taking this trip of his own free will. No one was

forcing him to it.

And assuredly nothing would happen except what he should choose.

As he left Hesdin, he heard a voice shouting to him: “Stop! Stop!” He

halted the cart with a vigorous movement which contained a feverish and

convulsive element resembling hope.

It was the old woman’s little boy.

“Monsieur,” said the latter, “it was I who got the cart for you.”

“Well?”

“You have not given me anything.”

He who gave to all so readily thought this demand exorbitant and almost

odious.

“Ah! it’s you, you scamp?” said he; “you shall have nothing.”

He whipped up his horse and set off at full speed.

He had lost a great deal of time at Hesdin. He wanted to make it good.

The little horse was courageous, and pulled for two; but it was the

month of February, there had been rain; the roads were bad. And then,

it was no longer the tilbury. The cart was very heavy, and in addition,

there were many ascents.

He took nearly four hours to go from Hesdin to Saint-Pol; four hours

for five leagues.

At Saint-Pol he had the horse unharnessed at the first inn he came to

and led to the stable; as he had promised Scaufflaire, he stood beside

the manger while the horse was eating; he thought of sad and confusing

things.

The inn-keeper’s wife came to the stable.

“Does not Monsieur wish to breakfast?”

“Come, that is true; I even have a good appetite.”

He followed the woman, who had a rosy, cheerful face; she led him to

the public room where there were tables covered with waxed cloth.

“Make haste!” said he; “I must start again; I am in a hurry.”

A big Flemish servant-maid placed his knife and fork in all haste; he

looked at the girl with a sensation of comfort.

“That is what ailed me,” he thought; “I had not breakfasted.”

His breakfast was served; he seized the bread, took a mouthful, and

then slowly replaced it on the table, and did not touch it again.

A carter was eating at another table; he said to this man:—

“Why is their bread so bitter here?”

The carter was a German and did not understand him.

He returned to the stable and remained near the horse.

An hour later he had quitted Saint-Pol and was directing his course

towards Tinques, which is only five leagues from Arras.

What did he do during this journey? Of what was he thinking? As in the

morning, he watched the trees, the thatched roofs, the tilled fields

pass by, and the way in which the landscape, broken at every turn of

the road, vanished; this is a sort of contemplation which sometimes

suffices to the soul, and almost relieves it from thought. What is more

melancholy and more profound than to see a thousand objects for the

first and the last time? To travel is to be born and to die at every

instant; perhaps, in the vaguest region of his mind, he did make

comparisons between the shifting horizon and our human existence: all

the things of life are perpetually fleeing before us; the dark and

bright intervals are intermingled; after a dazzling moment, an eclipse;

we look, we hasten, we stretch out our hands to grasp what is passing;

each event is a turn in the road, and, all at once, we are old; we feel

a shock; all is black; we distinguish an obscure door; the gloomy horse

of life, which has been drawing us halts, and we see a veiled and

unknown person unharnessing amid the shadows.

Twilight was falling when the children who were coming out of school

beheld this traveller enter Tinques; it is true that the days were

still short; he did not halt at Tinques; as he emerged from the

village, a laborer, who was mending the road with stones, raised his

head and said to him:—

“That horse is very much fatigued.”

The poor beast was, in fact, going at a walk.

“Are you going to Arras?” added the road-mender.

“Yes.”

“If you go on at that rate you will not arrive very early.”

He stopped his horse, and asked the laborer:—

“How far is it from here to Arras?”

“Nearly seven good leagues.”

“How is that? the posting guide only says five leagues and a quarter.”

“Ah!” returned the road-mender, “so you don’t know that the road is

under repair? You will find it barred a quarter of an hour further on;

there is no way to proceed further.”

“Really?”

“You will take the road on the left, leading to Carency; you will cross

the river; when you reach Camblin, you will turn to the right; that is

the road to Mont-Saint-Éloy which leads to Arras.”

“But it is night, and I shall lose my way.”

“You do not belong in these parts?”

“No.”

“And, besides, it is all crossroads; stop! sir,” resumed the

road-mender; “shall I give you a piece of advice? your horse is tired;

return to Tinques; there is a good inn there; sleep there; you can

reach Arras to-morrow.”

“I must be there this evening.”

“That is different; but go to the inn all the same, and get an extra

horse; the stable-boy will guide you through the crossroads.”

He followed the road-mender’s advice, retraced his steps, and, half an

hour later, he passed the same spot again, but this time at full speed,

with a good horse to aid; a stable-boy, who called himself a postilion,

was seated on the shaft of the cariole.

Still, he felt that he had lost time.

Night had fully come.

They turned into the crossroad; the way became frightfully bad; the

cart lurched from one rut to the other; he said to the postilion:—

“Keep at a trot, and you shall have a double fee.”

In one of the jolts, the whiffle-tree broke.

“There’s the whiffle-tree broken, sir,” said the postilion; “I don’t

know how to harness my horse now; this road is very bad at night; if

you wish to return and sleep at Tinques, we could be in Arras early

to-morrow morning.”

He replied, “Have you a bit of rope and a knife?”

“Yes, sir.”

He cut a branch from a tree and made a whiffle-tree of it.

This caused another loss of twenty minutes; but they set out again at a

gallop.

The plain was gloomy; low-hanging, black, crisp fogs crept over the

hills and wrenched themselves away like smoke: there were whitish

gleams in the clouds; a strong breeze which blew in from the sea

produced a sound in all quarters of the horizon, as of some one moving

furniture; everything that could be seen assumed attitudes of terror.

How many things shiver beneath these vast breaths of the night!

He was stiff with cold; he had eaten nothing since the night before; he

vaguely recalled his other nocturnal trip in the vast plain in the

neighborhood of D——, eight years previously, and it seemed but

yesterday.

The hour struck from a distant tower; he asked the boy:—

“What time is it?”

“Seven o’clock, sir; we shall reach Arras at eight; we have but three

leagues still to go.”

At that moment, he for the first time indulged in this reflection,

thinking it odd the while that it had not occurred to him sooner: that

all this trouble which he was taking was, perhaps, useless; that he did

not know so much as the hour of the trial; that he should, at least,

have informed himself of that; that he was foolish to go thus straight

ahead without knowing whether he would be of any service or not; then

he sketched out some calculations in his mind: that, ordinarily, the

sittings of the Court of Assizes began at nine o’clock in the morning;

that it could not be a long affair; that the theft of the apples would

be very brief; that there would then remain only a question of

identity, four or five depositions, and very little for the lawyers to

say; that he should arrive after all was over.

The postilion whipped up the horses; they had crossed the river and

left Mont-Saint-Éloy behind them.

The night grew more profound.

CHAPTER VI—SISTER SIMPLICE PUT TO THE PROOF

But at that moment Fantine was joyous.

She had passed a very bad night; her cough was frightful; her fever had

doubled in intensity; she had had dreams: in the morning, when the

doctor paid his visit, she was delirious; he assumed an alarmed look,

and ordered that he should be informed as soon as M. Madeleine arrived.

All the morning she was melancholy, said but little, and laid plaits in

her sheets, murmuring the while, in a low voice, calculations which

seemed to be calculations of distances. Her eyes were hollow and

staring. They seemed almost extinguished at intervals, then lighted up

again and shone like stars. It seems as though, at the approach of a

certain dark hour, the light of heaven fills those who are quitting the

light of earth.

Each time that Sister Simplice asked her how she felt, she replied

invariably, “Well. I should like to see M. Madeleine.”

Some months before this, at the moment when Fantine had just lost her

last modesty, her last shame, and her last joy, she was the shadow of

herself; now she was the spectre of herself. Physical suffering had

completed the work of moral suffering. This creature of five and twenty

had a wrinkled brow, flabby cheeks, pinched nostrils, teeth from which

the gums had receded, a leaden complexion, a bony neck, prominent

shoulder-blades, frail limbs, a clayey skin, and her golden hair was

growing out sprinkled with gray. Alas! how illness improvises old-age!

At midday the physician returned, gave some directions, inquired

whether the mayor had made his appearance at the infirmary, and shook

his head.

M. Madeleine usually came to see the invalid at three o’clock. As

exactness is kindness, he was exact.

About half-past two, Fantine began to be restless. In the course of

twenty minutes, she asked the nun more than ten times, “What time is

it, sister?”

Three o’clock struck. At the third stroke, Fantine sat up in bed; she

who could, in general, hardly turn over, joined her yellow, fleshless

hands in a sort of convulsive clasp, and the nun heard her utter one of

those profound sighs which seem to throw off dejection. Then Fantine

turned and looked at the door.

No one entered; the door did not open.

She remained thus for a quarter of an hour, her eyes riveted on the

door, motionless and apparently holding her breath. The sister dared

not speak to her. The clock struck a quarter past three. Fantine fell

back on her pillow.

She said nothing, but began to plait the sheets once more.

Half an hour passed, then an hour, no one came; every time the clock

struck, Fantine started up and looked towards the door, then fell back

again.

Her thought was clearly perceptible, but she uttered no name, she made

no complaint, she blamed no one. But she coughed in a melancholy way.

One would have said that something dark was descending upon her. She

was livid and her lips were blue. She smiled now and then.

Five o’clock struck. Then the sister heard her say, very low and

gently, “He is wrong not to come to-day, since I am going away

to-morrow.”

Sister Simplice herself was surprised at M. Madeleine’s delay.

In the meantime, Fantine was staring at the tester of her bed. She

seemed to be endeavoring to recall something. All at once she began to

sing in a voice as feeble as a breath. The nun listened. This is what

Fantine was singing:—

“Lovely things we will buy

As we stroll the faubourgs through.

Roses are pink, corn-flowers are blue,

I love my love, corn-flowers are blue.

“Yestere’en the Virgin Mary came near my stove, in a broidered mantle

clad, and said to me, ‘Here, hide ’neath my veil the child whom you one

day begged from me. Haste to the city, buy linen, buy a needle, buy

thread.’

“Lovely things we will buy

As we stroll the faubourgs through.

“Dear Holy Virgin, beside my stove I have set a cradle with ribbons

decked. God may give me his loveliest star; I prefer the child thou

hast granted me. ‘Madame, what shall I do with this linen fine?’—‘Make

of it clothes for thy new-born babe.’

“Roses are pink and corn-flowers are blue,

I love my love, and corn-flowers are blue.

“‘Wash this linen.’—‘Where?’—‘In the stream. Make of it, soiling not,

spoiling not, a petticoat fair with its bodice fine, which I will

embroider and fill with flowers.’—‘Madame, the child is no longer here;

what is to be done?’—‘Then make of it a winding-sheet in which to bury

me.’

“Lovely things we will buy

As we stroll the faubourgs through,

Roses are pink, corn-flowers are blue,

I love my love, corn-flowers are blue.”

This song was an old cradle romance with which she had, in former days,

lulled her little Cosette to sleep, and which had never recurred to her

mind in all the five years during which she had been parted from her

child. She sang it in so sad a voice, and to so sweet an air, that it

was enough to make any one, even a nun, weep. The sister, accustomed as

she was to austerities, felt a tear spring to her eyes.

The clock struck six. Fantine did not seem to hear it. She no longer

seemed to pay attention to anything about her.

Sister Simplice sent a serving-maid to inquire of the portress of the

factory, whether the mayor had returned, and if he would not come to

the infirmary soon. The girl returned in a few minutes.

Fantine was still motionless and seemed absorbed in her own thoughts.

The servant informed Sister Simplice in a very low tone, that the mayor

had set out that morning before six o’clock, in a little tilbury

harnessed to a white horse, cold as the weather was; that he had gone

alone, without even a driver; that no one knew what road he had taken;

that people said he had been seen to turn into the road to Arras; that

others asserted that they had met him on the road to Paris. That when

he went away he had been very gentle, as usual, and that he had merely

told the portress not to expect him that night.

While the two women were whispering together, with their backs turned

to Fantine’s bed, the sister interrogating, the servant conjecturing,

Fantine, with the feverish vivacity of certain organic maladies, which

unite the free movements of health with the frightful emaciation of

death, had raised herself to her knees in bed, with her shrivelled

hands resting on the bolster, and her head thrust through the opening

of the curtains, and was listening. All at once she cried:—

“You are speaking of M. Madeleine! Why are you talking so low? What is

he doing? Why does he not come?”

Her voice was so abrupt and hoarse that the two women thought they

heard the voice of a man; they wheeled round in affright.

“Answer me!” cried Fantine.

The servant stammered:—

“The portress told me that he could not come to-day.”

“Be calm, my child,” said the sister; “lie down again.”

Fantine, without changing her attitude, continued in a loud voice, and

with an accent that was both imperious and heart-rending:—

“He cannot come? Why not? You know the reason. You are whispering it to

each other there. I want to know it.”

The servant-maid hastened to say in the nun’s ear, “Say that he is busy

with the city council.”

Sister Simplice blushed faintly, for it was a lie that the maid had

proposed to her.

On the other hand, it seemed to her that the mere communication of the

truth to the invalid would, without doubt, deal her a terrible blow,

and that this was a serious matter in Fantine’s present state. Her

flush did not last long; the sister raised her calm, sad eyes to

Fantine, and said, “Monsieur le Maire has gone away.”

Fantine raised herself and crouched on her heels in the bed: her eyes

sparkled; indescribable joy beamed from that melancholy face.

“Gone!” she cried; “he has gone to get Cosette.”

Then she raised her arms to heaven, and her white face became

ineffable; her lips moved; she was praying in a low voice.

When her prayer was finished, “Sister,” she said, “I am willing to lie

down again; I will do anything you wish; I was naughty just now; I beg

your pardon for having spoken so loud; it is very wrong to talk loudly;

I know that well, my good sister, but, you see, I am very happy: the

good God is good; M. Madeleine is good; just think! he has gone to

Montfermeil to get my little Cosette.”

She lay down again, with the nun’s assistance, helped the nun to

arrange her pillow, and kissed the little silver cross which she wore

on her neck, and which Sister Simplice had given her.

“My child,” said the sister, “try to rest now, and do not talk any

more.”

Fantine took the sister’s hand in her moist hands, and the latter was

pained to feel that perspiration.

“He set out this morning for Paris; in fact, he need not even go

through Paris; Montfermeil is a little to the left as you come thence.

Do you remember how he said to me yesterday, when I spoke to him of

Cosette, \_Soon, soon?\_ He wants to give me a surprise, you know! he

made me sign a letter so that she could be taken from the Thénardiers;

they cannot say anything, can they? they will give back Cosette, for

they have been paid; the authorities will not allow them to keep the

child since they have received their pay. Do not make signs to me that

I must not talk, sister! I am extremely happy; I am doing well; I am

not ill at all any more; I am going to see Cosette again; I am even

quite hungry; it is nearly five years since I saw her last; you cannot

imagine how much attached one gets to children, and then, she will be

so pretty; you will see! If you only knew what pretty little rosy

fingers she had! In the first place, she will have very beautiful

hands; she had ridiculous hands when she was only a year old; like

this! she must be a big girl now; she is seven years old; she is quite

a young lady; I call her Cosette, but her name is really Euphrasie.

Stop! this morning I was looking at the dust on the chimney-piece, and

I had a sort of idea come across me, like that, that I should see

Cosette again soon. Mon Dieu! how wrong it is not to see one’s children

for years! One ought to reflect that life is not eternal. Oh, how good

M. le Maire is to go! it is very cold! it is true; he had on his cloak,

at least? he will be here to-morrow, will he not? to-morrow will be a

festival day; to-morrow morning, sister, you must remind me to put on

my little cap that has lace on it. What a place that Montfermeil is! I

took that journey on foot once; it was very long for me, but the

diligences go very quickly! he will be here to-morrow with Cosette: how

far is it from here to Montfermeil?”

The sister, who had no idea of distances, replied, “Oh, I think that he

will be here to-morrow.”

“To-morrow! to-morrow!” said Fantine, “I shall see Cosette to-morrow!

you see, good sister of the good God, that I am no longer ill; I am

mad; I could dance if any one wished it.”

A person who had seen her a quarter of an hour previously would not

have understood the change; she was all rosy now; she spoke in a lively

and natural voice; her whole face was one smile; now and then she

talked, she laughed softly; the joy of a mother is almost infantile.

“Well,” resumed the nun, “now that you are happy, mind me, and do not

talk any more.”

Fantine laid her head on her pillow and said in a low voice: “Yes, lie

down again; be good, for you are going to have your child; Sister

Simplice is right; every one here is right.”

And then, without stirring, without even moving her head, she began to

stare all about her with wide-open eyes and a joyous air, and she said

nothing more.

The sister drew the curtains together again, hoping that she would fall

into a doze. Between seven and eight o’clock the doctor came; not

hearing any sound, he thought Fantine was asleep, entered softly, and

approached the bed on tiptoe; he opened the curtains a little, and, by

the light of the taper, he saw Fantine’s big eyes gazing at him.

She said to him, “She will be allowed to sleep beside me in a little

bed, will she not, sir?”

The doctor thought that she was delirious. She added:—

“See! there is just room.”

The doctor took Sister Simplice aside, and she explained matters to

him; that M. Madeleine was absent for a day or two, and that in their

doubt they had not thought it well to undeceive the invalid, who

believed that the mayor had gone to Montfermeil; that it was possible,

after all, that her guess was correct: the doctor approved.

He returned to Fantine’s bed, and she went on:—

“You see, when she wakes up in the morning, I shall be able to say good

morning to her, poor kitten, and when I cannot sleep at night, I can

hear her asleep; her little gentle breathing will do me good.”

“Give me your hand,” said the doctor.

She stretched out her arm, and exclaimed with a laugh:—

“Ah, hold! in truth, you did not know it; I am cured; Cosette will

arrive to-morrow.”

The doctor was surprised; she was better; the pressure on her chest had

decreased; her pulse had regained its strength; a sort of life had

suddenly supervened and reanimated this poor, worn-out creature.

“Doctor,” she went on, “did the sister tell you that M. le Maire has

gone to get that mite of a child?”

The doctor recommended silence, and that all painful emotions should be

avoided; he prescribed an infusion of pure chinchona, and, in case the

fever should increase again during the night, a calming potion. As he

took his departure, he said to the sister:—

“She is doing better; if good luck willed that the mayor should

actually arrive to-morrow with the child, who knows? there are crises

so astounding; great joy has been known to arrest maladies; I know well

that this is an organic disease, and in an advanced state, but all

those things are such mysteries: we may be able to save her.”

CHAPTER VII—THE TRAVELLER ON HIS ARRIVAL TAKES PRECAUTIONS FOR

DEPARTURE

It was nearly eight o’clock in the evening when the cart, which we left

on the road, entered the porte-cochère of the Hotel de la Poste in

Arras; the man whom we have been following up to this moment alighted

from it, responded with an abstracted air to the attentions of the

people of the inn, sent back the extra horse, and with his own hands

led the little white horse to the stable; then he opened the door of a

billiard-room which was situated on the ground floor, sat down there,

and leaned his elbows on a table; he had taken fourteen hours for the

journey which he had counted on making in six; he did himself the

justice to acknowledge that it was not his fault, but at bottom, he was

not sorry.

The landlady of the hotel entered.

“Does Monsieur wish a bed? Does Monsieur require supper?”

He made a sign of the head in the negative.

“The stableman says that Monsieur’s horse is extremely fatigued.”

Here he broke his silence.

“Will not the horse be in a condition to set out again to-morrow

morning?”

“Oh, Monsieur! he must rest for two days at least.”

He inquired:—

“Is not the posting-station located here?”

“Yes, sir.”

The hostess conducted him to the office; he showed his passport, and

inquired whether there was any way of returning that same night to M.

sur M. by the mail-wagon; the seat beside the post-boy chanced to be

vacant; he engaged it and paid for it. “Monsieur,” said the clerk, “do

not fail to be here ready to start at precisely one o’clock in the

morning.”

This done, he left the hotel and began to wander about the town.

He was not acquainted with Arras; the streets were dark, and he walked

on at random; but he seemed bent upon not asking the way of the

passers-by. He crossed the little river Crinchon, and found himself in

a labyrinth of narrow alleys where he lost his way. A citizen was

passing along with a lantern. After some hesitation, he decided to

apply to this man, not without having first glanced behind and in front

of him, as though he feared lest some one should hear the question

which he was about to put.

“Monsieur,” said he, “where is the court-house, if you please.”

“You do not belong in town, sir?” replied the bourgeois, who was an

oldish man; “well, follow me. I happen to be going in the direction of

the court-house, that is to say, in the direction of the hotel of the

prefecture; for the court-house is undergoing repairs just at this

moment, and the courts are holding their sittings provisionally in the

prefecture.”

“Is it there that the Assizes are held?” he asked.

“Certainly, sir; you see, the prefecture of to-day was the bishop’s

palace before the Revolution. M. de Conzié, who was bishop in ’82,

built a grand hall there. It is in this grand hall that the court is

held.”

On the way, the bourgeois said to him:—

“If Monsieur desires to witness a case, it is rather late. The sittings

generally close at six o’clock.”

When they arrived on the grand square, however, the man pointed out to

him four long windows all lighted up, in the front of a vast and gloomy

building.

“Upon my word, sir, you are in luck; you have arrived in season. Do you

see those four windows? That is the Court of Assizes. There is light

there, so they are not through. The matter must have been greatly

protracted, and they are holding an evening session. Do you take an

interest in this affair? Is it a criminal case? Are you a witness?”

He replied:—

“I have not come on any business; I only wish to speak to one of the

lawyers.”

“That is different,” said the bourgeois. “Stop, sir; here is the door

where the sentry stands. You have only to ascend the grand staircase.”

He conformed to the bourgeois’s directions, and a few minutes later he

was in a hall containing many people, and where groups, intermingled

with lawyers in their gowns, were whispering together here and there.

It is always a heart-breaking thing to see these congregations of men

robed in black, murmuring together in low voices, on the threshold of

the halls of justice. It is rare that charity and pity are the outcome

of these words. Condemnations pronounced in advance are more likely to

be the result. All these groups seem to the passing and thoughtful

observer so many sombre hives where buzzing spirits construct in

concert all sorts of dark edifices.

This spacious hall, illuminated by a single lamp, was the old hall of

the episcopal palace, and served as the large hall of the palace of

justice. A double-leaved door, which was closed at that moment,

separated it from the large apartment where the court was sitting.

The obscurity was such that he did not fear to accost the first lawyer

whom he met.

“What stage have they reached, sir?” he asked.

“It is finished,” said the lawyer.

“Finished!”

This word was repeated in such accents that the lawyer turned round.

“Excuse me sir; perhaps you are a relative?”

“No; I know no one here. Has judgment been pronounced?”

“Of course. Nothing else was possible.”

“To penal servitude?”

“For life.”

He continued, in a voice so weak that it was barely audible:—

“Then his identity was established?”

“What identity?” replied the lawyer. “There was no identity to be

established. The matter was very simple. The woman had murdered her

child; the infanticide was proved; the jury threw out the question of

premeditation, and she was condemned for life.”

“So it was a woman?” said he.

“Why, certainly. The Limosin woman. Of what are you speaking?”

“Nothing. But since it is all over, how comes it that the hall is still

lighted?”

“For another case, which was begun about two hours ago.”

“What other case?”

“Oh! this one is a clear case also. It is about a sort of blackguard; a

man arrested for a second offence; a convict who has been guilty of

theft. I don’t know his name exactly. There’s a bandit’s phiz for you!

I’d send him to the galleys on the strength of his face alone.”

“Is there any way of getting into the court-room, sir?” said he.

“I really think that there is not. There is a great crowd. However, the

hearing has been suspended. Some people have gone out, and when the

hearing is resumed, you might make an effort.”

“Where is the entrance?”

“Through yonder large door.”

The lawyer left him. In the course of a few moments he had experienced,

almost simultaneously, almost intermingled with each other, all

possible emotions. The words of this indifferent spectator had, in

turn, pierced his heart like needles of ice and like blades of fire.

When he saw that nothing was settled, he breathed freely once more; but

he could not have told whether what he felt was pain or pleasure.

He drew near to many groups and listened to what they were saying. The

docket of the session was very heavy; the president had appointed for

the same day two short and simple cases. They had begun with the

infanticide, and now they had reached the convict, the old offender,

the “return horse.” This man had stolen apples, but that did not appear

to be entirely proved; what had been proved was, that he had already

been in the galleys at Toulon. It was that which lent a bad aspect to

his case. However, the man’s examination and the depositions of the

witnesses had been completed, but the lawyer’s plea, and the speech of

the public prosecutor were still to come; it could not be finished

before midnight. The man would probably be condemned; the

attorney-general was very clever, and never \_missed\_ his culprits; he

was a brilliant fellow who wrote verses.

An usher stood at the door communicating with the hall of the Assizes.

He inquired of this usher:—

“Will the door be opened soon, sir?”

“It will not be opened at all,” replied the usher.

“What! It will not be opened when the hearing is resumed? Is not the

hearing suspended?”

“The hearing has just been begun again,” replied the usher, “but the

door will not be opened again.”

“Why?”

“Because the hall is full.”

“What! There is not room for one more?”

“Not another one. The door is closed. No one can enter now.”

The usher added after a pause: “There are, to tell the truth, two or

three extra places behind Monsieur le Président, but Monsieur le

Président only admits public functionaries to them.”

So saying, the usher turned his back.

He retired with bowed head, traversed the antechamber, and slowly

descended the stairs, as though hesitating at every step. It is

probable that he was holding counsel with himself. The violent conflict

which had been going on within him since the preceding evening was not

yet ended; and every moment he encountered some new phase of it. On

reaching the landing-place, he leaned his back against the balusters

and folded his arms. All at once he opened his coat, drew out his

pocket-book, took from it a pencil, tore out a leaf, and upon that leaf

he wrote rapidly, by the light of the street lantern, this line: \_M.

Madeleine, Mayor of M. sur M.\_; then he ascended the stairs once more

with great strides, made his way through the crowd, walked straight up

to the usher, handed him the paper, and said in an authoritative

manner:—

“Take this to Monsieur le Président.”

The usher took the paper, cast a glance upon it, and obeyed.

CHAPTER VIII—AN ENTRANCE BY FAVOR

Although he did not suspect the fact, the mayor of M. sur M. enjoyed a

sort of celebrity. For the space of seven years his reputation for

virtue had filled the whole of Bas Boulonnais; it had eventually passed

the confines of a small district and had been spread abroad through two

or three neighboring departments. Besides the service which he had

rendered to the chief town by resuscitating the black jet industry,

there was not one out of the hundred and forty communes of the

arrondissement of M. sur M. which was not indebted to him for some

benefit. He had even at need contrived to aid and multiply the

industries of other arrondissements. It was thus that he had, when

occasion offered, supported with his credit and his funds the linen

factory at Boulogne, the flax-spinning industry at Frévent, and the

hydraulic manufacture of cloth at Boubers-sur-Canche. Everywhere the

name of M. Madeleine was pronounced with veneration. Arras and Douai

envied the happy little town of M. sur M. its mayor.

The Councillor of the Royal Court of Douai, who was presiding over this

session of the Assizes at Arras, was acquainted, in common with the

rest of the world, with this name which was so profoundly and

universally honored. When the usher, discreetly opening the door which

connected the council-chamber with the court-room, bent over the back

of the President’s armchair and handed him the paper on which was

inscribed the line which we have just perused, adding: “The gentleman

desires to be present at the trial,” the President, with a quick and

deferential movement, seized a pen and wrote a few words at the bottom

of the paper and returned it to the usher, saying, “Admit him.”

The unhappy man whose history we are relating had remained near the

door of the hall, in the same place and the same attitude in which the

usher had left him. In the midst of his reverie he heard some one

saying to him, “Will Monsieur do me the honor to follow me?” It was the

same usher who had turned his back upon him but a moment previously,

and who was now bowing to the earth before him. At the same time, the

usher handed him the paper. He unfolded it, and as he chanced to be

near the light, he could read it.

“The President of the Court of Assizes presents his respects to M.

Madeleine.”

He crushed the paper in his hand as though those words contained for

him a strange and bitter aftertaste.

He followed the usher.

A few minutes later he found himself alone in a sort of wainscoted

cabinet of severe aspect, lighted by two wax candles, placed upon a

table with a green cloth. The last words of the usher who had just

quitted him still rang in his ears: “Monsieur, you are now in the

council-chamber; you have only to turn the copper handle of yonder

door, and you will find yourself in the court-room, behind the

President’s chair.” These words were mingled in his thoughts with a

vague memory of narrow corridors and dark staircases which he had

recently traversed.

The usher had left him alone. The supreme moment had arrived. He sought

to collect his faculties, but could not. It is chiefly at the moment

when there is the greatest need for attaching them to the painful

realities of life, that the threads of thought snap within the brain.

He was in the very place where the judges deliberated and condemned.

With stupid tranquillity he surveyed this peaceful and terrible

apartment, where so many lives had been broken, which was soon to ring

with his name, and which his fate was at that moment traversing. He

stared at the wall, then he looked at himself, wondering that it should

be that chamber and that it should be he.

He had eaten nothing for four and twenty hours; he was worn out by the

jolts of the cart, but he was not conscious of it. It seemed to him

that he felt nothing.

He approached a black frame which was suspended on the wall, and which

contained, under glass, an ancient autograph letter of Jean Nicolas

Pache, mayor of Paris and minister, and dated, through an error, no

doubt, the \_9th of June\_, of the year II., and in which Pache forwarded

to the commune the list of ministers and deputies held in arrest by

them. Any spectator who had chanced to see him at that moment, and who

had watched him, would have imagined, doubtless, that this letter

struck him as very curious, for he did not take his eyes from it, and

he read it two or three times. He read it without paying any attention

to it, and unconsciously. He was thinking of Fantine and Cosette.

As he dreamed, he turned round, and his eyes fell upon the brass knob

of the door which separated him from the Court of Assizes. He had

almost forgotten that door. His glance, calm at first, paused there,

remained fixed on that brass handle, then grew terrified, and little by

little became impregnated with fear. Beads of perspiration burst forth

among his hair and trickled down upon his temples.

At a certain moment he made that indescribable gesture of a sort of

authority mingled with rebellion, which is intended to convey, and

which does so well convey, \_“Pardieu! who compels me to this?”\_ Then he

wheeled briskly round, caught sight of the door through which he had

entered in front of him, went to it, opened it, and passed out. He was

no longer in that chamber; he was outside in a corridor, a long, narrow

corridor, broken by steps and gratings, making all sorts of angles,

lighted here and there by lanterns similar to the night taper of

invalids, the corridor through which he had approached. He breathed, he

listened; not a sound in front, not a sound behind him, and he fled as

though pursued.

When he had turned many angles in this corridor, he still listened. The

same silence reigned, and there was the same darkness around him. He

was out of breath; he staggered; he leaned against the wall. The stone

was cold; the perspiration lay ice-cold on his brow; he straightened

himself up with a shiver.

Then, there alone in the darkness, trembling with cold and with

something else, too, perchance, he meditated.

He had meditated all night long; he had meditated all the day: he heard

within him but one voice, which said, “Alas!”

A quarter of an hour passed thus. At length he bowed his head, sighed

with agony, dropped his arms, and retraced his steps. He walked slowly,

and as though crushed. It seemed as though some one had overtaken him

in his flight and was leading him back.

He re-entered the council-chamber. The first thing he caught sight of

was the knob of the door. This knob, which was round and of polished

brass, shone like a terrible star for him. He gazed at it as a lamb

might gaze into the eye of a tiger.

He could not take his eyes from it. From time to time he advanced a

step and approached the door.

Had he listened, he would have heard the sound of the adjoining hall

like a sort of confused murmur; but he did not listen, and he did not

hear.

Suddenly, without himself knowing how it happened, he found himself

near the door; he grasped the knob convulsively; the door opened.

He was in the court-room.

CHAPTER IX—A PLACE WHERE CONVICTIONS ARE IN PROCESS OF FORMATION

He advanced a pace, closed the door mechanically behind him, and

remained standing, contemplating what he saw.

It was a vast and badly lighted apartment, now full of uproar, now full

of silence, where all the apparatus of a criminal case, with its petty

and mournful gravity in the midst of the throng, was in process of

development.

At the one end of the hall, the one where he was, were judges, with

abstracted air, in threadbare robes, who were gnawing their nails or

closing their eyelids; at the other end, a ragged crowd; lawyers in all

sorts of attitudes; soldiers with hard but honest faces; ancient,

spotted woodwork, a dirty ceiling, tables covered with serge that was

yellow rather than green; doors blackened by handmarks; tap-room lamps

which emitted more smoke than light, suspended from nails in the

wainscot; on the tables candles in brass candlesticks; darkness,

ugliness, sadness; and from all this there was disengaged an austere

and august impression, for one there felt that grand human thing which

is called the law, and that grand divine thing which is called justice.

No one in all that throng paid any attention to him; all glances were

directed towards a single point, a wooden bench placed against a small

door, in the stretch of wall on the President’s left; on this bench,

illuminated by several candles, sat a man between two gendarmes.

This man was \_the\_ man.

He did not seek him; he saw him; his eyes went thither naturally, as

though they had known beforehand where that figure was.

He thought he was looking at himself, grown old; not absolutely the

same in face, of course, but exactly similar in attitude and aspect,

with his bristling hair, with that wild and uneasy eye, with that

blouse, just as it was on the day when he entered D——, full of hatred,

concealing his soul in that hideous mass of frightful thoughts which he

had spent nineteen years in collecting on the floor of the prison.

He said to himself with a shudder, “Good God! shall I become like that

again?”

This creature seemed to be at least sixty; there was something

indescribably coarse, stupid, and frightened about him.

At the sound made by the opening door, people had drawn aside to make

way for him; the President had turned his head, and, understanding that

the personage who had just entered was the mayor of M. sur M., he had

bowed to him; the attorney-general, who had seen M. Madeleine at M. sur

M., whither the duties of his office had called him more than once,

recognized him and saluted him also: he had hardly perceived it; he was

the victim of a sort of hallucination; he was watching.

Judges, clerks, gendarmes, a throng of cruelly curious heads, all these

he had already beheld once, in days gone by, twenty-seven years before;

he had encountered those fatal things once more; there they were; they

moved; they existed; it was no longer an effort of his memory, a mirage

of his thought; they were real gendarmes and real judges, a real crowd,

and real men of flesh and blood: it was all over; he beheld the

monstrous aspects of his past reappear and live once more around him,

with all that there is formidable in reality.

All this was yawning before him.

He was horrified by it; he shut his eyes, and exclaimed in the deepest

recesses of his soul, “Never!”

And by a tragic play of destiny which made all his ideas tremble, and

rendered him nearly mad, it was another self of his that was there! all

called that man who was being tried Jean Valjean.

Under his very eyes, unheard-of vision, he had a sort of representation

of the most horrible moment of his life, enacted by his spectre.

Everything was there; the apparatus was the same, the hour of the

night, the faces of the judges, of soldiers, and of spectators; all

were the same, only above the President’s head there hung a crucifix,

something which the courts had lacked at the time of his condemnation:

God had been absent when he had been judged.

There was a chair behind him; he dropped into it, terrified at the

thought that he might be seen; when he was seated, he took advantage of

a pile of cardboard boxes, which stood on the judge’s desk, to conceal

his face from the whole room; he could now see without being seen; he

had fully regained consciousness of the reality of things; gradually he

recovered; he attained that phase of composure where it is possible to

listen.

M. Bamatabois was one of the jurors.

He looked for Javert, but did not see him; the seat of the witnesses

was hidden from him by the clerk’s table, and then, as we have just

said, the hall was sparely lighted.

At the moment of this entrance, the defendant’s lawyer had just

finished his plea.

The attention of all was excited to the highest pitch; the affair had

lasted for three hours: for three hours that crowd had been watching a

strange man, a miserable specimen of humanity, either profoundly stupid

or profoundly subtle, gradually bending beneath the weight of a

terrible likeness. This man, as the reader already knows, was a

vagabond who had been found in a field carrying a branch laden with

ripe apples, broken in the orchard of a neighbor, called the Pierron

orchard. Who was this man? an examination had been made; witnesses had

been heard, and they were unanimous; light had abounded throughout the

entire debate; the accusation said: “We have in our grasp not only a

marauder, a stealer of fruit; we have here, in our hands, a bandit, an

old offender who has broken his ban, an ex-convict, a miscreant of the

most dangerous description, a malefactor named Jean Valjean, whom

justice has long been in search of, and who, eight years ago, on

emerging from the galleys at Toulon, committed a highway robbery,

accompanied by violence, on the person of a child, a Savoyard named

Little Gervais; a crime provided for by article 383 of the Penal Code,

the right to try him for which we reserve hereafter, when his identity

shall have been judicially established. He has just committed a fresh

theft; it is a case of a second offence; condemn him for the fresh

deed; later on he will be judged for the old crime.” In the face of

this accusation, in the face of the unanimity of the witnesses, the

accused appeared to be astonished more than anything else; he made

signs and gestures which were meant to convey No, or else he stared at

the ceiling: he spoke with difficulty, replied with embarrassment, but

his whole person, from head to foot, was a denial; he was an idiot in

the presence of all these minds ranged in order of battle around him,

and like a stranger in the midst of this society which was seizing fast

upon him; nevertheless, it was a question of the most menacing future

for him; the likeness increased every moment, and the entire crowd

surveyed, with more anxiety than he did himself, that sentence

freighted with calamity, which descended ever closer over his head;

there was even a glimpse of a possibility afforded; besides the

galleys, a possible death penalty, in case his identity were

established, and the affair of Little Gervais were to end thereafter in

condemnation. Who was this man? what was the nature of his apathy? was

it imbecility or craft? Did he understand too well, or did he not

understand at all? these were questions which divided the crowd, and

seemed to divide the jury; there was something both terrible and

puzzling in this case: the drama was not only melancholy; it was also

obscure.

The counsel for the defence had spoken tolerably well, in that

provincial tongue which has long constituted the eloquence of the bar,

and which was formerly employed by all advocates, at Paris as well as

at Romorantin or at Montbrison, and which to-day, having become

classic, is no longer spoken except by the official orators of

magistracy, to whom it is suited on account of its grave sonorousness

and its majestic stride; a tongue in which a husband is called \_a

consort\_, and a woman \_a spouse\_; Paris, \_the centre of art and

civilization\_; the king, \_the monarch\_; Monseigneur the Bishop, \_a

sainted pontiff\_; the district-attorney, \_the eloquent interpreter of

public prosecution\_; the arguments, \_the accents which we have just

listened to\_; the age of Louis XIV., \_the grand age\_; a theatre, \_the

temple of Melpomene\_; the reigning family, \_the august blood of our

kings\_; a concert, \_a musical solemnity\_; the General Commandant of the

province, \_the illustrious warrior, who, etc.\_; the pupils in the

seminary, \_these tender levities\_; errors imputed to newspapers, \_the

imposture which distills its venom through the columns of those

organs\_; etc. The lawyer had, accordingly, begun with an explanation as

to the theft of the apples,—an awkward matter couched in fine style;

but Bénigne Bossuet himself was obliged to allude to a chicken in the

midst of a funeral oration, and he extricated himself from the

situation in stately fashion. The lawyer established the fact that the

theft of the apples had not been circumstantially proved. His client,

whom he, in his character of counsel, persisted in calling

Champmathieu, had not been seen scaling that wall nor breaking that

branch by any one. He had been taken with that branch (which the lawyer

preferred to call a \_bough\_) in his possession; but he said that he had

found it broken off and lying on the ground, and had picked it up.

Where was there any proof to the contrary? No doubt that branch had

been broken off and concealed after the scaling of the wall, then

thrown away by the alarmed marauder; there was no doubt that there had

been a thief in the case. But what proof was there that that thief had

been Champmathieu? One thing only. His character as an ex-convict. The

lawyer did not deny that that character appeared to be, unhappily, well

attested; the accused had resided at Faverolles; the accused had

exercised the calling of a tree-pruner there; the name of Champmathieu

might well have had its origin in Jean Mathieu; all that was true,—in

short, four witnesses recognize Champmathieu, positively and without

hesitation, as that convict, Jean Valjean; to these signs, to this

testimony, the counsel could oppose nothing but the denial of his

client, the denial of an interested party; but supposing that he was

the convict Jean Valjean, did that prove that he was the thief of the

apples? that was a presumption at the most, not a proof. The prisoner,

it was true, and his counsel, “in good faith,” was obliged to admit it,

had adopted “a bad system of defence.” He obstinately denied

everything, the theft and his character of convict. An admission upon

this last point would certainly have been better, and would have won

for him the indulgence of his judges; the counsel had advised him to do

this; but the accused had obstinately refused, thinking, no doubt, that

he would save everything by admitting nothing. It was an error; but

ought not the paucity of this intelligence to be taken into

consideration? This man was visibly stupid. Long-continued wretchedness

in the galleys, long misery outside the galleys, had brutalized him,

etc. He defended himself badly; was that a reason for condemning him?

As for the affair with Little Gervais, the counsel need not discuss it;

it did not enter into the case. The lawyer wound up by beseeching the

jury and the court, if the identity of Jean Valjean appeared to them to

be evident, to apply to him the police penalties which are provided for

a criminal who has broken his ban, and not the frightful chastisement

which descends upon the convict guilty of a second offence.

The district-attorney answered the counsel for the defence. He was

violent and florid, as district-attorneys usually are.

He congratulated the counsel for the defence on his “loyalty,” and

skilfully took advantage of this loyalty. He reached the accused

through all the concessions made by his lawyer. The advocate had seemed

to admit that the prisoner was Jean Valjean. He took note of this. So

this man was Jean Valjean. This point had been conceded to the

accusation and could no longer be disputed. Here, by means of a clever

autonomasia which went back to the sources and causes of crime, the

district-attorney thundered against the immorality of the romantic

school, then dawning under the name of \_the Satanic school\_, which had

been bestowed upon it by the critics of the \_Quotidienne\_ and the

\_Oriflamme\_; he attributed, not without some probability, to the

influence of this perverse literature the crime of Champmathieu, or

rather, to speak more correctly, of Jean Valjean. Having exhausted

these considerations, he passed on to Jean Valjean himself. Who was

this Jean Valjean? Description of Jean Valjean: a monster spewed forth,

etc. The model for this sort of description is contained in the tale of

Théramène, which is not useful to tragedy, but which every day renders

great services to judicial eloquence. The audience and the jury

“shuddered.” The description finished, the district-attorney resumed

with an oratorical turn calculated to raise the enthusiasm of the

journal of the prefecture to the highest pitch on the following day:

And it is such a man, etc., etc., etc., vagabond, beggar, without means

of existence, etc., etc., inured by his past life to culpable deeds,

and but little reformed by his sojourn in the galleys, as was proved by

the crime committed against Little Gervais, etc., etc.; it is such a

man, caught upon the highway in the very act of theft, a few paces from

a wall that had been scaled, still holding in his hand the object

stolen, who denies the crime, the theft, the climbing the wall; denies

everything; denies even his own identity! In addition to a hundred

other proofs, to which we will not recur, four witnesses recognize

him—Javert, the upright inspector of police; Javert, and three of his

former companions in infamy, the convicts Brevet, Chenildieu, and

Cochepaille. What does he offer in opposition to this overwhelming

unanimity? His denial. What obduracy! You will do justice, gentlemen of

the jury, etc., etc. While the district-attorney was speaking, the

accused listened to him open-mouthed, with a sort of amazement in which

some admiration was assuredly blended. He was evidently surprised that

a man could talk like that. From time to time, at those “energetic”

moments of the prosecutor’s speech, when eloquence which cannot contain

itself overflows in a flood of withering epithets and envelops the

accused like a storm, he moved his head slowly from right to left and

from left to right in the sort of mute and melancholy protest with

which he had contented himself since the beginning of the argument. Two

or three times the spectators who were nearest to him heard him say in

a low voice, “That is what comes of not having asked M. Baloup.” The

district-attorney directed the attention of the jury to this stupid

attitude, evidently deliberate, which denoted not imbecility, but

craft, skill, a habit of deceiving justice, and which set forth in all

its nakedness the “profound perversity” of this man. He ended by making

his reserves on the affair of Little Gervais and demanding a severe

sentence.

At that time, as the reader will remember, it was penal servitude for

life.

The counsel for the defence rose, began by complimenting Monsieur

l’Avocat-General on his “admirable speech,” then replied as best he

could; but he weakened; the ground was evidently slipping away from

under his feet.

CHAPTER X—THE SYSTEM OF DENIALS

The moment for closing the debate had arrived. The President had the

accused stand up, and addressed to him the customary question, “Have

you anything to add to your defence?”

The man did not appear to understand, as he stood there, twisting in

his hands a terrible cap which he had.

The President repeated the question.

This time the man heard it. He seemed to understand. He made a motion

like a man who is just waking up, cast his eyes about him, stared at

the audience, the gendarmes, his counsel, the jury, the court, laid his

monstrous fist on the rim of woodwork in front of his bench, took

another look, and all at once, fixing his glance upon the

district-attorney, he began to speak. It was like an eruption. It

seemed, from the manner in which the words escaped from his

mouth,—incoherent, impetuous, pell-mell, tumbling over each other,—as

though they were all pressing forward to issue forth at once. He said:—

“This is what I have to say. That I have been a wheelwright in Paris,

and that it was with Monsieur Baloup. It is a hard trade. In the

wheelwright’s trade one works always in the open air, in courtyards,

under sheds when the masters are good, never in closed workshops,

because space is required, you see. In winter one gets so cold that one

beats one’s arms together to warm one’s self; but the masters don’t

like it; they say it wastes time. Handling iron when there is ice

between the paving-stones is hard work. That wears a man out quickly.

One is old while he is still quite young in that trade. At forty a man

is done for. I was fifty-three. I was in a bad state. And then, workmen

are so mean! When a man is no longer young, they call him nothing but

an old bird, old beast! I was not earning more than thirty sous a day.

They paid me as little as possible. The masters took advantage of my

age—and then I had my daughter, who was a laundress at the river. She

earned a little also. It sufficed for us two. She had trouble, also;

all day long up to her waist in a tub, in rain, in snow. When the wind

cuts your face, when it freezes, it is all the same; you must still

wash. There are people who have not much linen, and wait until late; if

you do not wash, you lose your custom. The planks are badly joined, and

water drops on you from everywhere; you have your petticoats all damp

above and below. That penetrates. She has also worked at the laundry of

the Enfants-Rouges, where the water comes through faucets. You are not

in the tub there; you wash at the faucet in front of you, and rinse in

a basin behind you. As it is enclosed, you are not so cold; but there

is that hot steam, which is terrible, and which ruins your eyes. She

came home at seven o’clock in the evening, and went to bed at once, she

was so tired. Her husband beat her. She is dead. We have not been very

happy. She was a good girl, who did not go to the ball, and who was

very peaceable. I remember one Shrove-Tuesday when she went to bed at

eight o’clock. There, I am telling the truth; you have only to ask. Ah,

yes! how stupid I am! Paris is a gulf. Who knows Father Champmathieu

there? But M. Baloup does, I tell you. Go see at M. Baloup’s; and after

all, I don’t know what is wanted of me.”

The man ceased speaking, and remained standing. He had said these

things in a loud, rapid, hoarse voice, with a sort of irritated and

savage ingenuousness. Once he paused to salute some one in the crowd.

The sort of affirmations which he seemed to fling out before him at

random came like hiccoughs, and to each he added the gesture of a

wood-cutter who is splitting wood. When he had finished, the audience

burst into a laugh. He stared at the public, and, perceiving that they

were laughing, and not understanding why, he began to laugh himself.

It was inauspicious.

The President, an attentive and benevolent man, raised his voice.

He reminded “the gentlemen of the jury” that “the sieur Baloup,

formerly a master-wheelwright, with whom the accused stated that he had

served, had been summoned in vain. He had become bankrupt, and was not

to be found.” Then turning to the accused, he enjoined him to listen to

what he was about to say, and added: “You are in a position where

reflection is necessary. The gravest presumptions rest upon you, and

may induce vital results. Prisoner, in your own interests, I summon you

for the last time to explain yourself clearly on two points. In the

first place, did you or did you not climb the wall of the Pierron

orchard, break the branch, and steal the apples; that is to say, commit

the crime of breaking in and theft? In the second place, are you the

discharged convict, Jean Valjean—yes or no?”

The prisoner shook his head with a capable air, like a man who has

thoroughly understood, and who knows what answer he is going to make.

He opened his mouth, turned towards the President, and said:—

“In the first place—”

Then he stared at his cap, stared at the ceiling, and held his peace.

“Prisoner,” said the district-attorney, in a severe voice; “pay

attention. You are not answering anything that has been asked of you.

Your embarrassment condemns you. It is evident that your name is not

Champmathieu; that you are the convict, Jean Valjean, concealed first

under the name of Jean Mathieu, which was the name of his mother; that

you went to Auvergne; that you were born at Faverolles, where you were

a pruner of trees. It is evident that you have been guilty of entering,

and of the theft of ripe apples from the Pierron orchard. The gentlemen

of the jury will form their own opinion.”

[Illustration: Father Champmathieu on Trial]

The prisoner had finally resumed his seat; he arose abruptly when the

district-attorney had finished, and exclaimed:—

“You are very wicked; that you are! This what I wanted to say; I could

not find words for it at first. I have stolen nothing. I am a man who

does not have something to eat every day. I was coming from Ailly; I

was walking through the country after a shower, which had made the

whole country yellow: even the ponds were overflowed, and nothing

sprang from the sand any more but the little blades of grass at the

wayside. I found a broken branch with apples on the ground; I picked up

the branch without knowing that it would get me into trouble. I have

been in prison, and they have been dragging me about for the last three

months; more than that I cannot say; people talk against me, they tell

me, ‘Answer!’ The gendarme, who is a good fellow, nudges my elbow, and

says to me in a low voice, ‘Come, answer!’ I don’t know how to explain;

I have no education; I am a poor man; that is where they wrong me,

because they do not see this. I have not stolen; I picked up from the

ground things that were lying there. You say, Jean Valjean, Jean

Mathieu! I don’t know those persons; they are villagers. I worked for

M. Baloup, Boulevard de l’Hôpital; my name is Champmathieu. You are

very clever to tell me where I was born; I don’t know myself: it’s not

everybody who has a house in which to come into the world; that would

be too convenient. I think that my father and mother were people who

strolled along the highways; I know nothing different. When I was a

child, they called me \_young fellow\_; now they call me \_old Fellow\_;

those are my baptismal names; take that as you like. I have been in

Auvergne; I have been at Faverolles. Pardi. Well! can’t a man have been

in Auvergne, or at Faverolles, without having been in the galleys? I

tell you that I have not stolen, and that I am Father Champmathieu; I

have been with M. Baloup; I have had a settled residence. You worry me

with your nonsense, there! Why is everybody pursuing me so furiously?”

The district-attorney had remained standing; he addressed the

President:—

“Monsieur le Président, in view of the confused but exceedingly clever

denials of the prisoner, who would like to pass himself off as an

idiot, but who will not succeed in so doing,—we shall attend to

that,—we demand that it shall please you and that it shall please the

court to summon once more into this place the convicts Brevet,

Cochepaille, and Chenildieu, and Police-Inspector Javert, and question

them for the last time as to the identity of the prisoner with the

convict Jean Valjean.”

“I would remind the district-attorney,” said the President, “that

Police-Inspector Javert, recalled by his duties to the capital of a

neighboring arrondissement, left the court-room and the town as soon as

he had made his deposition; we have accorded him permission, with the

consent of the district-attorney and of the counsel for the prisoner.”

“That is true, Mr. President,” responded the district-attorney. “In the

absence of sieur Javert, I think it my duty to remind the gentlemen of

the jury of what he said here a few hours ago. Javert is an estimable

man, who does honor by his rigorous and strict probity to inferior but

important functions. These are the terms of his deposition: ‘I do not

even stand in need of circumstantial proofs and moral presumptions to

give the lie to the prisoner’s denial. I recognize him perfectly. The

name of this man is not Champmathieu; he is an ex-convict named Jean

Valjean, and is very vicious and much to be feared. It is only with

extreme regret that he was released at the expiration of his term. He

underwent nineteen years of penal servitude for theft. He made five or

six attempts to escape. Besides the theft from Little Gervais, and from

the Pierron orchard, I suspect him of a theft committed in the house of

His Grace the late Bishop of D—— I often saw him at the time when I was

adjutant of the galley-guard at the prison in Toulon. I repeat that I

recognize him perfectly.’”

This extremely precise statement appeared to produce a vivid impression

on the public and on the jury. The district-attorney concluded by

insisting, that in default of Javert, the three witnesses Brevet,

Chenildieu, and Cochepaille should be heard once more and solemnly

interrogated.

The President transmitted the order to an usher, and, a moment later,

the door of the witnesses’ room opened. The usher, accompanied by a

gendarme ready to lend him armed assistance, introduced the convict

Brevet. The audience was in suspense; and all breasts heaved as though

they had contained but one soul.

The ex-convict Brevet wore the black and gray waistcoat of the central

prisons. Brevet was a person sixty years of age, who had a sort of

business man’s face, and the air of a rascal. The two sometimes go

together. In prison, whither fresh misdeeds had led him, he had become

something in the nature of a turnkey. He was a man of whom his

superiors said, “He tries to make himself of use.” The chaplains bore

good testimony as to his religious habits. It must not be forgotten

that this passed under the Restoration.

“Brevet,” said the President, “you have undergone an ignominious

sentence, and you cannot take an oath.”

Brevet dropped his eyes.

“Nevertheless,” continued the President, “even in the man whom the law

has degraded, there may remain, when the divine mercy permits it, a

sentiment of honor and of equity. It is to this sentiment that I appeal

at this decisive hour. If it still exists in you,—and I hope it

does,—reflect before replying to me: consider on the one hand, this

man, whom a word from you may ruin; on the other hand, justice, which a

word from you may enlighten. The instant is solemn; there is still time

to retract if you think you have been mistaken. Rise, prisoner. Brevet,

take a good look at the accused, recall your souvenirs, and tell us on

your soul and conscience, if you persist in recognizing this man as

your former companion in the galleys, Jean Valjean?”

Brevet looked at the prisoner, then turned towards the court.

“Yes, Mr. President, I was the first to recognize him, and I stick to

it; that man is Jean Valjean, who entered at Toulon in 1796, and left

in 1815. I left a year later. He has the air of a brute now; but it

must be because age has brutalized him; he was sly at the galleys: I

recognize him positively.”

“Take your seat,” said the President. “Prisoner, remain standing.”

Chenildieu was brought in, a prisoner for life, as was indicated by his

red cassock and his green cap. He was serving out his sentence at the

galleys of Toulon, whence he had been brought for this case. He was a

small man of about fifty, brisk, wrinkled, frail, yellow, brazen-faced,

feverish, who had a sort of sickly feebleness about all his limbs and

his whole person, and an immense force in his glance. His companions in

the galleys had nicknamed him \_I-deny-God\_ (\_Je-nie Dieu\_, Chenildieu).

The President addressed him in nearly the same words which he had used

to Brevet. At the moment when he reminded him of his infamy which

deprived him of the right to take an oath, Chenildieu raised his head

and looked the crowd in the face. The President invited him to

reflection, and asked him as he had asked Brevet, if he persisted in

recognition of the prisoner.

Chenildieu burst out laughing.

“Pardieu, as if I didn’t recognize him! We were attached to the same

chain for five years. So you are sulking, old fellow?”

“Go take your seat,” said the President.

The usher brought in Cochepaille. He was another convict for life, who

had come from the galleys, and was dressed in red, like Chenildieu, was

a peasant from Lourdes, and a half-bear of the Pyrenees. He had guarded

the flocks among the mountains, and from a shepherd he had slipped into

a brigand. Cochepaille was no less savage and seemed even more stupid

than the prisoner. He was one of those wretched men whom nature has

sketched out for wild beasts, and on whom society puts the finishing

touches as convicts in the galleys.

The President tried to touch him with some grave and pathetic words,

and asked him, as he had asked the other two, if he persisted, without

hesitation or trouble, in recognizing the man who was standing before

him.

“He is Jean Valjean,” said Cochepaille. “He was even called

Jean-the-Screw, because he was so strong.”

Each of these affirmations from these three men, evidently sincere and

in good faith, had raised in the audience a murmur of bad augury for

the prisoner,—a murmur which increased and lasted longer each time that

a fresh declaration was added to the proceeding.

The prisoner had listened to them, with that astounded face which was,

according to the accusation, his principal means of defence; at the

first, the gendarmes, his neighbors, had heard him mutter between his

teeth: “Ah, well, he’s a nice one!” after the second, he said, a little

louder, with an air that was almost that of satisfaction, “Good!” at

the third, he cried, “Famous!”

The President addressed him:—

“Have you heard, prisoner? What have you to say?”

He replied:—

“I say, ‘Famous!’”

An uproar broke out among the audience, and was communicated to the

jury; it was evident that the man was lost.

“Ushers,” said the President, “enforce silence! I am going to sum up

the arguments.”

At that moment there was a movement just beside the President; a voice

was heard crying:—

“Brevet! Chenildieu! Cochepaille! look here!”

All who heard that voice were chilled, so lamentable and terrible was

it; all eyes were turned to the point whence it had proceeded. A man,

placed among the privileged spectators who were seated behind the

court, had just risen, had pushed open the half-door which separated

the tribunal from the audience, and was standing in the middle of the

hall; the President, the district-attorney, M. Bamatabois, twenty

persons, recognized him, and exclaimed in concert:—

“M. Madeleine!”

CHAPTER XI—CHAMPMATHIEU MORE AND MORE ASTONISHED

It was he, in fact. The clerk’s lamp illumined his countenance. He held

his hat in his hand; there was no disorder in his clothing; his coat

was carefully buttoned; he was very pale, and he trembled slightly; his

hair, which had still been gray on his arrival in Arras, was now

entirely white: it had turned white during the hour he had sat there.

All heads were raised: the sensation was indescribable; there was a

momentary hesitation in the audience, the voice had been so

heart-rending; the man who stood there appeared so calm that they did

not understand at first. They asked themselves whether he had indeed

uttered that cry; they could not believe that that tranquil man had

been the one to give that terrible outcry.

This indecision only lasted a few seconds. Even before the President

and the district-attorney could utter a word, before the ushers and the

gendarmes could make a gesture, the man whom all still called, at that

moment, M. Madeleine, had advanced towards the witnesses Cochepaille,

Brevet, and Chenildieu.

“Do you not recognize me?” said he.

All three remained speechless, and indicated by a sign of the head that

they did not know him. Cochepaille, who was intimidated, made a

military salute. M. Madeleine turned towards the jury and the court,

and said in a gentle voice:—

“Gentlemen of the jury, order the prisoner to be released! Mr.

President, have me arrested. He is not the man whom you are in search

of; it is I: I am Jean Valjean.”

Not a mouth breathed; the first commotion of astonishment had been

followed by a silence like that of the grave; those within the hall

experienced that sort of religious terror which seizes the masses when

something grand has been done.

In the meantime, the face of the President was stamped with sympathy

and sadness; he had exchanged a rapid sign with the district-attorney

and a few low-toned words with the assistant judges; he addressed the

public, and asked in accents which all understood:—

“Is there a physician present?”

The district-attorney took the word:—

“Gentlemen of the jury, the very strange and unexpected incident which

disturbs the audience inspires us, like yourselves, only with a

sentiment which it is unnecessary for us to express. You all know, by

reputation at least, the honorable M. Madeleine, mayor of M. sur M.; if

there is a physician in the audience, we join the President in

requesting him to attend to M. Madeleine, and to conduct him to his

home.”

M. Madeleine did not allow the district-attorney to finish; he

interrupted him in accents full of suavity and authority. These are the

words which he uttered; here they are literally, as they were written

down, immediately after the trial by one of the witnesses to this

scene, and as they now ring in the ears of those who heard them nearly

forty years ago:—

“I thank you, Mr. District-Attorney, but I am not mad; you shall see;

you were on the point of committing a great error; release this man! I

am fulfilling a duty; I am that miserable criminal. I am the only one

here who sees the matter clearly, and I am telling you the truth. God,

who is on high, looks down on what I am doing at this moment, and that

suffices. You can take me, for here I am: but I have done my best; I

concealed myself under another name; I have become rich; I have become

a mayor; I have tried to re-enter the ranks of the honest. It seems

that that is not to be done. In short, there are many things which I

cannot tell. I will not narrate the story of my life to you; you will

hear it one of these days. I robbed Monseigneur the Bishop, it is true;

it is true that I robbed Little Gervais; they were right in telling you

that Jean Valjean was a very vicious wretch. Perhaps it was not

altogether his fault. Listen, honorable judges! a man who has been so

greatly humbled as I have has neither any remonstrances to make to

Providence, nor any advice to give to society; but, you see, the infamy

from which I have tried to escape is an injurious thing; the galleys

make the convict what he is; reflect upon that, if you please. Before

going to the galleys, I was a poor peasant, with very little

intelligence, a sort of idiot; the galleys wrought a change in me. I

was stupid; I became vicious: I was a block of wood; I became a

firebrand. Later on, indulgence and kindness saved me, as severity had

ruined me. But, pardon me, you cannot understand what I am saying. You

will find at my house, among the ashes in the fireplace, the forty-sou

piece which I stole, seven years ago, from Little Gervais. I have

nothing farther to add; take me. Good God! the district-attorney shakes

his head; you say, ‘M. Madeleine has gone mad!’ you do not believe me!

that is distressing. Do not, at least, condemn this man! What! these

men do not recognize me! I wish Javert were here; he would recognize

me.”

Nothing can reproduce the sombre and kindly melancholy of tone which

accompanied these words.

He turned to the three convicts, and said:—

“Well, I recognize you; do you remember, Brevet?”

He paused, hesitated for an instant, and said:—

“Do you remember the knitted suspenders with a checked pattern which

you wore in the galleys?”

Brevet gave a start of surprise, and surveyed him from head to foot

with a frightened air. He continued:—

“Chenildieu, you who conferred on yourself the name of ‘Jenie-Dieu,’

your whole right shoulder bears a deep burn, because you one day laid

your shoulder against the chafing-dish full of coals, in order to

efface the three letters T. F. P., which are still visible,

nevertheless; answer, is this true?”

“It is true,” said Chenildieu.

He addressed himself to Cochepaille:—

“Cochepaille, you have, near the bend in your left arm, a date stamped

in blue letters with burnt powder; the date is that of the landing of

the Emperor at Cannes, March 1, 1815; pull up your sleeve!”

Cochepaille pushed up his sleeve; all eyes were focused on him and on

his bare arm.

A gendarme held a light close to it; there was the date.

The unhappy man turned to the spectators and the judges with a smile

which still rends the hearts of all who saw it whenever they think of

it. It was a smile of triumph; it was also a smile of despair.

“You see plainly,” he said, “that I am Jean Valjean.”

In that chamber there were no longer either judges, accusers, nor

gendarmes; there was nothing but staring eyes and sympathizing hearts.

No one recalled any longer the part that each might be called upon to

play; the district-attorney forgot he was there for the purpose of

prosecuting, the President that he was there to preside, the counsel

for the defence that he was there to defend. It was a striking

circumstance that no question was put, that no authority intervened.

The peculiarity of sublime spectacles is, that they capture all souls

and turn witnesses into spectators. No one, probably, could have

explained what he felt; no one, probably, said to himself that he was

witnessing the splendid outburst of a grand light: all felt themselves

inwardly dazzled.

It was evident that they had Jean Valjean before their eyes. That was

clear. The appearance of this man had sufficed to suffuse with light

that matter which had been so obscure but a moment previously, without

any further explanation: the whole crowd, as by a sort of electric

revelation, understood instantly and at a single glance the simple and

magnificent history of a man who was delivering himself up so that

another man might not be condemned in his stead. The details, the

hesitations, little possible oppositions, were swallowed up in that

vast and luminous fact.

It was an impression which vanished speedily, but which was

irresistible at the moment.

“I do not wish to disturb the court further,” resumed Jean Valjean. “I

shall withdraw, since you do not arrest me. I have many things to do.

The district-attorney knows who I am; he knows whither I am going; he

can have me arrested when he likes.”

He directed his steps towards the door. Not a voice was raised, not an

arm extended to hinder him. All stood aside. At that moment there was

about him that divine something which causes multitudes to stand aside

and make way for a man. He traversed the crowd slowly. It was never

known who opened the door, but it is certain that he found the door

open when he reached it. On arriving there he turned round and said:—

“I am at your command, Mr. District-Attorney.”

Then he addressed the audience:—

“All of you, all who are present—consider me worthy of pity, do you

not? Good God! When I think of what I was on the point of doing, I

consider that I am to be envied. Nevertheless, I should have preferred

not to have had this occur.”

He withdrew, and the door closed behind him as it had opened, for those

who do certain sovereign things are always sure of being served by some

one in the crowd.

Less than an hour after this, the verdict of the jury freed the said

Champmathieu from all accusations; and Champmathieu, being at once

released, went off in a state of stupefaction, thinking that all men

were fools, and comprehending nothing of this vision.

BOOK EIGHTH—A COUNTER-BLOW

CHAPTER I—IN WHAT MIRROR M. MADELEINE CONTEMPLATES HIS HAIR

The day had begun to dawn. Fantine had passed a sleepless and feverish

night, filled with happy visions; at daybreak she fell asleep. Sister

Simplice, who had been watching with her, availed herself of this

slumber to go and prepare a new potion of chinchona. The worthy sister

had been in the laboratory of the infirmary but a few moments, bending

over her drugs and phials, and scrutinizing things very closely, on

account of the dimness which the half-light of dawn spreads over all

objects. Suddenly she raised her head and uttered a faint shriek. M.

Madeleine stood before her; he had just entered silently.

“Is it you, Mr. Mayor?” she exclaimed.

He replied in a low voice:—

“How is that poor woman?”

“Not so bad just now; but we have been very uneasy.”

She explained to him what had passed: that Fantine had been very ill

the day before, and that she was better now, because she thought that

the mayor had gone to Montfermeil to get her child. The sister dared

not question the mayor; but she perceived plainly from his air that he

had not come from there.

“All that is good,” said he; “you were right not to undeceive her.”

“Yes,” responded the sister; “but now, Mr. Mayor, she will see you and

will not see her child. What shall we say to her?”

He reflected for a moment.

“God will inspire us,” said he.

“But we cannot tell a lie,” murmured the sister, half aloud.

It was broad daylight in the room. The light fell full on M.

Madeleine’s face. The sister chanced to raise her eyes to it.

“Good God, sir!” she exclaimed; “what has happened to you? Your hair is

perfectly white!”

“White!” said he.

Sister Simplice had no mirror. She rummaged in a drawer, and pulled out

the little glass which the doctor of the infirmary used to see whether

a patient was dead and whether he no longer breathed. M. Madeleine took

the mirror, looked at his hair, and said:—

“Well!”

He uttered the word indifferently, and as though his mind were on

something else.

The sister felt chilled by something strange of which she caught a

glimpse in all this.

He inquired:—

“Can I see her?”

“Is not Monsieur le Maire going to have her child brought back to her?”

said the sister, hardly venturing to put the question.

“Of course; but it will take two or three days at least.”

“If she were not to see Monsieur le Maire until that time,” went on the

sister, timidly, “she would not know that Monsieur le Maire had

returned, and it would be easy to inspire her with patience; and when

the child arrived, she would naturally think Monsieur le Maire had just

come with the child. We should not have to enact a lie.”

M. Madeleine seemed to reflect for a few moments; then he said with his

calm gravity:—

“No, sister, I must see her. I may, perhaps, be in haste.”

The nun did not appear to notice this word “perhaps,” which

communicated an obscure and singular sense to the words of the mayor’s

speech. She replied, lowering her eyes and her voice respectfully:—

“In that case, she is asleep; but Monsieur le Maire may enter.”

He made some remarks about a door which shut badly, and the noise of

which might awaken the sick woman; then he entered Fantine’s chamber,

approached the bed and drew aside the curtains. She was asleep. Her

breath issued from her breast with that tragic sound which is peculiar

to those maladies, and which breaks the hearts of mothers when they are

watching through the night beside their sleeping child who is condemned

to death. But this painful respiration hardly troubled a sort of

ineffable serenity which overspread her countenance, and which

transfigured her in her sleep. Her pallor had become whiteness; her

cheeks were crimson; her long golden lashes, the only beauty of her

youth and her virginity which remained to her, palpitated, though they

remained closed and drooping. Her whole person was trembling with an

indescribable unfolding of wings, all ready to open wide and bear her

away, which could be felt as they rustled, though they could not be

seen. To see her thus, one would never have dreamed that she was an

invalid whose life was almost despaired of. She resembled rather

something on the point of soaring away than something on the point of

dying.

The branch trembles when a hand approaches it to pluck a flower, and

seems to both withdraw and to offer itself at one and the same time.

The human body has something of this tremor when the instant arrives in

which the mysterious fingers of Death are about to pluck the soul.

M. Madeleine remained for some time motionless beside that bed, gazing

in turn upon the sick woman and the crucifix, as he had done two months

before, on the day when he had come for the first time to see her in

that asylum. They were both still there in the same attitude—she

sleeping, he praying; only now, after the lapse of two months, her hair

was gray and his was white.

The sister had not entered with him. He stood beside the bed, with his

finger on his lips, as though there were some one in the chamber whom

he must enjoin to silence.

She opened her eyes, saw him, and said quietly, with a smile:—

“And Cosette?”

CHAPTER II—FANTINE HAPPY

She made no movement of either surprise or of joy; she was joy itself.

That simple question, “And Cosette?” was put with so profound a faith,

with so much certainty, with such a complete absence of disquiet and of

doubt, that he found not a word of reply. She continued:—

“I knew that you were there. I was asleep, but I saw you. I have seen

you for a long, long time. I have been following you with my eyes all

night long. You were in a glory, and you had around you all sorts of

celestial forms.”

He raised his glance to the crucifix.

“But,” she resumed, “tell me where Cosette is. Why did not you place

her on my bed against the moment of my waking?”

He made some mechanical reply which he was never afterwards able to

recall.

Fortunately, the doctor had been warned, and he now made his

appearance. He came to the aid of M. Madeleine.

“Calm yourself, my child,” said the doctor; “your child is here.”

Fantine’s eyes beamed and filled her whole face with light. She clasped

her hands with an expression which contained all that is possible to

prayer in the way of violence and tenderness.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, “bring her to me!”

Touching illusion of a mother! Cosette was, for her, still the little

child who is carried.

“Not yet,” said the doctor, “not just now. You still have some fever.

The sight of your child would agitate you and do you harm. You must be

cured first.”

She interrupted him impetuously:—

“But I am cured! Oh, I tell you that I am cured! What an ass that

doctor is! The idea! I want to see my child!”

“You see,” said the doctor, “how excited you become. So long as you are

in this state I shall oppose your having your child. It is not enough

to see her; it is necessary that you should live for her. When you are

reasonable, I will bring her to you myself.”

The poor mother bowed her head.

“I beg your pardon, doctor, I really beg your pardon. Formerly I should

never have spoken as I have just done; so many misfortunes have

happened to me, that I sometimes do not know what I am saying. I

understand you; you fear the emotion. I will wait as long as you like,

but I swear to you that it would not have harmed me to see my daughter.

I have been seeing her; I have not taken my eyes from her since

yesterday evening. Do you know? If she were brought to me now, I should

talk to her very gently. That is all. Is it not quite natural that I

should desire to see my daughter, who has been brought to me expressly

from Montfermeil? I am not angry. I know well that I am about to be

happy. All night long I have seen white things, and persons who smiled

at me. When Monsieur le Docteur pleases, he shall bring me Cosette. I

have no longer any fever; I am well. I am perfectly conscious that

there is nothing the matter with me any more; but I am going to behave

as though I were ill, and not stir, to please these ladies here. When

it is seen that I am very calm, they will say, ‘She must have her

child.’”

M. Madeleine was sitting on a chair beside the bed. She turned towards

him; she was making a visible effort to be calm and “very good,” as she

expressed it in the feebleness of illness which resembles infancy, in

order that, seeing her so peaceable, they might make no difficulty

about bringing Cosette to her. But while she controlled herself she

could not refrain from questioning M. Madeleine.

“Did you have a pleasant trip, Monsieur le Maire? Oh! how good you were

to go and get her for me! Only tell me how she is. Did she stand the

journey well? Alas! she will not recognize me. She must have forgotten

me by this time, poor darling! Children have no memories. They are like

birds. A child sees one thing to-day and another thing to-morrow, and

thinks of nothing any longer. And did she have white linen? Did those

Thénardiers keep her clean? How have they fed her? Oh! if you only knew

how I have suffered, putting such questions as that to myself during

all the time of my wretchedness. Now, it is all past. I am happy. Oh,

how I should like to see her! Do you think her pretty, Monsieur le

Maire? Is not my daughter beautiful? You must have been very cold in

that diligence! Could she not be brought for just one little instant?

She might be taken away directly afterwards. Tell me; you are the

master; it could be so if you chose!”

He took her hand. “Cosette is beautiful,” he said, “Cosette is well.

You shall see her soon; but calm yourself; you are talking with too

much vivacity, and you are throwing your arms out from under the

clothes, and that makes you cough.”

In fact, fits of coughing interrupted Fantine at nearly every word.

Fantine did not murmur; she feared that she had injured by her too

passionate lamentations the confidence which she was desirous of

inspiring, and she began to talk of indifferent things.

“Montfermeil is quite pretty, is it not? People go there on pleasure

parties in summer. Are the Thénardiers prosperous? There are not many

travellers in their parts. That inn of theirs is a sort of a

cook-shop.”

M. Madeleine was still holding her hand, and gazing at her with

anxiety; it was evident that he had come to tell her things before

which his mind now hesitated. The doctor, having finished his visit,

retired. Sister Simplice remained alone with them.

But in the midst of this pause Fantine exclaimed:—

“I hear her! mon Dieu, I hear her!”

She stretched out her arm to enjoin silence about her, held her breath,

and began to listen with rapture.

There was a child playing in the yard—the child of the portress or of

some work-woman. It was one of those accidents which are always

occurring, and which seem to form a part of the mysterious

stage-setting of mournful scenes. The child—a little girl—was going and

coming, running to warm herself, laughing, singing at the top of her

voice. Alas! in what are the plays of children not intermingled. It was

this little girl whom Fantine heard singing.

“Oh!” she resumed, “it is my Cosette! I recognize her voice.”

The child retreated as it had come; the voice died away. Fantine

listened for a while longer, then her face clouded over, and M.

Madeleine heard her say, in a low voice: “How wicked that doctor is not

to allow me to see my daughter! That man has an evil countenance, that

he has.”

But the smiling background of her thoughts came to the front again. She

continued to talk to herself, with her head resting on the pillow: “How

happy we are going to be! We shall have a little garden the very first

thing; M. Madeleine has promised it to me. My daughter will play in the

garden. She must know her letters by this time. I will make her spell.

She will run over the grass after butterflies. I will watch her. Then

she will take her first communion. Ah! when will she take her first

communion?”

She began to reckon on her fingers.

“One, two, three, four—she is seven years old. In five years she will

have a white veil, and openwork stockings; she will look like a little

woman. O my good sister, you do not know how foolish I become when I

think of my daughter’s first communion!”

She began to laugh.

He had released Fantine’s hand. He listened to her words as one listens

to the sighing of the breeze, with his eyes on the ground, his mind

absorbed in reflection which had no bottom. All at once she ceased

speaking, and this caused him to raise his head mechanically. Fantine

had become terrible.

She no longer spoke, she no longer breathed; she had raised herself to

a sitting posture, her thin shoulder emerged from her chemise; her

face, which had been radiant but a moment before, was ghastly, and she

seemed to have fixed her eyes, rendered large with terror, on something

alarming at the other extremity of the room.

“Good God!” he exclaimed; “what ails you, Fantine?”

She made no reply; she did not remove her eyes from the object which

she seemed to see. She removed one hand from his arm, and with the

other made him a sign to look behind him.

He turned, and beheld Javert.

CHAPTER III—JAVERT SATISFIED

This is what had taken place.

The half-hour after midnight had just struck when M. Madeleine quitted

the Hall of Assizes in Arras. He regained his inn just in time to set

out again by the mail-wagon, in which he had engaged his place. A

little before six o’clock in the morning he had arrived at M. sur M.,

and his first care had been to post a letter to M. Laffitte, then to

enter the infirmary and see Fantine.

However, he had hardly quitted the audience hall of the Court of

Assizes, when the district-attorney, recovering from his first shock,

had taken the word to deplore the mad deed of the honorable mayor of M.

sur M., to declare that his convictions had not been in the least

modified by that curious incident, which would be explained thereafter,

and to demand, in the meantime, the condemnation of that Champmathieu,

who was evidently the real Jean Valjean. The district-attorney’s

persistence was visibly at variance with the sentiments of every one,

of the public, of the court, and of the jury. The counsel for the

defence had some difficulty in refuting this harangue and in

establishing that, in consequence of the revelations of M. Madeleine,

that is to say, of the real Jean Valjean, the aspect of the matter had

been thoroughly altered, and that the jury had before their eyes now

only an innocent man. Thence the lawyer had drawn some epiphonemas, not

very fresh, unfortunately, upon judicial errors, etc., etc.; the

President, in his summing up, had joined the counsel for the defence,

and in a few minutes the jury had thrown Champmathieu out of the case.

Nevertheless, the district-attorney was bent on having a Jean Valjean;

and as he had no longer Champmathieu, he took Madeleine.

Immediately after Champmathieu had been set at liberty, the

district-attorney shut himself up with the President. They conferred

“as to the necessity of seizing the person of M. le Maire of M. sur M.”

This phrase, in which there was a great deal of \_of\_, is the

district-attorney’s, written with his own hand, on the minutes of his

report to the attorney-general. His first emotion having passed off,

the President did not offer many objections. Justice must, after all,

take its course. And then, when all was said, although the President

was a kindly and a tolerably intelligent man, he was, at the same time,

a devoted and almost an ardent royalist, and he had been shocked to

hear the Mayor of M. sur M. say the \_Emperor\_, and not \_Bonaparte\_,

when alluding to the landing at Cannes.

The order for his arrest was accordingly despatched. The

district-attorney forwarded it to M. sur M. by a special messenger, at

full speed, and entrusted its execution to Police Inspector Javert.

The reader knows that Javert had returned to M. sur M. immediately

after having given his deposition.

Javert was just getting out of bed when the messenger handed him the

order of arrest and the command to produce the prisoner.

The messenger himself was a very clever member of the police, who, in

two words, informed Javert of what had taken place at Arras. The order

of arrest, signed by the district-attorney, was couched in these words:

“Inspector Javert will apprehend the body of the Sieur Madeleine, mayor

of M. sur M., who, in this day’s session of the court, was recognized

as the liberated convict, Jean Valjean.”

Any one who did not know Javert, and who had chanced to see him at the

moment when he penetrated the antechamber of the infirmary, could have

divined nothing of what had taken place, and would have thought his air

the most ordinary in the world. He was cool, calm, grave, his gray hair

was perfectly smooth upon his temples, and he had just mounted the

stairs with his habitual deliberation. Any one who was thoroughly

acquainted with him, and who had examined him attentively at the

moment, would have shuddered. The buckle of his leather stock was under

his left ear instead of at the nape of his neck. This betrayed unwonted

agitation.

Javert was a complete character, who never had a wrinkle in his duty or

in his uniform; methodical with malefactors, rigid with the buttons of

his coat.

That he should have set the buckle of his stock awry, it was

indispensable that there should have taken place in him one of those

emotions which may be designated as internal earthquakes.

He had come in a simple way, had made a requisition on the neighboring

post for a corporal and four soldiers, had left the soldiers in the

courtyard, had had Fantine’s room pointed out to him by the portress,

who was utterly unsuspicious, accustomed as she was to seeing armed men

inquiring for the mayor.

On arriving at Fantine’s chamber, Javert turned the handle, pushed the

door open with the gentleness of a sick-nurse or a police spy, and

entered.

Properly speaking, he did not enter. He stood erect in the half-open

door, his hat on his head and his left hand thrust into his coat, which

was buttoned up to the chin. In the bend of his elbow the leaden head

of his enormous cane, which was hidden behind him, could be seen.

Thus he remained for nearly a minute, without his presence being

perceived. All at once Fantine raised her eyes, saw him, and made M.

Madeleine turn round.

The instant that Madeleine’s glance encountered Javert’s glance,

Javert, without stirring, without moving from his post, without

approaching him, became terrible. No human sentiment can be as terrible

as joy.

It was the visage of a demon who has just found his damned soul.

The satisfaction of at last getting hold of Jean Valjean caused all

that was in his soul to appear in his countenance. The depths having

been stirred up, mounted to the surface. The humiliation of having, in

some slight degree, lost the scent, and of having indulged, for a few

moments, in an error with regard to Champmathieu, was effaced by pride

at having so well and accurately divined in the first place, and of

having for so long cherished a just instinct. Javert’s content shone

forth in his sovereign attitude. The deformity of triumph overspread

that narrow brow. All the demonstrations of horror which a satisfied

face can afford were there.

Javert was in heaven at that moment. Without putting the thing clearly

to himself, but with a confused intuition of the necessity of his

presence and of his success, he, Javert, personified justice, light,

and truth in their celestial function of crushing out evil. Behind him

and around him, at an infinite distance, he had authority, reason, the

case judged, the legal conscience, the public prosecution, all the

stars; he was protecting order, he was causing the law to yield up its

thunders, he was avenging society, he was lending a helping hand to the

absolute, he was standing erect in the midst of a glory. There existed

in his victory a remnant of defiance and of combat. Erect, haughty,

brilliant, he flaunted abroad in open day the superhuman bestiality of

a ferocious archangel. The terrible shadow of the action which he was

accomplishing caused the vague flash of the social sword to be visible

in his clenched fist; happy and indignant, he held his heel upon crime,

vice, rebellion, perdition, hell; he was radiant, he exterminated, he

smiled, and there was an incontestable grandeur in this monstrous Saint

Michael.

Javert, though frightful, had nothing ignoble about him.

Probity, sincerity, candor, conviction, the sense of duty, are things

which may become hideous when wrongly directed; but which, even when

hideous, remain grand: their majesty, the majesty peculiar to the human

conscience, clings to them in the midst of horror; they are virtues

which have one vice,—error. The honest, pitiless joy of a fanatic in

the full flood of his atrocity preserves a certain lugubriously

venerable radiance. Without himself suspecting the fact, Javert in his

formidable happiness was to be pitied, as is every ignorant man who

triumphs. Nothing could be so poignant and so terrible as this face,

wherein was displayed all that may be designated as the evil of the

good.

CHAPTER IV—AUTHORITY REASSERTS ITS RIGHTS

Fantine had not seen Javert since the day on which the mayor had torn

her from the man. Her ailing brain comprehended nothing, but the only

thing which she did not doubt was that he had come to get her. She

could not endure that terrible face; she felt her life quitting her;

she hid her face in both hands, and shrieked in her anguish:—

“Monsieur Madeleine, save me!”

Jean Valjean—we shall henceforth not speak of him otherwise—had risen.

He said to Fantine in the gentlest and calmest of voices:—

“Be at ease; it is not for you that he is come.”

Then he addressed Javert, and said:—

“I know what you want.”

Javert replied:—

“Be quick about it!”

There lay in the inflection of voice which accompanied these words

something indescribably fierce and frenzied. Javert did not say, “Be

quick about it!” he said “Bequiabouit.”

No orthography can do justice to the accent with which it was uttered:

it was no longer a human word: it was a roar.

He did not proceed according to his custom, he did not enter into the

matter, he exhibited no warrant of arrest. In his eyes, Jean Valjean

was a sort of mysterious combatant, who was not to be laid hands upon,

a wrestler in the dark whom he had had in his grasp for the last five

years, without being able to throw him. This arrest was not a

beginning, but an end. He confined himself to saying, “Be quick about

it!”

As he spoke thus, he did not advance a single step; he hurled at Jean

Valjean a glance which he threw out like a grappling-hook, and with

which he was accustomed to draw wretches violently to him.

It was this glance which Fantine had felt penetrating to the very

marrow of her bones two months previously.

At Javert’s exclamation, Fantine opened her eyes once more. But the

mayor was there; what had she to fear?

Javert advanced to the middle of the room, and cried:—

“See here now! Art thou coming?”

The unhappy woman glanced about her. No one was present excepting the

nun and the mayor. To whom could that abject use of “thou” be

addressed? To her only. She shuddered.

Then she beheld a most unprecedented thing, a thing so unprecedented

that nothing equal to it had appeared to her even in the blackest

deliriums of fever.

She beheld Javert, the police spy, seize the mayor by the collar; she

saw the mayor bow his head. It seemed to her that the world was coming

to an end.

Javert had, in fact, grasped Jean Valjean by the collar.

“Monsieur le Maire!” shrieked Fantine.

Javert burst out laughing with that frightful laugh which displayed all

his gums.

“There is no longer any Monsieur le Maire here!”

Jean Valjean made no attempt to disengage the hand which grasped the

collar of his coat. He said:—

“Javert—”

Javert interrupted him: “Call me Mr. Inspector.”

“Monsieur,” said Jean Valjean, “I should like to say a word to you in

private.”

“Aloud! Say it aloud!” replied Javert; “people are in the habit of

talking aloud to me.”

Jean Valjean went on in a lower tone:—

“I have a request to make of you—”

“I tell you to speak loud.”

“But you alone should hear it—”

“What difference does that make to me? I shall not listen.”

Jean Valjean turned towards him and said very rapidly and in a very low

voice:—

“Grant me three days’ grace! three days in which to go and fetch the

child of this unhappy woman. I will pay whatever is necessary. You

shall accompany me if you choose.”

“You are making sport of me!” cried Javert. “Come now, I did not think

you such a fool! You ask me to give you three days in which to run

away! You say that it is for the purpose of fetching that creature’s

child! Ah! Ah! That’s good! That’s really capital!”

Fantine was seized with a fit of trembling.

“My child!” she cried, “to go and fetch my child! She is not here,

then! Answer me, sister; where is Cosette? I want my child! Monsieur

Madeleine! Monsieur le Maire!”

Javert stamped his foot.

“And now there’s the other one! Will you hold your tongue, you hussy?

It’s a pretty sort of a place where convicts are magistrates, and where

women of the town are cared for like countesses! Ah! But we are going

to change all that; it is high time!”

He stared intently at Fantine, and added, once more taking into his

grasp Jean Valjean’s cravat, shirt and collar:—

“I tell you that there is no Monsieur Madeleine and that there is no

Monsieur le Maire. There is a thief, a brigand, a convict named Jean

Valjean! And I have him in my grasp! That’s what there is!”

Fantine raised herself in bed with a bound, supporting herself on her

stiffened arms and on both hands: she gazed at Jean Valjean, she gazed

at Javert, she gazed at the nun, she opened her mouth as though to

speak; a rattle proceeded from the depths of her throat, her teeth

chattered; she stretched out her arms in her agony, opening her hands

convulsively, and fumbling about her like a drowning person; then

suddenly fell back on her pillow.

Her head struck the head-board of the bed and fell forwards on her

breast, with gaping mouth and staring, sightless eyes.

She was dead.

Jean Valjean laid his hand upon the detaining hand of Javert, and

opened it as he would have opened the hand of a baby; then he said to

Javert:—

“You have murdered that woman.”

“Let’s have an end of this!” shouted Javert, in a fury; “I am not here

to listen to argument. Let us economize all that; the guard is below;

march on instantly, or you’ll get the thumb-screws!”

In the corner of the room stood an old iron bedstead, which was in a

decidedly decrepit state, and which served the sisters as a camp-bed

when they were watching with the sick. Jean Valjean stepped up to this

bed, in a twinkling wrenched off the head-piece, which was already in a

dilapidated condition, an easy matter to muscles like his, grasped the

principal rod like a bludgeon, and glanced at Javert. Javert retreated

towards the door. Jean Valjean, armed with his bar of iron, walked

slowly up to Fantine’s couch. When he arrived there he turned and said

to Javert, in a voice that was barely audible:—

“I advise you not to disturb me at this moment.”

One thing is certain, and that is, that Javert trembled.

It did occur to him to summon the guard, but Jean Valjean might avail

himself of that moment to effect his escape; so he remained, grasped

his cane by the small end, and leaned against the door-post, without

removing his eyes from Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean rested his elbow on the knob at the head of the bed, and

his brow on his hand, and began to contemplate the motionless body of

Fantine, which lay extended there. He remained thus, mute, absorbed,

evidently with no further thought of anything connected with this life.

Upon his face and in his attitude there was nothing but inexpressible

pity. After a few moments of this meditation he bent towards Fantine,

and spoke to her in a low voice.

What did he say to her? What could this man, who was reproved, say to

that woman, who was dead? What words were those? No one on earth heard

them. Did the dead woman hear them? There are some touching illusions

which are, perhaps, sublime realities. The point as to which there

exists no doubt is, that Sister Simplice, the sole witness of the

incident, often said that at the moment that Jean Valjean whispered in

Fantine’s ear, she distinctly beheld an ineffable smile dawn on those

pale lips, and in those dim eyes, filled with the amazement of the

tomb.

Jean Valjean took Fantine’s head in both his hands, and arranged it on

the pillow as a mother might have done for her child; then he tied the

string of her chemise, and smoothed her hair back under her cap. That

done, he closed her eyes.

Fantine’s face seemed strangely illuminated at that moment.

Death, that signifies entrance into the great light.

Fantine’s hand was hanging over the side of the bed. Jean Valjean knelt

down before that hand, lifted it gently, and kissed it.

Then he rose, and turned to Javert.

“Now,” said he, “I am at your disposal.”

CHAPTER V—A SUITABLE TOMB

Javert deposited Jean Valjean in the city prison.

The arrest of M. Madeleine occasioned a sensation, or rather, an

extraordinary commotion in M. sur M. We are sorry that we cannot

conceal the fact, that at the single word, “He was a convict,” nearly

every one deserted him. In less than two hours all the good that he had

done had been forgotten, and he was nothing but a “convict from the

galleys.” It is just to add that the details of what had taken place at

Arras were not yet known. All day long conversations like the following

were to be heard in all quarters of the town:—

“You don’t know? He was a liberated convict!” “Who?” “The mayor.” “Bah!

M. Madeleine?” “Yes.” “Really?” “His name was not Madeleine at all; he

had a frightful name, Béjean, Bojean, Boujean.” “Ah! Good God!” “He has

been arrested.” “Arrested!” “In prison, in the city prison, while

waiting to be transferred.” “Until he is transferred!” “He is to be

transferred!” “Where is he to be taken?” “He will be tried at the

Assizes for a highway robbery which he committed long ago.” “Well! I

suspected as much. That man was too good, too perfect, too affected. He

refused the cross; he bestowed sous on all the little scamps he came

across. I always thought there was some evil history back of all that.”

The “drawing-rooms” particularly abounded in remarks of this nature.

One old lady, a subscriber to the \_Drapeau Blanc\_, made the following

remark, the depth of which it is impossible to fathom:—

“I am not sorry. It will be a lesson to the Bonapartists!”

It was thus that the phantom which had been called M. Madeleine

vanished from M. sur M. Only three or four persons in all the town

remained faithful to his memory. The old portress who had served him

was among the number.

On the evening of that day the worthy old woman was sitting in her

lodge, still in a thorough fright, and absorbed in sad reflections. The

factory had been closed all day, the carriage gate was bolted, the

street was deserted. There was no one in the house but the two nuns,

Sister Perpétue and Sister Simplice, who were watching beside the body

of Fantine.

Towards the hour when M. Madeleine was accustomed to return home, the

good portress rose mechanically, took from a drawer the key of M.

Madeleine’s chamber, and the flat candlestick which he used every

evening to go up to his quarters; then she hung the key on the nail

whence he was accustomed to take it, and set the candlestick on one

side, as though she was expecting him. Then she sat down again on her

chair, and became absorbed in thought once more. The poor, good old

woman had done all this without being conscious of it.

It was only at the expiration of two hours that she roused herself from

her reverie, and exclaimed, “Hold! My good God Jesus! And I hung his

key on the nail!”

At that moment the small window in the lodge opened, a hand passed

through, seized the key and the candlestick, and lighted the taper at

the candle which was burning there.

The portress raised her eyes, and stood there with gaping mouth, and a

shriek which she confined to her throat.

She knew that hand, that arm, the sleeve of that coat.

It was M. Madeleine.

It was several seconds before she could speak; she had a \_seizure\_, as

she said herself, when she related the adventure afterwards.

“Good God, Monsieur le Maire,” she cried at last, “I thought you were—”

She stopped; the conclusion of her sentence would have been lacking in

respect towards the beginning. Jean Valjean was still Monsieur le Maire

to her.

He finished her thought.

“In prison,” said he. “I was there; I broke a bar of one of the

windows; I let myself drop from the top of a roof, and here I am. I am

going up to my room; go and find Sister Simplice for me. She is with

that poor woman, no doubt.”

The old woman obeyed in all haste.

He gave her no orders; he was quite sure that she would guard him

better than he should guard himself.

No one ever found out how he had managed to get into the courtyard

without opening the big gates. He had, and always carried about him, a

pass-key which opened a little side-door; but he must have been

searched, and his latch-key must have been taken from him. This point

was never explained.

He ascended the staircase leading to his chamber. On arriving at the

top, he left his candle on the top step of his stairs, opened his door

with very little noise, went and closed his window and his shutters by

feeling, then returned for his candle and re-entered his room.

It was a useful precaution; it will be recollected that his window

could be seen from the street.

He cast a glance about him, at his table, at his chair, at his bed

which had not been disturbed for three days. No trace of the disorder

of the night before last remained. The portress had “done up” his room;

only she had picked out of the ashes and placed neatly on the table the

two iron ends of the cudgel and the forty-sou piece which had been

blackened by the fire.

He took a sheet of paper, on which he wrote: “These are the two tips of

my iron-shod cudgel and the forty-sou piece stolen from Little Gervais,

which I mentioned at the Court of Assizes,” and he arranged this piece

of paper, the bits of iron, and the coin in such a way that they were

the first things to be seen on entering the room. From a cupboard he

pulled out one of his old shirts, which he tore in pieces. In the

strips of linen thus prepared he wrapped the two silver candlesticks.

He betrayed neither haste nor agitation; and while he was wrapping up

the Bishop’s candlesticks, he nibbled at a piece of black bread. It was

probably the prison-bread which he had carried with him in his flight.

This was proved by the crumbs which were found on the floor of the room

when the authorities made an examination later on.

There came two taps at the door.

“Come in,” said he.

It was Sister Simplice.

She was pale; her eyes were red; the candle which she carried trembled

in her hand. The peculiar feature of the violences of destiny is, that

however polished or cool we may be, they wring human nature from our

very bowels, and force it to reappear on the surface. The emotions of

that day had turned the nun into a woman once more. She had wept, and

she was trembling.

Jean Valjean had just finished writing a few lines on a paper, which he

handed to the nun, saying, “Sister, you will give this to Monsieur le

Curé.”

The paper was not folded. She cast a glance upon it.

“You can read it,” said he.

She read:—

“I beg Monsieur le Curé to keep an eye on all that I leave behind me.

He will be so good as to pay out of it the expenses of my trial, and of

the funeral of the woman who died yesterday. The rest is for the poor.”

The sister tried to speak, but she only managed to stammer a few

inarticulate sounds. She succeeded in saying, however:—

“Does not Monsieur le Maire desire to take a last look at that poor,

unhappy woman?”

“No,” said he; “I am pursued; it would only end in their arresting me

in that room, and that would disturb her.”

He had hardly finished when a loud noise became audible on the

staircase. They heard a tumult of ascending footsteps, and the old

portress saying in her loudest and most piercing tones:—

“My good sir, I swear to you by the good God, that not a soul has

entered this house all day, nor all the evening, and that I have not

even left the door.”

A man responded:—

“But there is a light in that room, nevertheless.”

They recognized Javert’s voice.

The chamber was so arranged that the door in opening masked the corner

of the wall on the right. Jean Valjean blew out the light and placed

himself in this angle. Sister Simplice fell on her knees near the

table.

The door opened.

Javert entered.

The whispers of many men and the protestations of the portress were

audible in the corridor.

The nun did not raise her eyes. She was praying.

The candle was on the chimney-piece, and gave but very little light.

Javert caught sight of the nun and halted in amazement.

It will be remembered that the fundamental point in Javert, his

element, the very air he breathed, was veneration for all authority.

This was impregnable, and admitted of neither objection nor

restriction. In his eyes, of course, the ecclesiastical authority was

the chief of all; he was religious, superficial and correct on this

point as on all others. In his eyes, a priest was a mind, who never

makes a mistake; a nun was a creature who never sins; they were souls

walled in from this world, with a single door which never opened except

to allow the truth to pass through.

On perceiving the sister, his first movement was to retire.

But there was also another duty which bound him and impelled him

imperiously in the opposite direction. His second movement was to

remain and to venture on at least one question.

This was Sister Simplice, who had never told a lie in her life. Javert

knew it, and held her in special veneration in consequence.

“Sister,” said he, “are you alone in this room?”

A terrible moment ensued, during which the poor portress felt as though

she should faint.

The sister raised her eyes and answered:—

“Yes.”

“Then,” resumed Javert, “you will excuse me if I persist; it is my

duty; you have not seen a certain person—a man—this evening? He has

escaped; we are in search of him—that Jean Valjean; you have not seen

him?”

The sister replied:—

“No.”

She lied. She had lied twice in succession, one after the other,

without hesitation, promptly, as a person does when sacrificing

herself.

“Pardon me,” said Javert, and he retired with a deep bow.

O sainted maid! you left this world many years ago; you have rejoined

your sisters, the virgins, and your brothers, the angels, in the light;

may this lie be counted to your credit in paradise!

The sister’s affirmation was for Javert so decisive a thing that he did

not even observe the singularity of that candle which had but just been

extinguished, and which was still smoking on the table.

An hour later, a man, marching amid trees and mists, was rapidly

departing from M. sur M. in the direction of Paris. That man was Jean

Valjean. It has been established by the testimony of two or three

carters who met him, that he was carrying a bundle; that he was dressed

in a blouse. Where had he obtained that blouse? No one ever found out.

But an aged workman had died in the infirmary of the factory a few days

before, leaving behind him nothing but his blouse. Perhaps that was the

one.

One last word about Fantine.

We all have a mother,—the earth. Fantine was given back to that mother.

The curé thought that he was doing right, and perhaps he really was, in

reserving as much money as possible from what Jean Valjean had left for

the poor. Who was concerned, after all? A convict and a woman of the

town. That is why he had a very simple funeral for Fantine, and reduced

it to that strictly necessary form known as the pauper’s grave.

So Fantine was buried in the free corner of the cemetery which belongs

to anybody and everybody, and where the poor are lost. Fortunately, God

knows where to find the soul again. Fantine was laid in the shade,

among the first bones that came to hand; she was subjected to the

promiscuousness of ashes. She was thrown into the public grave. Her

grave resembled her bed.

[THE END OF VOLUME I “FANTINE”]

[Illustration: Frontispiece Volume Two]

[Illustration: Titlepage Volume Two]

VOLUME II

COSETTE

BOOK FIRST—WATERLOO

CHAPTER I—WHAT IS MET WITH ON THE WAY FROM NIVELLES

Last year (1861), on a beautiful May morning, a traveller, the person

who is telling this story, was coming from Nivelles, and directing his

course towards La Hulpe. He was on foot. He was pursuing a broad paved

road, which undulated between two rows of trees, over the hills which

succeed each other, raise the road and let it fall again, and produce

something in the nature of enormous waves.

He had passed Lillois and Bois-Seigneur-Isaac. In the west he perceived

the slate-roofed tower of Braine-l’Alleud, which has the form of a

reversed vase. He had just left behind a wood upon an eminence; and at

the angle of the crossroad, by the side of a sort of mouldy gibbet

bearing the inscription \_Ancient Barrier No. 4\_, a public house,

bearing on its front this sign: \_At the Four Winds\_ (Aux Quatre Vents).

\_Échabeau, Private Café\_.

A quarter of a league further on, he arrived at the bottom of a little

valley, where there is water which passes beneath an arch made through

the embankment of the road. The clump of sparsely planted but very

green trees, which fills the valley on one side of the road, is

dispersed over the meadows on the other, and disappears gracefully and

as in order in the direction of Braine-l’Alleud.

On the right, close to the road, was an inn, with a four-wheeled cart

at the door, a large bundle of hop-poles, a plough, a heap of dried

brushwood near a flourishing hedge, lime smoking in a square hole, and

a ladder suspended along an old penthouse with straw partitions. A

young girl was weeding in a field, where a huge yellow poster, probably

of some outside spectacle, such as a parish festival, was fluttering in

the wind. At one corner of the inn, beside a pool in which a flotilla

of ducks was navigating, a badly paved path plunged into the bushes.

The wayfarer struck into this.

After traversing a hundred paces, skirting a wall of the fifteenth

century, surmounted by a pointed gable, with bricks set in contrast, he

found himself before a large door of arched stone, with a rectilinear

impost, in the sombre style of Louis XIV., flanked by two flat

medallions. A severe façade rose above this door; a wall, perpendicular

to the façade, almost touched the door, and flanked it with an abrupt

right angle. In the meadow before the door lay three harrows, through

which, in disorder, grew all the flowers of May. The door was closed.

The two decrepit leaves which barred it were ornamented with an old

rusty knocker.

The sun was charming; the branches had that soft shivering of May,

which seems to proceed rather from the nests than from the wind. A

brave little bird, probably a lover, was carolling in a distracted

manner in a large tree.

The wayfarer bent over and examined a rather large circular excavation,

resembling the hollow of a sphere, in the stone on the left, at the

foot of the pier of the door.

At this moment the leaves of the door parted, and a peasant woman

emerged.

She saw the wayfarer, and perceived what he was looking at.

“It was a French cannon-ball which made that,” she said to him. And she

added:—

“That which you see there, higher up in the door, near a nail, is the

hole of a big iron bullet as large as an egg. The bullet did not pierce

the wood.”

“What is the name of this place?” inquired the wayfarer.

“Hougomont,” said the peasant woman.

The traveller straightened himself up. He walked on a few paces, and

went off to look over the tops of the hedges. On the horizon through

the trees, he perceived a sort of little elevation, and on this

elevation something which at that distance resembled a lion.

He was on the battle-field of Waterloo.

CHAPTER II—HOUGOMONT

Hougomont,—this was a funereal spot, the beginning of the obstacle, the

first resistance, which that great wood-cutter of Europe, called

Napoleon, encountered at Waterloo, the first knot under the blows of

his axe.

It was a château; it is no longer anything but a farm. For the

antiquary, Hougomont is \_Hugomons\_. This manor was built by Hugo, Sire

of Somerel, the same who endowed the sixth chaplaincy of the Abbey of

Villiers.

The traveller pushed open the door, elbowed an ancient calash under the

porch, and entered the courtyard.

The first thing which struck him in this paddock was a door of the

sixteenth century, which here simulates an arcade, everything else

having fallen prostrate around it. A monumental aspect often has its

birth in ruin. In a wall near the arcade opens another arched door, of

the time of Henry IV., permitting a glimpse of the trees of an orchard;

beside this door, a manure-hole, some pickaxes, some shovels, some

carts, an old well, with its flagstone and its iron reel, a chicken

jumping, and a turkey spreading its tail, a chapel surmounted by a

small bell-tower, a blossoming pear-tree trained in espalier against

the wall of the chapel—behold the court, the conquest of which was one

of Napoleon’s dreams. This corner of earth, could he but have seized

it, would, perhaps, have given him the world likewise. Chickens are

scattering its dust abroad with their beaks. A growl is audible; it is

a huge dog, who shows his teeth and replaces the English.

The English behaved admirably there. Cooke’s four companies of guards

there held out for seven hours against the fury of an army.

Hougomont viewed on the map, as a geometrical plan, comprising

buildings and enclosures, presents a sort of irregular rectangle, one

angle of which is nicked out. It is this angle which contains the

southern door, guarded by this wall, which commands it only a gun’s

length away. Hougomont has two doors,—the southern door, that of the

château; and the northern door, belonging to the farm. Napoleon sent

his brother Jérôme against Hougomont; the divisions of Foy,

Guilleminot, and Bachelu hurled themselves against it; nearly the

entire corps of Reille was employed against it, and miscarried;

Kellermann’s balls were exhausted on this heroic section of wall.

Bauduin’s brigade was not strong enough to force Hougomont on the

north, and the brigade of Soye could not do more than effect the

beginning of a breach on the south, but without taking it.

The farm buildings border the courtyard on the south. A bit of the

north door, broken by the French, hangs suspended to the wall. It

consists of four planks nailed to two cross-beams, on which the scars

of the attack are visible.

The northern door, which was beaten in by the French, and which has had

a piece applied to it to replace the panel suspended on the wall,

stands half-open at the bottom of the paddock; it is cut squarely in

the wall, built of stone below, of brick above which closes in the

courtyard on the north. It is a simple door for carts, such as exist in

all farms, with the two large leaves made of rustic planks: beyond lie

the meadows. The dispute over this entrance was furious. For a long

time, all sorts of imprints of bloody hands were visible on the

door-posts. It was there that Bauduin was killed.

The storm of the combat still lingers in this courtyard; its horror is

visible there; the confusion of the fray was petrified there; it lives

and it dies there; it was only yesterday. The walls are in the death

agony, the stones fall; the breaches cry aloud; the holes are wounds;

the drooping, quivering trees seem to be making an effort to flee.

This courtyard was more built up in 1815 than it is to-day. Buildings

which have since been pulled down then formed redans and angles.

The English barricaded themselves there; the French made their way in,

but could not stand their ground. Beside the chapel, one wing of the

château, the only ruin now remaining of the manor of Hougomont, rises

in a crumbling state,—disembowelled, one might say. The château served

for a dungeon, the chapel for a block-house. There men exterminated

each other. The French, fired on from every point,—from behind the

walls, from the summits of the garrets, from the depths of the cellars,

through all the casements, through all the air-holes, through every

crack in the stones,—fetched fagots and set fire to walls and men; the

reply to the grape-shot was a conflagration.

In the ruined wing, through windows garnished with bars of iron, the

dismantled chambers of the main building of brick are visible; the

English guards were in ambush in these rooms; the spiral of the

staircase, cracked from the ground floor to the very roof, appears like

the inside of a broken shell. The staircase has two stories; the

English, besieged on the staircase, and massed on its upper steps, had

cut off the lower steps. These consisted of large slabs of blue stone,

which form a heap among the nettles. Half a score of steps still cling

to the wall; on the first is cut the figure of a trident. These

inaccessible steps are solid in their niches. All the rest resembles a

jaw which has been denuded of its teeth. There are two old trees there:

one is dead; the other is wounded at its base, and is clothed with

verdure in April. Since 1815 it has taken to growing through the

staircase.

A massacre took place in the chapel. The interior, which has recovered

its calm, is singular. The mass has not been said there since the

carnage. Nevertheless, the altar has been left there—an altar of

unpolished wood, placed against a background of roughhewn stone. Four

whitewashed walls, a door opposite the altar, two small arched windows;

over the door a large wooden crucifix, below the crucifix a square

air-hole stopped up with a bundle of hay; on the ground, in one corner,

an old window-frame with the glass all broken to pieces—such is the

chapel. Near the altar there is nailed up a wooden statue of Saint

Anne, of the fifteenth century; the head of the infant Jesus has been

carried off by a large ball. The French, who were masters of the chapel

for a moment, and were then dislodged, set fire to it. The flames

filled this building; it was a perfect furnace; the door was burned,

the floor was burned, the wooden Christ was not burned. The fire preyed

upon his feet, of which only the blackened stumps are now to be seen;

then it stopped,—a miracle, according to the assertion of the people of

the neighborhood. The infant Jesus, decapitated, was less fortunate

than the Christ.

The walls are covered with inscriptions. Near the feet of Christ this

name is to be read: \_Henquinez\_. Then these others: \_Conde de Rio Maior

Marques y Marquesa de Almagro (Habana)\_. There are French names with

exclamation points,—a sign of wrath. The wall was freshly whitewashed

in 1849. The nations insulted each other there.

It was at the door of this chapel that the corpse was picked up which

held an axe in its hand; this corpse was Sub-Lieutenant Legros.

On emerging from the chapel, a well is visible on the left. There are

two in this courtyard. One inquires, Why is there no bucket and pulley

to this? It is because water is no longer drawn there. Why is water not

drawn there? Because it is full of skeletons.

The last person who drew water from the well was named Guillaume van

Kylsom. He was a peasant who lived at Hougomont, and was gardener

there. On the 18th of June, 1815, his family fled and concealed

themselves in the woods.

The forest surrounding the Abbey of Villiers sheltered these

unfortunate people who had been scattered abroad, for many days and

nights. There are at this day certain traces recognizable, such as old

boles of burned trees, which mark the site of these poor bivouacs

trembling in the depths of the thickets.

Guillaume van Kylsom remained at Hougomont, “to guard the château,” and

concealed himself in the cellar. The English discovered him there. They

tore him from his hiding-place, and the combatants forced this

frightened man to serve them, by administering blows with the flats of

their swords. They were thirsty; this Guillaume brought them water. It

was from this well that he drew it. Many drank there their last

draught. This well where drank so many of the dead was destined to die

itself.

After the engagement, they were in haste to bury the dead bodies. Death

has a fashion of harassing victory, and she causes the pest to follow

glory. The typhus is a concomitant of triumph. This well was deep, and

it was turned into a sepulchre. Three hundred dead bodies were cast

into it. With too much haste perhaps. Were they all dead? Legend says

they were not. It seems that on the night succeeding the interment,

feeble voices were heard calling from the well.

This well is isolated in the middle of the courtyard. Three walls, part

stone, part brick, and simulating a small, square tower, and folded

like the leaves of a screen, surround it on all sides. The fourth side

is open. It is there that the water was drawn. The wall at the bottom

has a sort of shapeless loophole, possibly the hole made by a shell.

This little tower had a platform, of which only the beams remain. The

iron supports of the well on the right form a cross. On leaning over,

the eye is lost in a deep cylinder of brick which is filled with a

heaped-up mass of shadows. The base of the walls all about the well is

concealed in a growth of nettles.

This well has not in front of it that large blue slab which forms the

table for all wells in Belgium. The slab has here been replaced by a

cross-beam, against which lean five or six shapeless fragments of

knotty and petrified wood which resemble huge bones. There is no longer

either pail, chain, or pulley; but there is still the stone basin which

served the overflow. The rain-water collects there, and from time to

time a bird of the neighboring forests comes thither to drink, and then

flies away. One house in this ruin, the farmhouse, is still inhabited.

The door of this house opens on the courtyard. Upon this door, beside a

pretty Gothic lock-plate, there is an iron handle with trefoils placed

slanting. At the moment when the Hanoverian lieutenant, Wilda, grasped

this handle in order to take refuge in the farm, a French sapper hewed

off his hand with an axe.

The family who occupy the house had for their grandfather Guillaume van

Kylsom, the old gardener, dead long since. A woman with gray hair said

to us: “I was there. I was three years old. My sister, who was older,

was terrified and wept. They carried us off to the woods. I went there

in my mother’s arms. We glued our ears to the earth to hear. I imitated

the cannon, and went \_boum! boum!\_”

A door opening from the courtyard on the left led into the orchard, so

we were told. The orchard is terrible.

It is in three parts; one might almost say, in three acts. The first

part is a garden, the second is an orchard, the third is a wood. These

three parts have a common enclosure: on the side of the entrance, the

buildings of the château and the farm; on the left, a hedge; on the

right, a wall; and at the end, a wall. The wall on the right is of

brick, the wall at the bottom is of stone. One enters the garden first.

It slopes downwards, is planted with gooseberry bushes, choked with a

wild growth of vegetation, and terminated by a monumental terrace of

cut stone, with balustrade with a double curve.

It was a seignorial garden in the first French style which preceded Le

Nôtre; to-day it is ruins and briars. The pilasters are surmounted by

globes which resemble cannon-balls of stone. Forty-three balusters can

still be counted on their sockets; the rest lie prostrate in the grass.

Almost all bear scratches of bullets. One broken baluster is placed on

the pediment like a fractured leg.

It was in this garden, further down than the orchard, that six

light-infantry men of the 1st, having made their way thither, and being

unable to escape, hunted down and caught like bears in their dens,

accepted the combat with two Hanoverian companies, one of which was

armed with carbines. The Hanoverians lined this balustrade and fired

from above. The infantry men, replying from below, six against two

hundred, intrepid and with no shelter save the currant-bushes, took a

quarter of an hour to die.

One mounts a few steps and passes from the garden into the orchard,

properly speaking. There, within the limits of those few square

fathoms, fifteen hundred men fell in less than an hour. The wall seems

ready to renew the combat. Thirty-eight loopholes, pierced by the

English at irregular heights, are there still. In front of the sixth

are placed two English tombs of granite. There are loopholes only in

the south wall, as the principal attack came from that quarter. The

wall is hidden on the outside by a tall hedge; the French came up,

thinking that they had to deal only with a hedge, crossed it, and found

the wall both an obstacle and an ambuscade, with the English guards

behind it, the thirty-eight loopholes firing at once a shower of

grape-shot and balls, and Soye’s brigade was broken against it. Thus

Waterloo began.

Nevertheless, the orchard was taken. As they had no ladders, the French

scaled it with their nails. They fought hand to hand amid the trees.

All this grass has been soaked in blood. A battalion of Nassau, seven

hundred strong, was overwhelmed there. The outside of the wall, against

which Kellermann’s two batteries were trained, is gnawed by grape-shot.

This orchard is sentient, like others, in the month of May. It has its

buttercups and its daisies; the grass is tall there; the cart-horses

browse there; cords of hair, on which linen is drying, traverse the

spaces between the trees and force the passer-by to bend his head; one

walks over this uncultivated land, and one’s foot dives into

mole-holes. In the middle of the grass one observes an uprooted

tree-bole which lies there all verdant. Major Blackmann leaned against

it to die. Beneath a great tree in the neighborhood fell the German

general, Duplat, descended from a French family which fled on the

revocation of the Edict of Nantes. An aged and falling apple-tree leans

far over to one side, its wound dressed with a bandage of straw and of

clayey loam. Nearly all the apple-trees are falling with age. There is

not one which has not had its bullet or its biscayan.6 The skeletons of

dead trees abound in this orchard. Crows fly through their branches,

and at the end of it is a wood full of violets.

Bauduin killed, Foy wounded, conflagration, massacre, carnage, a

rivulet formed of English blood, French blood, German blood mingled in

fury, a well crammed with corpses, the regiment of Nassau and the

regiment of Brunswick destroyed, Duplat killed, Blackmann killed, the

English Guards mutilated, twenty French battalions, besides the forty

from Reille’s corps, decimated, three thousand men in that hovel of

Hougomont alone cut down, slashed to pieces, shot, burned, with their

throats cut,—and all this so that a peasant can say to-day to the

traveller: \_Monsieur, give me three francs, and if you like, I will

explain to you the affair of Waterloo!\_

CHAPTER III—THE EIGHTEENTH OF JUNE, 1815

Let us turn back,—that is one of the story-teller’s rights,—and put

ourselves once more in the year 1815, and even a little earlier than

the epoch when the action narrated in the first part of this book took

place.

If it had not rained in the night between the 17th and the 18th of

June, 1815, the fate of Europe would have been different. A few drops

of water, more or less, decided the downfall of Napoleon. All that

Providence required in order to make Waterloo the end of Austerlitz was

a little more rain, and a cloud traversing the sky out of season

sufficed to make a world crumble.

The battle of Waterloo could not be begun until half-past eleven

o’clock, and that gave Blücher time to come up. Why? Because the ground

was wet. The artillery had to wait until it became a little firmer

before they could manœuvre.

Napoleon was an artillery officer, and felt the effects of this. The

foundation of this wonderful captain was the man who, in the report to

the Directory on Aboukir, said: \_Such a one of our balls killed six

men\_. All his plans of battle were arranged for projectiles. The key to

his victory was to make the artillery converge on one point. He treated

the strategy of the hostile general like a citadel, and made a breach

in it. He overwhelmed the weak point with grape-shot; he joined and

dissolved battles with cannon. There was something of the sharpshooter

in his genius. To beat in squares, to pulverize regiments, to break

lines, to crush and disperse masses,—for him everything lay in this, to

strike, strike, strike incessantly,—and he intrusted this task to the

cannon-ball. A redoubtable method, and one which, united with genius,

rendered this gloomy athlete of the pugilism of war invincible for the

space of fifteen years.

On the 18th of June, 1815, he relied all the more on his artillery,

because he had numbers on his side. Wellington had only one hundred and

fifty-nine mouths of fire; Napoleon had two hundred and forty.

Suppose the soil dry, and the artillery capable of moving, the action

would have begun at six o’clock in the morning. The battle would have

been won and ended at two o’clock, three hours before the change of

fortune in favor of the Prussians. What amount of blame attaches to

Napoleon for the loss of this battle? Is the shipwreck due to the

pilot?

Was it the evident physical decline of Napoleon that complicated this

epoch by an inward diminution of force? Had the twenty years of war

worn out the blade as it had worn the scabbard, the soul as well as the

body? Did the veteran make himself disastrously felt in the leader? In

a word, was this genius, as many historians of note have thought,

suffering from an eclipse? Did he go into a frenzy in order to disguise

his weakened powers from himself? Did he begin to waver under the

delusion of a breath of adventure? Had he become—a grave matter in a

general—unconscious of peril? Is there an age, in this class of

material great men, who may be called the giants of action, when genius

grows short-sighted? Old age has no hold on the geniuses of the ideal;

for the Dantes and Michael Angelos to grow old is to grow in greatness;

is it to grow less for the Hannibals and the Bonapartes? Had Napoleon

lost the direct sense of victory? Had he reached the point where he

could no longer recognize the reef, could no longer divine the snare,

no longer discern the crumbling brink of abysses? Had he lost his power

of scenting out catastrophes? He who had in former days known all the

roads to triumph, and who, from the summit of his chariot of lightning,

pointed them out with a sovereign finger, had he now reached that state

of sinister amazement when he could lead his tumultuous legions

harnessed to it, to the precipice? Was he seized at the age of

forty-six with a supreme madness? Was that titanic charioteer of

destiny no longer anything more than an immense dare-devil?

We do not think so.

His plan of battle was, by the confession of all, a masterpiece. To go

straight to the centre of the Allies’ line, to make a breach in the

enemy, to cut them in two, to drive the British half back on Hal, and

the Prussian half on Tongres, to make two shattered fragments of

Wellington and Blücher, to carry Mont-Saint-Jean, to seize Brussels, to

hurl the German into the Rhine, and the Englishman into the sea. All

this was contained in that battle, according to Napoleon. Afterwards

people would see.

Of course, we do not here pretend to furnish a history of the battle of

Waterloo; one of the scenes of the foundation of the story which we are

relating is connected with this battle, but this history is not our

subject; this history, moreover, has been finished, and finished in a

masterly manner, from one point of view by Napoleon, and from another

point of view by a whole pleiad of historians.7

As for us, we leave the historians at loggerheads; we are but a distant

witness, a passer-by on the plain, a seeker bending over that soil all

made of human flesh, taking appearances for realities, perchance; we

have no right to oppose, in the name of science, a collection of facts

which contain illusions, no doubt; we possess neither military practice

nor strategic ability which authorize a system; in our opinion, a chain

of accidents dominated the two leaders at Waterloo; and when it becomes

a question of destiny, that mysterious culprit, we judge like that

ingenious judge, the populace.

CHAPTER IV—A

Those persons who wish to gain a clear idea of the battle of Waterloo

have only to place, mentally, on the ground, a capital A. The left limb

of the A is the road to Nivelles, the right limb is the road to

Genappe, the tie of the A is the hollow road to Ohain from

Braine-l’Alleud. The top of the A is Mont-Saint-Jean, where Wellington

is; the lower left tip is Hougomont, where Reille is stationed with

Jérôme Bonaparte; the right tip is the Belle-Alliance, where Napoleon

was. At the centre of this chord is the precise point where the final

word of the battle was pronounced. It was there that the lion has been

placed, the involuntary symbol of the supreme heroism of the Imperial

Guard.

The triangle included in the top of the A, between the two limbs and

the tie, is the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean. The dispute over this

plateau constituted the whole battle. The wings of the two armies

extended to the right and left of the two roads to Genappe and

Nivelles; d’Erlon facing Picton, Reille facing Hill.

Behind the tip of the A, behind the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean, is the

forest of Soignes.

As for the plain itself, let the reader picture to himself a vast

undulating sweep of ground; each rise commands the next rise, and all

the undulations mount towards Mont-Saint-Jean, and there end in the

forest.

Two hostile troops on a field of battle are two wrestlers. It is a

question of seizing the opponent round the waist. The one seeks to trip

up the other. They clutch at everything: a bush is a point of support;

an angle of the wall offers them a rest to the shoulder; for the lack

of a hovel under whose cover they can draw up, a regiment yields its

ground; an unevenness in the ground, a chance turn in the landscape, a

cross-path encountered at the right moment, a grove, a ravine, can stay

the heel of that colossus which is called an army, and prevent its

retreat. He who quits the field is beaten; hence the necessity

devolving on the responsible leader, of examining the most

insignificant clump of trees, and of studying deeply the slightest

relief in the ground.

The two generals had attentively studied the plain of Mont-Saint-Jean,

now called the plain of Waterloo. In the preceding year, Wellington,

with the sagacity of foresight, had examined it as the possible seat of

a great battle. Upon this spot, and for this duel, on the 18th of June,

Wellington had the good post, Napoleon the bad post. The English army

was stationed above, the French army below.

It is almost superfluous here to sketch the appearance of Napoleon on

horseback, glass in hand, upon the heights of Rossomme, at daybreak, on

June 18, 1815. All the world has seen him before we can show him. That

calm profile under the little three-cornered hat of the school of

Brienne, that green uniform, the white revers concealing the star of

the Legion of Honor, his great coat hiding his epaulets, the corner of

red ribbon peeping from beneath his vest, his leather trousers, the

white horse with the saddle-cloth of purple velvet bearing on the

corners crowned N’s and eagles, Hessian boots over silk stockings,

silver spurs, the sword of Marengo,—that whole figure of the last of

the Cæsars is present to all imaginations, saluted with acclamations by

some, severely regarded by others.

That figure stood for a long time wholly in the light; this arose from

a certain legendary dimness evolved by the majority of heroes, and

which always veils the truth for a longer or shorter time; but to-day

history and daylight have arrived.

That light called history is pitiless; it possesses this peculiar and

divine quality, that, pure light as it is, and precisely because it is

wholly light, it often casts a shadow in places where people had

hitherto beheld rays; from the same man it constructs two different

phantoms, and the one attacks the other and executes justice on it, and

the shadows of the despot contend with the brilliancy of the leader.

Hence arises a truer measure in the definitive judgments of nations.

Babylon violated lessens Alexander, Rome enchained lessens Cæsar,

Jerusalem murdered lessens Titus, tyranny follows the tyrant. It is a

misfortune for a man to leave behind him the night which bears his

form.

CHAPTER V—THE QUID OBSCURUM OF BATTLES

Every one is acquainted with the first phase of this battle; a

beginning which was troubled, uncertain, hesitating, menacing to both

armies, but still more so for the English than for the French.

It had rained all night, the earth had been cut up by the downpour, the

water had accumulated here and there in the hollows of the plain as if

in casks; at some points the gear of the artillery carriages was buried

up to the axles, the circingles of the horses were dripping with liquid

mud. If the wheat and rye trampled down by this cohort of transports on

the march had not filled in the ruts and strewn a litter beneath the

wheels, all movement, particularly in the valleys, in the direction of

Papelotte would have been impossible.

The affair began late. Napoleon, as we have already explained, was in

the habit of keeping all his artillery well in hand, like a pistol,

aiming it now at one point, now at another, of the battle; and it had

been his wish to wait until the horse batteries could move and gallop

freely. In order to do that it was necessary that the sun should come

out and dry the soil. But the sun did not make its appearance. It was

no longer the rendezvous of Austerlitz. When the first cannon was

fired, the English general, Colville, looked at his watch, and noted

that it was thirty-five minutes past eleven.

The action was begun furiously, with more fury, perhaps, than the

Emperor would have wished, by the left wing of the French resting on

Hougomont. At the same time Napoleon attacked the centre by hurling

Quiot’s brigade on La Haie-Sainte, and Ney pushed forward the right

wing of the French against the left wing of the English, which rested

on Papelotte.

The attack on Hougomont was something of a feint; the plan was to draw

Wellington thither, and to make him swerve to the left. This plan would

have succeeded if the four companies of the English guards and the

brave Belgians of Perponcher’s division had not held the position

solidly, and Wellington, instead of massing his troops there, could

confine himself to despatching thither, as reinforcements, only four

more companies of guards and one battalion from Brunswick.

The attack of the right wing of the French on Papelotte was calculated,

in fact, to overthrow the English left, to cut off the road to

Brussels, to bar the passage against possible Prussians, to force

Mont-Saint-Jean, to turn Wellington back on Hougomont, thence on

Braine-l’Alleud, thence on Hal; nothing easier. With the exception of a

few incidents this attack succeeded. Papelotte was taken; La

Haie-Sainte was carried.

A detail to be noted. There was in the English infantry, particularly

in Kempt’s brigade, a great many raw recruits. These young soldiers

were valiant in the presence of our redoubtable infantry; their

inexperience extricated them intrepidly from the dilemma; they

performed particularly excellent service as skirmishers: the soldier

skirmisher, left somewhat to himself, becomes, so to speak, his own

general. These recruits displayed some of the French ingenuity and

fury. This novice of an infantry had dash. This displeased Wellington.

After the taking of La Haie-Sainte the battle wavered.

There is in this day an obscure interval, from midday to four o’clock;

the middle portion of this battle is almost indistinct, and

participates in the sombreness of the hand-to-hand conflict. Twilight

reigns over it. We perceive vast fluctuations in that fog, a dizzy

mirage, paraphernalia of war almost unknown to-day, pendant colbacks,

floating sabre-taches, cross-belts, cartridge-boxes for grenades,

hussar dolmans, red boots with a thousand wrinkles, heavy shakos

garlanded with torsades, the almost black infantry of Brunswick mingled

with the scarlet infantry of England, the English soldiers with great,

white circular pads on the slopes of their shoulders for epaulets, the

Hanoverian light-horse with their oblong casques of leather, with brass

hands and red horse-tails, the Scotch with their bare knees and plaids,

the great white gaiters of our grenadiers; pictures, not strategic

lines—what Salvator Rosa requires, not what is suited to the needs of

Gribeauval.

A certain amount of tempest is always mingled with a battle. \_Quid

obscurum, quid divinum\_. Each historian traces, to some extent, the

particular feature which pleases him amid this pell-mell. Whatever may

be the combinations of the generals, the shock of armed masses has an

incalculable ebb. During the action the plans of the two leaders enter

into each other and become mutually thrown out of shape. Such a point

of the field of battle devours more combatants than such another, just

as more or less spongy soils soak up more or less quickly the water

which is poured on them. It becomes necessary to pour out more soldiers

than one would like; a series of expenditures which are the unforeseen.

The line of battle waves and undulates like a thread, the trails of

blood gush illogically, the fronts of the armies waver, the regiments

form capes and gulfs as they enter and withdraw; all these reefs are

continually moving in front of each other. Where the infantry stood the

artillery arrives, the cavalry rushes in where the artillery was, the

battalions are like smoke. There was something there; seek it. It has

disappeared; the open spots change place, the sombre folds advance and

retreat, a sort of wind from the sepulchre pushes forward, hurls back,

distends, and disperses these tragic multitudes. What is a fray? an

oscillation? The immobility of a mathematical plan expresses a minute,

not a day. In order to depict a battle, there is required one of those

powerful painters who have chaos in their brushes. Rembrandt is better

than Vandermeulen; Vandermeulen, exact at noon, lies at three o’clock.

Geometry is deceptive; the hurricane alone is trustworthy. That is what

confers on Folard the right to contradict Polybius. Let us add, that

there is a certain instant when the battle degenerates into a combat,

becomes specialized, and disperses into innumerable detailed feats,

which, to borrow the expression of Napoleon himself, “belong rather to

the biography of the regiments than to the history of the army.” The

historian has, in this case, the evident right to sum up the whole. He

cannot do more than seize the principal outlines of the struggle, and

it is not given to any one narrator, however conscientious he may be,

to fix, absolutely, the form of that horrible cloud which is called a

battle.

This, which is true of all great armed encounters, is particularly

applicable to Waterloo.

Nevertheless, at a certain moment in the afternoon the battle came to a

point.

CHAPTER VI—FOUR O’CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON

Towards four o’clock the condition of the English army was serious. The

Prince of Orange was in command of the centre, Hill of the right wing,

Picton of the left wing. The Prince of Orange, desperate and intrepid,

shouted to the Hollando-Belgians: “Nassau! Brunswick! Never retreat!”

Hill, having been weakened, had come up to the support of Wellington;

Picton was dead. At the very moment when the English had captured from

the French the flag of the 105th of the line, the French had killed the

English general, Picton, with a bullet through the head. The battle

had, for Wellington, two bases of action, Hougomont and La Haie-Sainte;

Hougomont still held out, but was on fire; La Haie-Sainte was taken. Of

the German battalion which defended it, only forty-two men survived;

all the officers, except five, were either dead or captured. Three

thousand combatants had been massacred in that barn. A sergeant of the

English Guards, the foremost boxer in England, reputed invulnerable by

his companions, had been killed there by a little French drummer-boy.

Baring had been dislodged, Alten put to the sword. Many flags had been

lost, one from Alten’s division, and one from the battalion of

Lunenburg, carried by a prince of the house of Deux-Ponts. The Scotch

Grays no longer existed; Ponsonby’s great dragoons had been hacked to

pieces. That valiant cavalry had bent beneath the lancers of Bro and

beneath the cuirassiers of Travers; out of twelve hundred horses, six

hundred remained; out of three lieutenant-colonels, two lay on the

earth,—Hamilton wounded, Mater slain. Ponsonby had fallen, riddled by

seven lance-thrusts. Gordon was dead. Marsh was dead. Two divisions,

the fifth and the sixth, had been annihilated.

Hougomont injured, La Haie-Sainte taken, there now existed but one

rallying-point, the centre. That point still held firm. Wellington

reinforced it. He summoned thither Hill, who was at Merle-Braine; he

summoned Chassé, who was at Braine-l’Alleud.

The centre of the English army, rather concave, very dense, and very

compact, was strongly posted. It occupied the plateau of

Mont-Saint-Jean, having behind it the village, and in front of it the

slope, which was tolerably steep then. It rested on that stout stone

dwelling which at that time belonged to the domain of Nivelles, and

which marks the intersection of the roads—a pile of the sixteenth

century, and so robust that the cannon-balls rebounded from it without

injuring it. All about the plateau the English had cut the hedges here

and there, made embrasures in the hawthorn-trees, thrust the throat of

a cannon between two branches, embattled the shrubs. There artillery

was ambushed in the brushwood. This punic labor, incontestably

authorized by war, which permits traps, was so well done, that Haxo,

who had been despatched by the Emperor at nine o’clock in the morning

to reconnoitre the enemy’s batteries, had discovered nothing of it, and

had returned and reported to Napoleon that there were no obstacles

except the two barricades which barred the road to Nivelles and to

Genappe. It was at the season when the grain is tall; on the edge of

the plateau a battalion of Kempt’s brigade, the 95th, armed with

carabines, was concealed in the tall wheat.

Thus assured and buttressed, the centre of the Anglo-Dutch army was

well posted. The peril of this position lay in the forest of Soignes,

then adjoining the field of battle, and intersected by the ponds of

Groenendael and Boitsfort. An army could not retreat thither without

dissolving; the regiments would have broken up immediately there. The

artillery would have been lost among the morasses. The retreat,

according to many a man versed in the art,—though it is disputed by

others,—would have been a disorganized flight.

To this centre, Wellington added one of Chassé’s brigades taken from

the right wing, and one of Wincke’s brigades taken from the left wing,

plus Clinton’s division. To his English, to the regiments of Halkett,

to the brigades of Mitchell, to the guards of Maitland, he gave as

reinforcements and aids, the infantry of Brunswick, Nassau’s

contingent, Kielmansegg’s Hanoverians, and Ompteda’s Germans. This

placed twenty-six battalions under his hand. \_The right wing\_, as

Charras says, \_was thrown back on the centre\_. An enormous battery was

masked by sacks of earth at the spot where there now stands what is

called the “Museum of Waterloo.” Besides this, Wellington had, behind a

rise in the ground, Somerset’s Dragoon Guards, fourteen hundred horse

strong. It was the remaining half of the justly celebrated English

cavalry. Ponsonby destroyed, Somerset remained.

The battery, which, if completed, would have been almost a redoubt, was

ranged behind a very low garden wall, backed up with a coating of bags

of sand and a large slope of earth. This work was not finished; there

had been no time to make a palisade for it.

Wellington, uneasy but impassive, was on horseback, and there remained

the whole day in the same attitude, a little in advance of the old mill

of Mont-Saint-Jean, which is still in existence, beneath an elm, which

an Englishman, an enthusiastic vandal, purchased later on for two

hundred francs, cut down, and carried off. Wellington was coldly

heroic. The bullets rained about him. His aide-de-camp, Gordon, fell at

his side. Lord Hill, pointing to a shell which had burst, said to him:

“My lord, what are your orders in case you are killed?” “To do like

me,” replied Wellington. To Clinton he said laconically, “To hold this

spot to the last man.” The day was evidently turning out ill.

Wellington shouted to his old companions of Talavera, of Vittoria, of

Salamanca: “Boys, can retreat be thought of? Think of old England!”

Towards four o’clock, the English line drew back. Suddenly nothing was

visible on the crest of the plateau except the artillery and the

sharpshooters; the rest had disappeared: the regiments, dislodged by

the shells and the French bullets, retreated into the bottom, now

intersected by the back road of the farm of Mont-Saint-Jean; a

retrograde movement took place, the English front hid itself,

Wellington drew back. “The beginning of retreat!” cried Napoleon.

CHAPTER VII—NAPOLEON IN A GOOD HUMOR

The Emperor, though ill and discommoded on horseback by a local

trouble, had never been in a better humor than on that day. His

impenetrability had been smiling ever since the morning. On the 18th of

June, that profound soul masked by marble beamed blindly. The man who

had been gloomy at Austerlitz was gay at Waterloo. The greatest

favorites of destiny make mistakes. Our joys are composed of shadow.

The supreme smile is God’s alone.

\_Ridet Cæsar, Pompeius flebit\_, said the legionaries of the Fulminatrix

Legion. Pompey was not destined to weep on that occasion, but it is

certain that Cæsar laughed. While exploring on horseback at one o’clock

on the preceding night, in storm and rain, in company with Bertrand,

the communes in the neighborhood of Rossomme, satisfied at the sight of

the long line of the English camp-fires illuminating the whole horizon

from Frischemont to Braine-l’Alleud, it had seemed to him that fate, to

whom he had assigned a day on the field of Waterloo, was exact to the

appointment; he stopped his horse, and remained for some time

motionless, gazing at the lightning and listening to the thunder; and

this fatalist was heard to cast into the darkness this mysterious

saying, “We are in accord.” Napoleon was mistaken. They were no longer

in accord.

He took not a moment for sleep; every instant of that night was marked

by a joy for him. He traversed the line of the principal outposts,

halting here and there to talk to the sentinels. At half-past two, near

the wood of Hougomont, he heard the tread of a column on the march; he

thought at the moment that it was a retreat on the part of Wellington.

He said: “It is the rear-guard of the English getting under way for the

purpose of decamping. I will take prisoners the six thousand English

who have just arrived at Ostend.” He conversed expansively; he regained

the animation which he had shown at his landing on the first of March,

when he pointed out to the Grand-Marshal the enthusiastic peasant of

the Gulf Juan, and cried, “Well, Bertrand, here is a reinforcement

already!” On the night of the 17th to the 18th of June he rallied

Wellington. “That little Englishman needs a lesson,” said Napoleon. The

rain redoubled in violence; the thunder rolled while the Emperor was

speaking.

At half-past three o’clock in the morning, he lost one illusion;

officers who had been despatched to reconnoitre announced to him that

the enemy was not making any movement. Nothing was stirring; not a

bivouac-fire had been extinguished; the English army was asleep. The

silence on earth was profound; the only noise was in the heavens. At

four o’clock, a peasant was brought in to him by the scouts; this

peasant had served as guide to a brigade of English cavalry, probably

Vivian’s brigade, which was on its way to take up a position in the

village of Ohain, at the extreme left. At five o’clock, two Belgian

deserters reported to him that they had just quitted their regiment,

and that the English army was ready for battle. “So much the better!”

exclaimed Napoleon. “I prefer to overthrow them rather than to drive

them back.”

In the morning he dismounted in the mud on the slope which forms an

angle with the Plancenoit road, had a kitchen table and a peasant’s

chair brought to him from the farm of Rossomme, seated himself, with a

truss of straw for a carpet, and spread out on the table the chart of

the battle-field, saying to Soult as he did so, “A pretty

checker-board.”

In consequence of the rains during the night, the transports of

provisions, embedded in the soft roads, had not been able to arrive by

morning; the soldiers had had no sleep; they were wet and fasting. This

did not prevent Napoleon from exclaiming cheerfully to Ney, “We have

ninety chances out of a hundred.” At eight o’clock the Emperor’s

breakfast was brought to him. He invited many generals to it. During

breakfast, it was said that Wellington had been to a ball two nights

before, in Brussels, at the Duchess of Richmond’s; and Soult, a rough

man of war, with a face of an archbishop, said, “The ball takes place

to-day.” The Emperor jested with Ney, who said, “Wellington will not be

so simple as to wait for Your Majesty.” That was his way, however. “He

was fond of jesting,” says Fleury de Chaboulon. “A merry humor was at

the foundation of his character,” says Gourgaud. “He abounded in

pleasantries, which were more peculiar than witty,” says Benjamin

Constant. These gayeties of a giant are worthy of insistence. It was he

who called his grenadiers “his grumblers”; he pinched their ears; he

pulled their moustaches. “The Emperor did nothing but play pranks on

us,” is the remark of one of them. During the mysterious trip from the

island of Elba to France, on the 27th of February, on the open sea, the

French brig of war, \_Le Zéphyr\_, having encountered the brig

\_L’Inconstant\_, on which Napoleon was concealed, and having asked the

news of Napoleon from \_L’Inconstant\_, the Emperor, who still wore in

his hat the white and amaranthine cockade sown with bees, which he had

adopted at the isle of Elba, laughingly seized the speaking-trumpet,

and answered for himself, “The Emperor is well.” A man who laughs like

that is on familiar terms with events. Napoleon indulged in many fits

of this laughter during the breakfast at Waterloo. After breakfast he

meditated for a quarter of an hour; then two generals seated themselves

on the truss of straw, pen in hand and their paper on their knees, and

the Emperor dictated to them the order of battle.

At nine o’clock, at the instant when the French army, ranged in

echelons and set in motion in five columns, had deployed—the divisions

in two lines, the artillery between the brigades, the music at their

head; as they beat the march, with rolls on the drums and the blasts of

trumpets, mighty, vast, joyous, a sea of casques, of sabres, and of

bayonets on the horizon, the Emperor was touched, and twice exclaimed,

“Magnificent! Magnificent!”

Between nine o’clock and half-past ten the whole army, incredible as it

may appear, had taken up its position and ranged itself in six lines,

forming, to repeat the Emperor’s expression, “the figure of six V’s.” A

few moments after the formation of the battle-array, in the midst of

that profound silence, like that which heralds the beginning of a

storm, which precedes engagements, the Emperor tapped Haxo on the

shoulder, as he beheld the three batteries of twelve-pounders, detached

by his orders from the corps of Erlon, Reille, and Lobau, and destined

to begin the action by taking Mont-Saint-Jean, which was situated at

the intersection of the Nivelles and the Genappe roads, and said to

him, “There are four and twenty handsome maids, General.”

Sure of the issue, he encouraged with a smile, as they passed before

him, the company of sappers of the first corps, which he had appointed

to barricade Mont-Saint-Jean as soon as the village should be carried.

All this serenity had been traversed by but a single word of haughty

pity; perceiving on his left, at a spot where there now stands a large

tomb, those admirable Scotch Grays, with their superb horses, massing

themselves, he said, “It is a pity.”

Then he mounted his horse, advanced beyond Rossomme, and selected for

his post of observation a contracted elevation of turf to the right of

the road from Genappe to Brussels, which was his second station during

the battle. The third station, the one adopted at seven o’clock in the

evening, between La Belle-Alliance and La Haie-Sainte, is formidable;

it is a rather elevated knoll, which still exists, and behind which the

guard was massed on a slope of the plain. Around this knoll the balls

rebounded from the pavements of the road, up to Napoleon himself. As at

Brienne, he had over his head the shriek of the bullets and of the

heavy artillery. Mouldy cannon-balls, old sword-blades, and shapeless

projectiles, eaten up with rust, were picked up at the spot where his

horse’s feet stood. \_Scabra rubigine\_. A few years ago, a shell of

sixty pounds, still charged, and with its fuse broken off level with

the bomb, was unearthed. It was at this last post that the Emperor said

to his guide, Lacoste, a hostile and terrified peasant, who was

attached to the saddle of a hussar, and who turned round at every

discharge of canister and tried to hide behind Napoleon: “Fool, it is

shameful! You’ll get yourself killed with a ball in the back.” He who

writes these lines has himself found, in the friable soil of this

knoll, on turning over the sand, the remains of the neck of a bomb,

disintegrated, by the oxidization of six and forty years, and old

fragments of iron which parted like elder-twigs between the fingers.

Every one is aware that the variously inclined undulations of the

plains, where the engagement between Napoleon and Wellington took

place, are no longer what they were on June 18, 1815. By taking from

this mournful field the wherewithal to make a monument to it, its real

relief has been taken away, and history, disconcerted, no longer finds

her bearings there. It has been disfigured for the sake of glorifying

it. Wellington, when he beheld Waterloo once more, two years later,

exclaimed, “They have altered my field of battle!” Where the great

pyramid of earth, surmounted by the lion, rises to-day, there was a

hillock which descended in an easy slope towards the Nivelles road, but

which was almost an escarpment on the side of the highway to Genappe.

The elevation of this escarpment can still be measured by the height of

the two knolls of the two great sepulchres which enclose the road from

Genappe to Brussels: one, the English tomb, is on the left; the other,

the German tomb, is on the right. There is no French tomb. The whole of

that plain is a sepulchre for France. Thanks to the thousands upon

thousands of cartloads of earth employed in the hillock one hundred and

fifty feet in height and half a mile in circumference, the plateau of

Mont-Saint-Jean is now accessible by an easy slope. On the day of

battle, particularly on the side of La Haie-Sainte, it was abrupt and

difficult of approach. The slope there is so steep that the English

cannon could not see the farm, situated in the bottom of the valley,

which was the centre of the combat. On the 18th of June, 1815, the

rains had still farther increased this acclivity, the mud complicated

the problem of the ascent, and the men not only slipped back, but stuck

fast in the mire. Along the crest of the plateau ran a sort of trench

whose presence it was impossible for the distant observer to divine.

What was this trench? Let us explain. Braine-l’Alleud is a Belgian

village; Ohain is another. These villages, both of them concealed in

curves of the landscape, are connected by a road about a league and a

half in length, which traverses the plain along its undulating level,

and often enters and buries itself in the hills like a furrow, which

makes a ravine of this road in some places. In 1815, as at the present

day, this road cut the crest of the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean between

the two highways from Genappe and Nivelles; only, it is now on a level

with the plain; it was then a hollow way. Its two slopes have been

appropriated for the monumental hillock. This road was, and still is, a

trench throughout the greater portion of its course; a hollow trench,

sometimes a dozen feet in depth, and whose banks, being too steep,

crumbled away here and there, particularly in winter, under driving

rains. Accidents happened here. The road was so narrow at the

Braine-l’Alleud entrance that a passer-by was crushed by a cart, as is

proved by a stone cross which stands near the cemetery, and which gives

the name of the dead, \_Monsieur Bernard Debrye, Merchant of Brussels\_,

and the date of the accident, \_February, 1637\_.8 It was so deep on the

table-land of Mont-Saint-Jean that a peasant, Mathieu Nicaise, was

crushed there, in 1783, by a slide from the slope, as is stated on

another stone cross, the top of which has disappeared in the process of

clearing the ground, but whose overturned pedestal is still visible on

the grassy slope to the left of the highway between La Haie-Sainte and

the farm of Mont-Saint-Jean.

On the day of battle, this hollow road whose existence was in no way

indicated, bordering the crest of Mont-Saint-Jean, a trench at the

summit of the escarpment, a rut concealed in the soil, was invisible;

that is to say, terrible.

CHAPTER VIII—THE EMPEROR PUTS A QUESTION TO THE GUIDE LACOSTE

So, on the morning of Waterloo, Napoleon was content.

He was right; the plan of battle conceived by him was, as we have seen,

really admirable.

The battle once begun, its very various changes,—the resistance of

Hougomont; the tenacity of La Haie-Sainte; the killing of Bauduin; the

disabling of Foy; the unexpected wall against which Soye’s brigade was

shattered; Guilleminot’s fatal heedlessness when he had neither petard

nor powder sacks; the miring of the batteries; the fifteen unescorted

pieces overwhelmed in a hollow way by Uxbridge; the small effect of the

bombs falling in the English lines, and there embedding themselves in

the rain-soaked soil, and only succeeding in producing volcanoes of

mud, so that the canister was turned into a splash; the uselessness of

Piré’s demonstration on Braine-l’Alleud; all that cavalry, fifteen

squadrons, almost exterminated; the right wing of the English badly

alarmed, the left wing badly cut into; Ney’s strange mistake in

massing, instead of echelonning the four divisions of the first corps;

men delivered over to grape-shot, arranged in ranks twenty-seven deep

and with a frontage of two hundred; the frightful holes made in these

masses by the cannon-balls; attacking columns disorganized; the

side-battery suddenly unmasked on their flank; Bourgeois, Donzelot, and

Durutte compromised; Quiot repulsed; Lieutenant Vieux, that Hercules

graduated at the Polytechnic School, wounded at the moment when he was

beating in with an axe the door of La Haie-Sainte under the downright

fire of the English barricade which barred the angle of the road from

Genappe to Brussels; Marcognet’s division caught between the infantry

and the cavalry, shot down at the very muzzle of the guns amid the

grain by Best and Pack, put to the sword by Ponsonby; his battery of

seven pieces spiked; the Prince of Saxe-Weimar holding and guarding, in

spite of the Comte d’Erlon, both Frischemont and Smohain; the flag of

the 105th taken, the flag of the 45th captured; that black Prussian

hussar stopped by runners of the flying column of three hundred light

cavalry on the scout between Wavre and Plancenoit; the alarming things

that had been said by prisoners; Grouchy’s delay; fifteen hundred men

killed in the orchard of Hougomont in less than an hour; eighteen

hundred men overthrown in a still shorter time about La

Haie-Sainte,—all these stormy incidents passing like the clouds of

battle before Napoleon, had hardly troubled his gaze and had not

overshadowed that face of imperial certainty. Napoleon was accustomed

to gaze steadily at war; he never added up the heart-rending details,

cipher by cipher; ciphers mattered little to him, provided that they

furnished the total—victory; he was not alarmed if the beginnings did

go astray, since he thought himself the master and the possessor at the

end; he knew how to wait, supposing himself to be out of the question,

and he treated destiny as his equal: he seemed to say to fate, Thou

wilt not dare.

Composed half of light and half of shadow, Napoleon thought himself

protected in good and tolerated in evil. He had, or thought that he

had, a connivance, one might almost say a complicity, of events in his

favor, which was equivalent to the invulnerability of antiquity.

Nevertheless, when one has Bérésina, Leipzig, and Fontainebleau behind

one, it seems as though one might distrust Waterloo. A mysterious frown

becomes perceptible in the depths of the heavens.

At the moment when Wellington retreated, Napoleon shuddered. He

suddenly beheld the table-land of Mont-Saint-Jean cleared, and the van

of the English army disappear. It was rallying, but hiding itself. The

Emperor half rose in his stirrups. The lightning of victory flashed

from his eyes.

Wellington, driven into a corner at the forest of Soignes and

destroyed—that was the definitive conquest of England by France; it was

Crécy, Poitiers, Malplaquet, and Ramillies avenged. The man of Marengo

was wiping out Agincourt.

So the Emperor, meditating on this terrible turn of fortune, swept his

glass for the last time over all the points of the field of battle. His

guard, standing behind him with grounded arms, watched him from below

with a sort of religion. He pondered; he examined the slopes, noted the

declivities, scrutinized the clumps of trees, the square of rye, the

path; he seemed to be counting each bush. He gazed with some intentness

at the English barricades of the two highways,—two large abatis of

trees, that on the road to Genappe above La Haie-Sainte, armed with two

cannon, the only ones out of all the English artillery which commanded

the extremity of the field of battle, and that on the road to Nivelles

where gleamed the Dutch bayonets of Chassé’s brigade. Near this

barricade he observed the old chapel of Saint Nicholas, painted white,

which stands at the angle of the crossroad near Braine-l’Alleud; he

bent down and spoke in a low voice to the guide Lacoste. The guide made

a negative sign with his head, which was probably perfidious.

The Emperor straightened himself up and fell to thinking.

Wellington had drawn back.

All that remained to do was to complete this retreat by crushing him.

Napoleon turning round abruptly, despatched an express at full speed to

Paris to announce that the battle was won.

Napoleon was one of those geniuses from whom thunder darts.

He had just found his clap of thunder.

He gave orders to Milhaud’s cuirassiers to carry the table-land of

Mont-Saint-Jean.

CHAPTER IX—THE UNEXPECTED

There were three thousand five hundred of them. They formed a front a

quarter of a league in extent. They were giant men, on colossal horses.

There were six and twenty squadrons of them; and they had behind them

to support them Lefebvre-Desnouettes’s division,—the one hundred and

six picked gendarmes, the light cavalry of the Guard, eleven hundred

and ninety-seven men, and the lancers of the guard of eight hundred and

eighty lances. They wore casques without horse-tails, and cuirasses of

beaten iron, with horse-pistols in their holsters, and long

sabre-swords. That morning the whole army had admired them, when, at

nine o’clock, with braying of trumpets and all the music playing “Let

us watch o’er the Safety of the Empire,” they had come in a solid

column, with one of their batteries on their flank, another in their

centre, and deployed in two ranks between the roads to Genappe and

Frischemont, and taken up their position for battle in that powerful

second line, so cleverly arranged by Napoleon, which, having on its

extreme left Kellermann’s cuirassiers and on its extreme right

Milhaud’s cuirassiers, had, so to speak, two wings of iron.

Aide-de-camp Bernard carried them the Emperor’s orders. Ney drew his

sword and placed himself at their head. The enormous squadrons were set

in motion.

Then a formidable spectacle was seen.

All their cavalry, with upraised swords, standards and trumpets flung

to the breeze, formed in columns by divisions, descended, by a

simultaneous movement and like one man, with the precision of a brazen

battering-ram which is effecting a breach, the hill of La Belle

Alliance, plunged into the terrible depths in which so many men had

already fallen, disappeared there in the smoke, then emerging from that

shadow, reappeared on the other side of the valley, still compact and

in close ranks, mounting at a full trot, through a storm of grape-shot

which burst upon them, the terrible muddy slope of the table-land of

Mont-Saint-Jean. They ascended, grave, threatening, imperturbable; in

the intervals between the musketry and the artillery, their colossal

trampling was audible. Being two divisions, there were two columns of

them; Wathier’s division held the right, Delort’s division was on the

left. It seemed as though two immense adders of steel were to be seen

crawling towards the crest of the table-land. It traversed the battle

like a prodigy.

Nothing like it had been seen since the taking of the great redoubt of

the Muskowa by the heavy cavalry; Murat was lacking here, but Ney was

again present. It seemed as though that mass had become a monster and

had but one soul. Each column undulated and swelled like the ring of a

polyp. They could be seen through a vast cloud of smoke which was rent

here and there. A confusion of helmets, of cries, of sabres, a stormy

heaving of the cruppers of horses amid the cannons and the flourish of

trumpets, a terrible and disciplined tumult; over all, the cuirasses

like the scales on the hydra.

These narrations seemed to belong to another age. Something parallel to

this vision appeared, no doubt, in the ancient Orphic epics, which told

of the centaurs, the old hippanthropes, those Titans with human heads

and equestrian chests who scaled Olympus at a gallop, horrible,

invulnerable, sublime—gods and beasts.

Odd numerical coincidence,—twenty-six battalions rode to meet

twenty-six battalions. Behind the crest of the plateau, in the shadow

of the masked battery, the English infantry, formed into thirteen

squares, two battalions to the square, in two lines, with seven in the

first line, six in the second, the stocks of their guns to their

shoulders, taking aim at that which was on the point of appearing,

waited, calm, mute, motionless. They did not see the cuirassiers, and

the cuirassiers did not see them. They listened to the rise of this

flood of men. They heard the swelling noise of three thousand horse,

the alternate and symmetrical tramp of their hoofs at full trot, the

jingling of the cuirasses, the clang of the sabres and a sort of grand

and savage breathing. There ensued a most terrible silence; then, all

at once, a long file of uplifted arms, brandishing sabres, appeared

above the crest, and casques, trumpets, and standards, and three

thousand heads with gray moustaches, shouting, “Vive l’Empereur!” All

this cavalry debouched on the plateau, and it was like the appearance

of an earthquake.

All at once, a tragic incident; on the English left, on our right, the

head of the column of cuirassiers reared up with a frightful clamor. On

arriving at the culminating point of the crest, ungovernable, utterly

given over to fury and their course of extermination of the squares and

cannon, the cuirassiers had just caught sight of a trench,—a trench

between them and the English. It was the hollow road of Ohain.

It was a terrible moment. The ravine was there, unexpected, yawning,

directly under the horses’ feet, two fathoms deep between its double

slopes; the second file pushed the first into it, and the third pushed

on the second; the horses reared and fell backward, landed on their

haunches, slid down, all four feet in the air, crushing and

overwhelming the riders; and there being no means of retreat,—the whole

column being no longer anything more than a projectile,—the force which

had been acquired to crush the English crushed the French; the

inexorable ravine could only yield when filled; horses and riders

rolled there pell-mell, grinding each other, forming but one mass of

flesh in this gulf: when this trench was full of living men, the rest

marched over them and passed on. Almost a third of Dubois’s brigade

fell into that abyss.

This began the loss of the battle.

A local tradition, which evidently exaggerates matters, says that two

thousand horses and fifteen hundred men were buried in the hollow road

of Ohain. This figure probably comprises all the other corpses which

were flung into this ravine the day after the combat.

Let us note in passing that it was Dubois’s sorely tried brigade which,

an hour previously, making a charge to one side, had captured the flag

of the Lunenburg battalion.

Napoleon, before giving the order for this charge of Milhaud’s

cuirassiers, had scrutinized the ground, but had not been able to see

that hollow road, which did not even form a wrinkle on the surface of

the plateau. Warned, nevertheless, and put on the alert by the little

white chapel which marks its angle of junction with the Nivelles

highway, he had probably put a question as to the possibility of an

obstacle, to the guide Lacoste. The guide had answered No. We might

almost affirm that Napoleon’s catastrophe originated in that sign of a

peasant’s head.

Other fatalities were destined to arise.

Was it possible that Napoleon should have won that battle? We answer

No. Why? Because of Wellington? Because of Blücher? No. Because of God.

Bonaparte victor at Waterloo; that does not come within the law of the

nineteenth century. Another series of facts was in preparation, in

which there was no longer any room for Napoleon. The ill will of events

had declared itself long before.

It was time that this vast man should fall.

The excessive weight of this man in human destiny disturbed the

balance. This individual alone counted for more than a universal group.

These plethoras of all human vitality concentrated in a single head;

the world mounting to the brain of one man,—this would be mortal to

civilization were it to last. The moment had arrived for the

incorruptible and supreme equity to alter its plan. Probably the

principles and the elements, on which the regular gravitations of the

moral, as of the material, world depend, had complained. Smoking blood,

over-filled cemeteries, mothers in tears,—these are formidable

pleaders. When the earth is suffering from too heavy a burden, there

are mysterious groanings of the shades, to which the abyss lends an

ear.

Napoleon had been denounced in the infinite and his fall had been

decided on.

He embarrassed God.

Waterloo is not a battle; it is a change of front on the part of the

Universe.

CHAPTER X—THE PLATEAU OF MONT-SAINT-JEAN

The battery was unmasked at the same moment with the ravine.

Sixty cannons and the thirteen squares darted lightning point-blank on

the cuirassiers. The intrepid General Delort made the military salute

to the English battery.

The whole of the flying artillery of the English had re-entered the

squares at a gallop. The cuirassiers had not had even the time for a

halt. The disaster of the hollow road had decimated, but not

discouraged them. They belonged to that class of men who, when

diminished in number, increase in courage.

Wathier’s column alone had suffered in the disaster; Delort’s column,

which Ney had deflected to the left, as though he had a presentiment of

an ambush, had arrived whole.

The cuirassiers hurled themselves on the English squares.

At full speed, with bridles loose, swords in their teeth, pistols in

fist,—such was the attack.

There are moments in battles in which the soul hardens the man until

the soldier is changed into a statue, and when all this flesh turns

into granite. The English battalions, desperately assaulted, did not

stir.

Then it was terrible.

All the faces of the English squares were attacked at once. A frenzied

whirl enveloped them. That cold infantry remained impassive. The first

rank knelt and received the cuirassiers on their bayonets, the second

ranks shot them down; behind the second rank the cannoneers charged

their guns, the front of the square parted, permitted the passage of an

eruption of grape-shot, and closed again. The cuirassiers replied by

crushing them. Their great horses reared, strode across the ranks,

leaped over the bayonets and fell, gigantic, in the midst of these four

living wells. The cannon-balls ploughed furrows in these cuirassiers;

the cuirassiers made breaches in the squares. Files of men disappeared,

ground to dust under the horses. The bayonets plunged into the bellies

of these centaurs; hence a hideousness of wounds which has probably

never been seen anywhere else. The squares, wasted by this mad cavalry,

closed up their ranks without flinching. Inexhaustible in the matter of

grape-shot, they created explosions in their assailants’ midst. The

form of this combat was monstrous. These squares were no longer

battalions, they were craters; those cuirassiers were no longer

cavalry, they were a tempest. Each square was a volcano attacked by a

cloud; lava contended with lightning.

The square on the extreme right, the most exposed of all, being in the

air, was almost annihilated at the very first shock. lt was formed of

the 75th regiment of Highlanders. The bagpipe-player in the centre

dropped his melancholy eyes, filled with the reflections of the forests

and the lakes, in profound inattention, while men were being

exterminated around him, and seated on a drum, with his pibroch under

his arm, played the Highland airs. These Scotchmen died thinking of Ben

Lothian, as did the Greeks recalling Argos. The sword of a cuirassier,

which hewed down the bagpipes and the arm which bore it, put an end to

the song by killing the singer.

The cuirassiers, relatively few in number, and still further diminished

by the catastrophe of the ravine, had almost the whole English army

against them, but they multiplied themselves so that each man of them

was equal to ten. Nevertheless, some Hanoverian battalions yielded.

Wellington perceived it, and thought of his cavalry. Had Napoleon at

that same moment thought of his infantry, he would have won the battle.

This forgetfulness was his great and fatal mistake.

All at once, the cuirassiers, who had been the assailants, found

themselves assailed. The English cavalry was at their back. Before them

two squares, behind them Somerset; Somerset meant fourteen hundred

dragoons of the guard. On the right, Somerset had Dornberg with the

German light-horse, and on his left, Trip with the Belgian carabineers;

the cuirassiers attacked on the flank and in front, before and in the

rear, by infantry and cavalry, had to face all sides. What mattered it

to them? They were a whirlwind. Their valor was something

indescribable.

In addition to this, they had behind them the battery, which was still

thundering. It was necessary that it should be so, or they could never

have been wounded in the back. One of their cuirasses, pierced on the

shoulder by a ball from a biscayan,9 is in the collection of the

Waterloo Museum.

For such Frenchmen nothing less than such Englishmen was needed. It was

no longer a hand-to-hand conflict; it was a shadow, a fury, a dizzy

transport of souls and courage, a hurricane of lightning swords. In an

instant the fourteen hundred dragoon guards numbered only eight

hundred. Fuller, their lieutenant-colonel, fell dead. Ney rushed up

with the lancers and Lefebvre-Desnouettes’s light-horse. The plateau of

Mont-Saint-Jean was captured, recaptured, captured again. The

cuirassiers quitted the cavalry to return to the infantry; or, to put

it more exactly, the whole of that formidable rout collared each other

without releasing the other. The squares still held firm.

There were a dozen assaults. Ney had four horses killed under him. Half

the cuirassiers remained on the plateau. This conflict lasted two

hours.

The English army was profoundly shaken. There is no doubt that, had

they not been enfeebled in their first shock by the disaster of the

hollow road the cuirassiers would have overwhelmed the centre and

decided the victory. This extraordinary cavalry petrified Clinton, who

had seen Talavera and Badajoz. Wellington, three-quarters vanquished,

admired heroically. He said in an undertone, “Sublime!”

The cuirassiers annihilated seven squares out of thirteen, took or

spiked sixty pieces of ordnance, and captured from the English

regiments six flags, which three cuirassiers and three chasseurs of the

Guard bore to the Emperor, in front of the farm of La Belle Alliance.

Wellington’s situation had grown worse. This strange battle was like a

duel between two raging, wounded men, each of whom, still fighting and

still resisting, is expending all his blood.

Which of the two will be the first to fall?

The conflict on the plateau continued.

What had become of the cuirassiers? No one could have told. One thing

is certain, that on the day after the battle, a cuirassier and his

horse were found dead among the woodwork of the scales for vehicles at

Mont-Saint-Jean, at the very point where the four roads from Nivelles,

Genappe, La Hulpe, and Brussels meet and intersect each other. This

horseman had pierced the English lines. One of the men who picked up

the body still lives at Mont-Saint-Jean. His name is Dehaze. He was

eighteen years old at that time.

Wellington felt that he was yielding. The crisis was at hand.

The cuirassiers had not succeeded, since the centre was not broken

through. As every one was in possession of the plateau, no one held it,

and in fact it remained, to a great extent, with the English.

Wellington held the village and the culminating plain; Ney had only the

crest and the slope. They seemed rooted in that fatal soil on both

sides.

But the weakening of the English seemed irremediable. The bleeding of

that army was horrible. Kempt, on the left wing, demanded

reinforcements. “There are none,” replied Wellington; “he must let

himself be killed!” Almost at that same moment, a singular coincidence

which paints the exhaustion of the two armies, Ney demanded infantry

from Napoleon, and Napoleon exclaimed, “Infantry! Where does he expect

me to get it? Does he think I can make it?”

Nevertheless, the English army was in the worse case of the two. The

furious onsets of those great squadrons with cuirasses of iron and

breasts of steel had ground the infantry to nothing. A few men

clustered round a flag marked the post of a regiment; such and such a

battalion was commanded only by a captain or a lieutenant; Alten’s

division, already so roughly handled at La Haie-Sainte, was almost

destroyed; the intrepid Belgians of Van Kluze’s brigade strewed the

rye-fields all along the Nivelles road; hardly anything was left of

those Dutch grenadiers, who, intermingled with Spaniards in our ranks

in 1811, fought against Wellington; and who, in 1815, rallied to the

English standard, fought against Napoleon. The loss in officers was

considerable. Lord Uxbridge, who had his leg buried on the following

day, had his knee shattered. If, on the French side, in that tussle of

the cuirassiers, Delort, l’Héritier, Colbert, Dnop, Travers, and

Blancard were disabled, on the side of the English there was Alten

wounded, Barne wounded, Delancey killed, Van Meeren killed, Ompteda

killed, the whole of Wellington’s staff decimated, and England had the

worse of it in that bloody scale. The second regiment of foot-guards

had lost five lieutenant-colonels, four captains, and three ensigns;

the first battalion of the 30th infantry had lost 24 officers and 1,200

soldiers; the 79th Highlanders had lost 24 officers wounded, 18

officers killed, 450 soldiers killed. The Hanoverian hussars of

Cumberland, a whole regiment, with Colonel Hacke at its head, who was

destined to be tried later on and cashiered, had turned bridle in the

presence of the fray, and had fled to the forest of Soignes, sowing

defeat all the way to Brussels. The transports, ammunition-wagons, the

baggage-wagons, the wagons filled with wounded, on perceiving that the

French were gaining ground and approaching the forest, rushed headlong

thither. The Dutch, mowed down by the French cavalry, cried, “Alarm!”

From Vert-Coucou to Groenendael, for a distance of nearly two leagues

in the direction of Brussels, according to the testimony of

eye-witnesses who are still alive, the roads were encumbered with

fugitives. This panic was such that it attacked the Prince de Condé at

Mechlin, and Louis XVIII. at Ghent. With the exception of the feeble

reserve echelonned behind the ambulance established at the farm of

Mont-Saint-Jean, and of Vivian’s and Vandeleur’s brigades, which

flanked the left wing, Wellington had no cavalry left. A number of

batteries lay unhorsed. These facts are attested by Siborne; and

Pringle, exaggerating the disaster, goes so far as to say that the

Anglo-Dutch army was reduced to thirty-four thousand men. The Iron Duke

remained calm, but his lips blanched. Vincent, the Austrian

commissioner, Alava, the Spanish commissioner, who were present at the

battle in the English staff, thought the Duke lost. At five o’clock

Wellington drew out his watch, and he was heard to murmur these

sinister words, “Blücher, or night!”

It was at about that moment that a distant line of bayonets gleamed on

the heights in the direction of Frischemont.

Here comes the change of face in this giant drama.

CHAPTER XI—A BAD GUIDE TO NAPOLEON; A GOOD GUIDE TO BÜLOW

The painful surprise of Napoleon is well known. Grouchy hoped for,

Blücher arriving. Death instead of life.

Fate has these turns; the throne of the world was expected; it was

Saint Helena that was seen.

If the little shepherd who served as guide to Bülow, Blücher’s

lieutenant, had advised him to debouch from the forest above

Frischemont, instead of below Plancenoit, the form of the nineteenth

century might, perhaps, have been different. Napoleon would have won

the battle of Waterloo. By any other route than that below Plancenoit,

the Prussian army would have come out upon a ravine impassable for

artillery, and Bülow would not have arrived.

Now the Prussian general, Muffling, declares that one hour’s delay, and

Blücher would not have found Wellington on his feet. “The battle was

lost.”

It was time that Bülow should arrive, as will be seen. He had,

moreover, been very much delayed. He had bivouacked at Dion-le-Mont,

and had set out at daybreak; but the roads were impassable, and his

divisions stuck fast in the mire. The ruts were up to the hubs of the

cannons. Moreover, he had been obliged to pass the Dyle on the narrow

bridge of Wavre; the street leading to the bridge had been fired by the

French, so the caissons and ammunition-wagons could not pass between

two rows of burning houses, and had been obliged to wait until the

conflagration was extinguished. It was midday before Bülow’s vanguard

had been able to reach Chapelle-Saint-Lambert.

Had the action been begun two hours earlier, it would have been over at

four o’clock, and Blücher would have fallen on the battle won by

Napoleon. Such are these immense risks proportioned to an infinite

which we cannot comprehend.

The Emperor had been the first, as early as midday, to descry with his

field-glass, on the extreme horizon, something which had attracted his

attention. He had said, “I see yonder a cloud, which seems to me to be

troops.” Then he asked the Duc de Dalmatie, “Soult, what do you see in

the direction of Chapelle-Saint-Lambert?” The marshal, levelling his

glass, answered, “Four or five thousand men, Sire; evidently Grouchy.”

But it remained motionless in the mist. All the glasses of the staff

had studied “the cloud” pointed out by the Emperor. Some said: “It is

trees.” The truth is, that the cloud did not move. The Emperor detached

Domon’s division of light cavalry to reconnoitre in that quarter.

Bülow had not moved, in fact. His vanguard was very feeble, and could

accomplish nothing. He was obliged to wait for the body of the army

corps, and he had received orders to concentrate his forces before

entering into line; but at five o’clock, perceiving Wellington’s peril,

Blücher ordered Bülow to attack, and uttered these remarkable words:

“We must give air to the English army.”

A little later, the divisions of Losthin, Hiller, Hacke, and Ryssel

deployed before Lobau’s corps, the cavalry of Prince William of Prussia

debouched from the forest of Paris, Plancenoit was in flames, and the

Prussian cannon-balls began to rain even upon the ranks of the guard in

reserve behind Napoleon.

CHAPTER XII—THE GUARD

Every one knows the rest,—the irruption of a third army; the battle

broken to pieces; eighty-six mouths of fire thundering simultaneously;

Pirch the first coming up with Bülow; Zieten’s cavalry led by Blücher

in person, the French driven back; Marcognet swept from the plateau of

Ohain; Durutte dislodged from Papelotte; Donzelot and Quiot retreating;

Lobau caught on the flank; a fresh battle precipitating itself on our

dismantled regiments at nightfall; the whole English line resuming the

offensive and thrust forward; the gigantic breach made in the French

army; the English grape-shot and the Prussian grape-shot aiding each

other; the extermination; disaster in front; disaster on the flank; the

Guard entering the line in the midst of this terrible crumbling of all

things.

Conscious that they were about to die, they shouted, “Vive l’Empereur!”

History records nothing more touching than that agony bursting forth in

acclamations.

The sky had been overcast all day long. All of a sudden, at that very

moment,—it was eight o’clock in the evening—the clouds on the horizon

parted, and allowed the grand and sinister glow of the setting sun to

pass through, athwart the elms on the Nivelles road. They had seen it

rise at Austerlitz.

Each battalion of the Guard was commanded by a general for this final

catastrophe. Friant, Michel, Roguet, Harlet, Mallet, Poret de Morvan,

were there. When the tall caps of the grenadiers of the Guard, with

their large plaques bearing the eagle appeared, symmetrical, in line,

tranquil, in the midst of that combat, the enemy felt a respect for

France; they thought they beheld twenty victories entering the field of

battle, with wings outspread, and those who were the conquerors,

believing themselves to be vanquished, retreated; but Wellington

shouted, “Up, Guards, and aim straight!” The red regiment of English

guards, lying flat behind the hedges, sprang up, a cloud of grape-shot

riddled the tricolored flag and whistled round our eagles; all hurled

themselves forwards, and the final carnage began. In the darkness, the

Imperial Guard felt the army losing ground around it, and in the vast

shock of the rout it heard the desperate flight which had taken the

place of the “Vive l’Empereur!” and, with flight behind it, it

continued to advance, more crushed, losing more men at every step that

it took. There were none who hesitated, no timid men in its ranks. The

soldier in that troop was as much of a hero as the general. Not a man

was missing in that suicide.

Ney, bewildered, great with all the grandeur of accepted death, offered

himself to all blows in that tempest. He had his fifth horse killed

under him there. Perspiring, his eyes aflame, foaming at the mouth,

with uniform unbuttoned, one of his epaulets half cut off by a

sword-stroke from a horseguard, his plaque with the great eagle dented

by a bullet; bleeding, bemired, magnificent, a broken sword in his

hand, he said, “Come and see how a Marshal of France dies on the field

of battle!” But in vain; he did not die. He was haggard and angry. At

Drouet d’Erlon he hurled this question, “Are you not going to get

yourself killed?” In the midst of all that artillery engaged in

crushing a handful of men, he shouted: “So there is nothing for me! Oh!

I should like to have all these English bullets enter my bowels!”

Unhappy man, thou wert reserved for French bullets!

CHAPTER XIII—THE CATASTROPHE

The rout behind the Guard was melancholy.

The army yielded suddenly on all sides at once,—Hougomont, La

Haie-Sainte, Papelotte, Plancenoit. The cry “Treachery!” was followed

by a cry of “Save yourselves who can!” An army which is disbanding is

like a thaw. All yields, splits, cracks, floats, rolls, falls, jostles,

hastens, is precipitated. The disintegration is unprecedented. Ney

borrows a horse, leaps upon it, and without hat, cravat, or sword,

places himself across the Brussels road, stopping both English and

French. He strives to detain the army, he recalls it to its duty, he

insults it, he clings to the rout. He is overwhelmed. The soldiers fly

from him, shouting, “Long live Marshal Ney!” Two of Durutte’s regiments

go and come in affright as though tossed back and forth between the

swords of the Uhlans and the fusillade of the brigades of Kempt, Best,

Pack, and Rylandt; the worst of hand-to-hand conflicts is the defeat;

friends kill each other in order to escape; squadrons and battalions

break and disperse against each other, like the tremendous foam of

battle. Lobau at one extremity, and Reille at the other, are drawn into

the tide. In vain does Napoleon erect walls from what is left to him of

his Guard; in vain does he expend in a last effort his last serviceable

squadrons. Quiot retreats before Vivian, Kellermann before Vandeleur,

Lobau before Bülow, Morand before Pirch, Domon and Subervic before

Prince William of Prussia; Guyot, who led the Emperor’s squadrons to

the charge, falls beneath the feet of the English dragoons. Napoleon

gallops past the line of fugitives, harangues, urges, threatens,

entreats them. All the mouths which in the morning had shouted, “Long

live the Emperor!” remain gaping; they hardly recognize him. The

Prussian cavalry, newly arrived, dashes forwards, flies, hews, slashes,

kills, exterminates. Horses lash out, the cannons flee; the soldiers of

the artillery-train unharness the caissons and use the horses to make

their escape; transports overturned, with all four wheels in the air,

clog the road and occasion massacres. Men are crushed, trampled down,

others walk over the dead and the living. Arms are lost. A dizzy

multitude fills the roads, the paths, the bridges, the plains, the

hills, the valleys, the woods, encumbered by this invasion of forty

thousand men. Shouts despair, knapsacks and guns flung among the rye,

passages forced at the point of the sword, no more comrades, no more

officers, no more generals, an inexpressible terror. Zieten putting

France to the sword at its leisure. Lions converted into goats. Such

was the flight.

At Genappe, an effort was made to wheel about, to present a battle

front, to draw up in line. Lobau rallied three hundred men. The

entrance to the village was barricaded, but at the first volley of

Prussian canister, all took to flight again, and Lobau was taken. That

volley of grape-shot can be seen to-day imprinted on the ancient gable

of a brick building on the right of the road at a few minutes’ distance

before you enter Genappe. The Prussians threw themselves into Genappe,

furious, no doubt, that they were not more entirely the conquerors. The

pursuit was stupendous. Blücher ordered extermination. Roguet had set

the lugubrious example of threatening with death any French grenadier

who should bring him a Prussian prisoner. Blücher outdid Roguet.

Duhesme, the general of the Young Guard, hemmed in at the doorway of an

inn at Genappe, surrendered his sword to a huzzar of death, who took

the sword and slew the prisoner. The victory was completed by the

assassination of the vanquished. Let us inflict punishment, since we

are history: old Blücher disgraced himself. This ferocity put the

finishing touch to the disaster. The desperate route traversed Genappe,

traversed Quatre-Bras, traversed Gosselies, traversed Frasnes,

traversed Charleroi, traversed Thuin, and only halted at the frontier.

Alas! and who, then, was fleeing in that manner? The Grand Army.

This vertigo, this terror, this downfall into ruin of the loftiest

bravery which ever astounded history,—is that causeless? No. The shadow

of an enormous right is projected athwart Waterloo. It is the day of

destiny. The force which is mightier than man produced that day. Hence

the terrified wrinkle of those brows; hence all those great souls

surrendering their swords. Those who had conquered Europe have fallen

prone on the earth, with nothing left to say nor to do, feeling the

present shadow of a terrible presence. \_Hoc erat in fatis\_. That day

the perspective of the human race underwent a change. Waterloo is the

hinge of the nineteenth century. The disappearance of the great man was

necessary to the advent of the great century. Some one, a person to

whom one replies not, took the responsibility on himself. The panic of

heroes can be explained. In the battle of Waterloo there is something

more than a cloud, there is something of the meteor. God has passed by.

At nightfall, in a meadow near Genappe, Bernard and Bertrand seized by

the skirt of his coat and detained a man, haggard, pensive, sinister,

gloomy, who, dragged to that point by the current of the rout, had just

dismounted, had passed the bridle of his horse over his arm, and with

wild eye was returning alone to Waterloo. It was Napoleon, the immense

somnambulist of this dream which had crumbled, essaying once more to

advance.

CHAPTER XIV—THE LAST SQUARE

Several squares of the Guard, motionless amid this stream of the

defeat, as rocks in running water, held their own until night. Night

came, death also; they awaited that double shadow, and, invincible,

allowed themselves to be enveloped therein. Each regiment, isolated

from the rest, and having no bond with the army, now shattered in every

part, died alone. They had taken up position for this final action,

some on the heights of Rossomme, others on the plain of

Mont-Saint-Jean. There, abandoned, vanquished, terrible, those gloomy

squares endured their death-throes in formidable fashion. Ulm, Wagram,

Jena, Friedland, died with them.

At twilight, towards nine o’clock in the evening, one of them was left

at the foot of the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean. In that fatal valley, at

the foot of that declivity which the cuirassiers had ascended, now

inundated by the masses of the English, under the converging fires of

the victorious hostile cavalry, under a frightful density of

projectiles, this square fought on. It was commanded by an obscure

officer named Cambronne. At each discharge, the square diminished and

replied. It replied to the grape-shot with a fusillade, continually

contracting its four walls. The fugitives pausing breathless for a

moment in the distance, listened in the darkness to that gloomy and

ever-decreasing thunder.

When this legion had been reduced to a handful, when nothing was left

of their flag but a rag, when their guns, the bullets all gone, were no

longer anything but clubs, when the heap of corpses was larger than the

group of survivors, there reigned among the conquerors, around those

men dying so sublimely, a sort of sacred terror, and the English

artillery, taking breath, became silent. This furnished a sort of

respite. These combatants had around them something in the nature of a

swarm of spectres, silhouettes of men on horseback, the black profiles

of cannon, the white sky viewed through wheels and gun-carriages, the

colossal death’s-head, which the heroes saw constantly through the

smoke, in the depths of the battle, advanced upon them and gazed at

them. Through the shades of twilight they could hear the pieces being

loaded; the matches all lighted, like the eyes of tigers at night,

formed a circle round their heads; all the lintstocks of the English

batteries approached the cannons, and then, with emotion, holding the

supreme moment suspended above these men, an English general, Colville

according to some, Maitland according to others, shouted to them,

“Surrender, brave Frenchmen!” Cambronne replied, “——.”

{EDITOR’S COMMENTARY: Another edition of this book has the word

“Merde!” in lieu of the —— above.}

CHAPTER XV—CAMBRONNE

If any French reader object to having his susceptibilities offended,

one would have to refrain from repeating in his presence what is

perhaps the finest reply that a Frenchman ever made. This would enjoin

us from consigning something sublime to History.

At our own risk and peril, let us violate this injunction.

Now, then, among those giants there was one Titan,—Cambronne.

To make that reply and then perish, what could be grander? For being

willing to die is the same as to die; and it was not this man’s fault

if he survived after he was shot.

The winner of the battle of Waterloo was not Napoleon, who was put to

flight; nor Wellington, giving way at four o’clock, in despair at five;

nor Blücher, who took no part in the engagement. The winner of Waterloo

was Cambronne.

To thunder forth such a reply at the lightning-flash that kills you is

to conquer!

Thus to answer the Catastrophe, thus to speak to Fate, to give this

pedestal to the future lion, to hurl such a challenge to the midnight

rainstorm, to the treacherous wall of Hougomont, to the sunken road of

Ohain, to Grouchy’s delay, to Blücher’s arrival, to be Irony itself in

the tomb, to act so as to stand upright though fallen, to drown in two

syllables the European coalition, to offer kings privies which the

Cæsars once knew, to make the lowest of words the most lofty by

entwining with it the glory of France, insolently to end Waterloo with

Mardigras, to finish Leonidas with Rabellais, to set the crown on this

victory by a word impossible to speak, to lose the field and preserve

history, to have the laugh on your side after such a carnage,—this is

immense!

It was an insult such as a thunder-cloud might hurl! It reaches the

grandeur of Æschylus!

Cambronne’s reply produces the effect of a violent break. ’Tis like the

breaking of a heart under a weight of scorn. ’Tis the overflow of agony

bursting forth. Who conquered? Wellington? No! Had it not been for

Blücher, he was lost. Was it Blücher? No! If Wellington had not begun,

Blücher could not have finished. This Cambronne, this man spending his

last hour, this unknown soldier, this infinitesimal of war, realizes

that here is a falsehood, a falsehood in a catastrophe, and so doubly

agonizing; and at the moment when his rage is bursting forth because of

it, he is offered this mockery,—life! How could he restrain himself?

Yonder are all the kings of Europe, the general’s flushed with victory,

the Jupiter’s darting thunderbolts; they have a hundred thousand

victorious soldiers, and back of the hundred thousand a million; their

cannon stand with yawning mouths, the match is lighted; they grind down

under their heels the Imperial guards, and the grand army; they have

just crushed Napoleon, and only Cambronne remains,—only this earthworm

is left to protest. He will protest. Then he seeks for the appropriate

word as one seeks for a sword. His mouth froths, and the froth is the

word. In face of this mean and mighty victory, in face of this victory

which counts none victorious, this desperate soldier stands erect. He

grants its overwhelming immensity, but he establishes its triviality;

and he does more than spit upon it. Borne down by numbers, by superior

force, by brute matter, he finds in his soul an expression:

\_“Excrément!”\_ We repeat it,—to use that word, to do thus, to invent

such an expression, is to be the conqueror!

The spirit of mighty days at that portentous moment made its descent on

that unknown man. Cambronne invents the word for Waterloo as Rouget

invents the “Marseillaise,” under the visitation of a breath from on

high. An emanation from the divine whirlwind leaps forth and comes

sweeping over these men, and they shake, and one of them sings the song

supreme, and the other utters the frightful cry.

This challenge of titanic scorn Cambronne hurls not only at Europe in

the name of the Empire,—that would be a trifle: he hurls it at the past

in the name of the Revolution. It is heard, and Cambronne is recognized

as possessed by the ancient spirit of the Titans. Danton seems to be

speaking! Kléber seems to be bellowing!

At that word from Cambronne, the English voice responded, “Fire!” The

batteries flamed, the hill trembled, from all those brazen mouths

belched a last terrible gush of grape-shot; a vast volume of smoke,

vaguely white in the light of the rising moon, rolled out, and when the

smoke dispersed, there was no longer anything there. That formidable

remnant had been annihilated; the Guard was dead. The four walls of the

living redoubt lay prone, and hardly was there discernible, here and

there, even a quiver in the bodies; it was thus that the French

legions, greater than the Roman legions, expired on Mont-Saint-Jean, on

the soil watered with rain and blood, amid the gloomy grain, on the

spot where nowadays Joseph, who drives the post-wagon from Nivelles,

passes whistling, and cheerfully whipping up his horse at four o’clock

in the morning.

CHAPTER XVI—QUOT LIBRAS IN DUCE?

The battle of Waterloo is an enigma. It is as obscure to those who won

it as to those who lost it. For Napoleon it was a panic;10 Blücher sees

nothing in it but fire; Wellington understands nothing in regard to it.

Look at the reports. The bulletins are confused, the commentaries

involved. Some stammer, others lisp. Jomini divides the battle of

Waterloo into four moments; Muffling cuts it up into three changes;

Charras alone, though we hold another judgment than his on some points,

seized with his haughty glance the characteristic outlines of that

catastrophe of human genius in conflict with divine chance. All the

other historians suffer from being somewhat dazzled, and in this

dazzled state they fumble about. It was a day of lightning brilliancy;

in fact, a crumbling of the military monarchy which, to the vast

stupefaction of kings, drew all the kingdoms after it—the fall of

force, the defeat of war.

In this event, stamped with superhuman necessity, the part played by

men amounts to nothing.

If we take Waterloo from Wellington and Blücher, do we thereby deprive

England and Germany of anything? No. Neither that illustrious England

nor that august Germany enter into the problem of Waterloo. Thank

Heaven, nations are great, independently of the lugubrious feats of the

sword. Neither England, nor Germany, nor France is contained in a

scabbard. At this epoch when Waterloo is only a clashing of swords,

above Blücher, Germany has Schiller; above Wellington, England has

Byron. A vast dawn of ideas is the peculiarity of our century, and in

that aurora England and Germany have a magnificent radiance. They are

majestic because they think. The elevation of level which they

contribute to civilization is intrinsic with them; it proceeds from

themselves and not from an accident. The aggrandizement which they have

brought to the nineteenth century has not Waterloo as its source. It is

only barbarous peoples who undergo rapid growth after a victory. That

is the temporary vanity of torrents swelled by a storm. Civilized

people, especially in our day, are neither elevated nor abased by the

good or bad fortune of a captain. Their specific gravity in the human

species results from something more than a combat. Their honor, thank

God! their dignity, their intelligence, their genius, are not numbers

which those gamblers, heroes and conquerors, can put in the lottery of

battles. Often a battle is lost and progress is conquered. There is

less glory and more liberty. The drum holds its peace; reason takes the

word. It is a game in which he who loses wins. Let us, therefore, speak

of Waterloo coldly from both sides. Let us render to chance that which

is due to chance, and to God that which is due to God. What is

Waterloo? A victory? No. The winning number in the lottery.

The quine 11 won by Europe, paid by France.

It was not worthwhile to place a lion there.

Waterloo, moreover, is the strangest encounter in history. Napoleon and

Wellington. They are not enemies; they are opposites. Never did God,

who is fond of antitheses, make a more striking contrast, a more

extraordinary comparison. On one side, precision, foresight, geometry,

prudence, an assured retreat, reserves spared, with an obstinate

coolness, an imperturbable method, strategy, which takes advantage of

the ground, tactics, which preserve the equilibrium of battalions,

carnage, executed according to rule, war regulated, watch in hand,

nothing voluntarily left to chance, the ancient classic courage,

absolute regularity; on the other, intuition, divination, military

oddity, superhuman instinct, a flaming glance, an indescribable

something which gazes like an eagle, and which strikes like the

lightning, a prodigious art in disdainful impetuosity, all the

mysteries of a profound soul, associated with destiny; the stream, the

plain, the forest, the hill, summoned, and in a manner, forced to obey,

the despot going even so far as to tyrannize over the field of battle;

faith in a star mingled with strategic science, elevating but

perturbing it. Wellington was the Barême of war; Napoleon was its

Michael Angelo; and on this occasion, genius was vanquished by

calculation. On both sides some one was awaited. It was the exact

calculator who succeeded. Napoleon was waiting for Grouchy; he did not

come. Wellington expected Blücher; he came.

Wellington is classic war taking its revenge. Bonaparte, at his

dawning, had encountered him in Italy, and beaten him superbly. The old

owl had fled before the young vulture. The old tactics had been not

only struck as by lightning, but disgraced. Who was that Corsican of

six and twenty? What signified that splendid ignoramus, who, with

everything against him, nothing in his favor, without provisions,

without ammunition, without cannon, without shoes, almost without an

army, with a mere handful of men against masses, hurled himself on

Europe combined, and absurdly won victories in the impossible? Whence

had issued that fulminating convict, who almost without taking breath,

and with the same set of combatants in hand, pulverized, one after the

other, the five armies of the emperor of Germany, upsetting Beaulieu on

Alvinzi, Wurmser on Beaulieu, Mélas on Wurmser, Mack on Mélas? Who was

this novice in war with the effrontery of a luminary? The academical

military school excommunicated him, and as it lost its footing; hence,

the implacable rancor of the old Cæsarism against the new; of the

regular sword against the flaming sword; and of the exchequer against

genius. On the 18th of June, 1815, that rancor had the last word, and

beneath Lodi, Montebello, Montenotte, Mantua, Arcola, it wrote:

Waterloo. A triumph of the mediocres which is sweet to the majority.

Destiny consented to this irony. In his decline, Napoleon found

Wurmser, the younger, again in front of him.

In fact, to get Wurmser, it sufficed to blanch the hair of Wellington.

Waterloo is a battle of the first order, won by a captain of the

second.

That which must be admired in the battle of Waterloo, is England; the

English firmness, the English resolution, the English blood; the superb

thing about England there, no offence to her, was herself. It was not

her captain; it was her army.

Wellington, oddly ungrateful, declares in a letter to Lord Bathurst,

that his army, the army which fought on the 18th of June, 1815, was a

“detestable army.” What does that sombre intermingling of bones buried

beneath the furrows of Waterloo think of that?

England has been too modest in the matter of Wellington. To make

Wellington so great is to belittle England. Wellington is nothing but a

hero like many another. Those Scotch Grays, those Horse Guards, those

regiments of Maitland and of Mitchell, that infantry of Pack and Kempt,

that cavalry of Ponsonby and Somerset, those Highlanders playing the

pibroch under the shower of grape-shot, those battalions of Rylandt,

those utterly raw recruits, who hardly knew how to handle a musket

holding their own against Essling’s and Rivoli’s old troops,—that is

what was grand. Wellington was tenacious; in that lay his merit, and we

are not seeking to lessen it: but the least of his foot-soldiers and of

his cavalry would have been as solid as he. The iron soldier is worth

as much as the Iron Duke. As for us, all our glorification goes to the

English soldier, to the English army, to the English people. If trophy

there be, it is to England that the trophy is due. The column of

Waterloo would be more just, if, instead of the figure of a man, it

bore on high the statue of a people.

But this great England will be angry at what we are saying here. She

still cherishes, after her own 1688 and our 1789, the feudal illusion.

She believes in heredity and hierarchy. This people, surpassed by none

in power and glory, regards itself as a nation, and not as a people.

And as a people, it willingly subordinates itself and takes a lord for

its head. As a workman, it allows itself to be disdained; as a soldier,

it allows itself to be flogged.

It will be remembered, that at the battle of Inkermann a sergeant who

had, it appears, saved the army, could not be mentioned by Lord Paglan,

as the English military hierarchy does not permit any hero below the

grade of an officer to be mentioned in the reports.

That which we admire above all, in an encounter of the nature of

Waterloo, is the marvellous cleverness of chance. A nocturnal rain, the

wall of Hougomont, the hollow road of Ohain, Grouchy deaf to the

cannon, Napoleon’s guide deceiving him, Bülow’s guide enlightening

him,—the whole of this cataclysm is wonderfully conducted.

On the whole, let us say it plainly, it was more of a massacre than of

a battle at Waterloo.

Of all pitched battles, Waterloo is the one which has the smallest

front for such a number of combatants. Napoleon three-quarters of a

league; Wellington, half a league; seventy-two thousand combatants on

each side. From this denseness the carnage arose.

The following calculation has been made, and the following proportion

established: Loss of men: at Austerlitz, French, fourteen per cent;

Russians, thirty per cent; Austrians, forty-four per cent. At Wagram,

French, thirteen per cent; Austrians, fourteen. At the Moskowa, French,

thirty-seven per cent; Russians, forty-four. At Bautzen, French,

thirteen per cent; Russians and Prussians, fourteen. At Waterloo,

French, fifty-six per cent; the Allies, thirty-one. Total for Waterloo,

forty-one per cent; one hundred and forty-four thousand combatants;

sixty thousand dead.

To-day the field of Waterloo has the calm which belongs to the earth,

the impassive support of man, and it resembles all plains.

At night, moreover, a sort of visionary mist arises from it; and if a

traveller strolls there, if he listens, if he watches, if he dreams

like Virgil in the fatal plains of Philippi, the hallucination of the

catastrophe takes possession of him. The frightful 18th of June lives

again; the false monumental hillock disappears, the lion vanishes in

air, the battle-field resumes its reality, lines of infantry undulate

over the plain, furious gallops traverse the horizon; the frightened

dreamer beholds the flash of sabres, the gleam of bayonets, the flare

of bombs, the tremendous interchange of thunders; he hears, as it were,

the death rattle in the depths of a tomb, the vague clamor of the

battle phantom; those shadows are grenadiers, those lights are

cuirassiers; that skeleton Napoleon, that other skeleton is Wellington;

all this no longer exists, and yet it clashes together and combats

still; and the ravines are empurpled, and the trees quiver, and there

is fury even in the clouds and in the shadows; all those terrible

heights, Hougomont, Mont-Saint-Jean, Frischemont, Papelotte,

Plancenoit, appear confusedly crowned with whirlwinds of spectres

engaged in exterminating each other.

CHAPTER XVII—IS WATERLOO TO BE CONSIDERED GOOD?

There exists a very respectable liberal school which does not hate

Waterloo. We do not belong to it. To us, Waterloo is but the stupefied

date of liberty. That such an eagle should emerge from such an egg is

certainly unexpected.

If one places one’s self at the culminating point of view of the

question, Waterloo is intentionally a counter-revolutionary victory. It

is Europe against France; it is Petersburg, Berlin, and Vienna against

Paris; it is the \_statu quo\_ against the initiative; it is the 14th of

July, 1789, attacked through the 20th of March, 1815; it is the

monarchies clearing the decks in opposition to the indomitable French

rioting. The final extinction of that vast people which had been in

eruption for twenty-six years—such was the dream. The solidarity of the

Brunswicks, the Nassaus, the Romanoffs, the Hohenzollerns, the

Hapsburgs with the Bourbons. Waterloo bears divine right on its

crupper. It is true, that the Empire having been despotic, the kingdom

by the natural reaction of things, was forced to be liberal, and that a

constitutional order was the unwilling result of Waterloo, to the great

regret of the conquerors. It is because revolution cannot be really

conquered, and that being providential and absolutely fatal, it is

always cropping up afresh: before Waterloo, in Bonaparte overthrowing

the old thrones; after Waterloo, in Louis XVIII. granting and

conforming to the charter. Bonaparte places a postilion on the throne

of Naples, and a sergeant on the throne of Sweden, employing inequality

to demonstrate equality; Louis XVIII. at Saint-Ouen countersigns the

declaration of the rights of man. If you wish to gain an idea of what

revolution is, call it Progress; and if you wish to acquire an idea of

the nature of progress, call it To-morrow. To-morrow fulfils its work

irresistibly, and it is already fulfilling it to-day. It always reaches

its goal strangely. It employs Wellington to make of Foy, who was only

a soldier, an orator. Foy falls at Hougomont and rises again in the

tribune. Thus does progress proceed. There is no such thing as a bad

tool for that workman. It does not become disconcerted, but adjusts to

its divine work the man who has bestridden the Alps, and the good old

tottering invalid of Father Élysée. It makes use of the gouty man as

well as of the conqueror; of the conqueror without, of the gouty man

within. Waterloo, by cutting short the demolition of European thrones

by the sword, had no other effect than to cause the revolutionary work

to be continued in another direction. The slashers have finished; it

was the turn of the thinkers. The century that Waterloo was intended to

arrest has pursued its march. That sinister victory was vanquished by

liberty.

In short, and incontestably, that which triumphed at Waterloo; that

which smiled in Wellington’s rear; that which brought him all the

marshals’ staffs of Europe, including, it is said, the staff of a

marshal of France; that which joyously trundled the barrows full of

bones to erect the knoll of the lion; that which triumphantly inscribed

on that pedestal the date “\_June\_ 18, 1815”; that which encouraged

Blücher, as he put the flying army to the sword; that which, from the

heights of the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean, hovered over France as over

its prey, was the counter-revolution. It was the counter-revolution

which murmured that infamous word “dismemberment.” On arriving in

Paris, it beheld the crater close at hand; it felt those ashes which

scorched its feet, and it changed its mind; it returned to the stammer

of a charter.

Let us behold in Waterloo only that which is in Waterloo. Of

intentional liberty there is none. The counter-revolution was

involuntarily liberal, in the same manner as, by a corresponding

phenomenon, Napoleon was involuntarily revolutionary. On the 18th of

June, 1815, the mounted Robespierre was hurled from his saddle.

CHAPTER XVIII—A RECRUDESCENCE OF DIVINE RIGHT

End of the dictatorship. A whole European system crumbled away.

The Empire sank into a gloom which resembled that of the Roman world as

it expired. Again we behold the abyss, as in the days of the

barbarians; only the barbarism of 1815, which must be called by its pet

name of the counter-revolution, was not long breathed, soon fell to

panting, and halted short. The Empire was bewept,—let us acknowledge

the fact,—and bewept by heroic eyes. If glory lies in the sword

converted into a sceptre, the Empire had been glory in person. It had

diffused over the earth all the light which tyranny can give—a sombre

light. We will say more; an obscure light. Compared to the true

daylight, it is night. This disappearance of night produces the effect

of an eclipse.

Louis XVIII. re-entered Paris. The circling dances of the 8th of July

effaced the enthusiasms of the 20th of March. The Corsican became the

antithesis of the Bearnese. The flag on the dome of the Tuileries was

white. The exile reigned. Hartwell’s pine table took its place in front

of the fleur-de-lys-strewn throne of Louis XIV. Bouvines and Fontenoy

were mentioned as though they had taken place on the preceding day,

Austerlitz having become antiquated. The altar and the throne

fraternized majestically. One of the most undisputed forms of the

health of society in the nineteenth century was established over

France, and over the continent. Europe adopted the white cockade.

Trestaillon was celebrated. The device \_non pluribus impar\_ reappeared

on the stone rays representing a sun upon the front of the barracks on

the Quai d’Orsay. Where there had been an Imperial Guard, there was now

a red house. The Arc du Carrousel, all laden with badly borne

victories, thrown out of its element among these novelties, a little

ashamed, it may be, of Marengo and Arcola, extricated itself from its

predicament with the statue of the Duc d’Angoulême. The cemetery of the

Madeleine, a terrible pauper’s grave in 1793, was covered with jasper

and marble, since the bones of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette lay in

that dust.

In the moat of Vincennes a sepulchral shaft sprang from the earth,

recalling the fact that the Duc d’Enghien had perished in the very

month when Napoleon was crowned. Pope Pius VII., who had performed the

coronation very near this death, tranquilly bestowed his blessing on

the fall as he had bestowed it on the elevation. At Schoenbrunn there

was a little shadow, aged four, whom it was seditious to call the King

of Rome. And these things took place, and the kings resumed their

thrones, and the master of Europe was put in a cage, and the old regime

became the new regime, and all the shadows and all the light of the

earth changed place, because, on the afternoon of a certain summer’s

day, a shepherd said to a Prussian in the forest, “Go this way, and not

that!”

This 1815 was a sort of lugubrious April. Ancient unhealthy and

poisonous realities were covered with new appearances. A lie wedded

1789; the right divine was masked under a charter; fictions became

constitutional; prejudices, superstitions and mental reservations, with

Article 14 in the heart, were varnished over with liberalism. It was

the serpent’s change of skin.

Man had been rendered both greater and smaller by Napoleon. Under this

reign of splendid matter, the ideal had received the strange name of

ideology! It is a grave imprudence in a great man to turn the future

into derision. The populace, however, that food for cannon which is so

fond of the cannoneer, sought him with its glance. Where is he? What is

he doing? “Napoleon is dead,” said a passer-by to a veteran of Marengo

and Waterloo. “He dead!” cried the soldier; “you don’t know him.”

Imagination distrusted this man, even when overthrown. The depths of

Europe were full of darkness after Waterloo. Something enormous

remained long empty through Napoleon’s disappearance.

The kings placed themselves in this void. Ancient Europe profited by it

to undertake reforms. There was a Holy Alliance; \_Belle-Alliance\_,

Beautiful Alliance, the fatal field of Waterloo had said in advance.

In presence and in face of that antique Europe reconstructed, the

features of a new France were sketched out. The future, which the

Emperor had rallied, made its entry. On its brow it bore the star,

Liberty. The glowing eyes of all young generations were turned on it.

Singular fact! people were, at one and the same time, in love with the

future, Liberty, and the past, Napoleon. Defeat had rendered the

vanquished greater. Bonaparte fallen seemed more lofty than Napoleon

erect. Those who had triumphed were alarmed. England had him guarded by

Hudson Lowe, and France had him watched by Montchenu. His folded arms

became a source of uneasiness to thrones. Alexander called him “my

sleeplessness.” This terror was the result of the quantity of

revolution which was contained in him. That is what explains and

excuses Bonapartist liberalism. This phantom caused the old world to

tremble. The kings reigned, but ill at their ease, with the rock of

Saint Helena on the horizon.

While Napoleon was passing through the death struggle at Longwood, the

sixty thousand men who had fallen on the field of Waterloo were quietly

rotting, and something of their peace was shed abroad over the world.

The Congress of Vienna made the treaties in 1815, and Europe called

this the Restoration.

This is what Waterloo was.

But what matters it to the Infinite? all that tempest, all that cloud,

that war, then that peace? All that darkness did not trouble for a

moment the light of that immense Eye before which a grub skipping from

one blade of grass to another equals the eagle soaring from belfry to

belfry on the towers of Notre Dame.

CHAPTER XIX—THE BATTLE-FIELD AT NIGHT

Let us return—it is a necessity in this book—to that fatal

battle-field.

On the 18th of June the moon was full. Its light favored Blücher’s

ferocious pursuit, betrayed the traces of the fugitives, delivered up

that disastrous mass to the eager Prussian cavalry, and aided the

massacre. Such tragic favors of the night do occur sometimes during

catastrophes.

After the last cannon-shot had been fired, the plain of Mont-Saint-Jean

remained deserted.

The English occupied the encampment of the French; it is the usual sign

of victory to sleep in the bed of the vanquished. They established

their bivouac beyond Rossomme. The Prussians, let loose on the

retreating rout, pushed forward. Wellington went to the village of

Waterloo to draw up his report to Lord Bathurst.

If ever the \_sic vos non vobis\_ was applicable, it certainly is to that

village of Waterloo. Waterloo took no part, and lay half a league from

the scene of action. Mont-Saint-Jean was cannonaded, Hougomont was

burned, La Haie-Sainte was taken by assault, Papelotte was burned,

Plancenoit was burned, La Belle-Alliance beheld the embrace of the two

conquerors; these names are hardly known, and Waterloo, which worked

not in the battle, bears off all the honor.

We are not of the number of those who flatter war; when the occasion

presents itself, we tell the truth about it. War has frightful beauties

which we have not concealed; it has also, we acknowledge, some hideous

features. One of the most surprising is the prompt stripping of the

bodies of the dead after the victory. The dawn which follows a battle

always rises on naked corpses.

Who does this? Who thus soils the triumph? What hideous, furtive hand

is that which is slipped into the pocket of victory? What pickpockets

are they who ply their trade in the rear of glory? Some

philosophers—Voltaire among the number—affirm that it is precisely

those persons who have made the glory. It is the same men, they say;

there is no relief corps; those who are erect pillage those who are

prone on the earth. The hero of the day is the vampire of the night.

One has assuredly the right, after all, to strip a corpse a bit when

one is the author of that corpse. For our own part, we do not think so;

it seems to us impossible that the same hand should pluck laurels and

purloin the shoes from a dead man.

One thing is certain, which is, that generally after conquerors follow

thieves. But let us leave the soldier, especially the contemporary

soldier, out of the question.

Every army has a rear-guard, and it is that which must be blamed.

Bat-like creatures, half brigands and lackeys; all the sorts of

vespertillos that that twilight called war engenders; wearers of

uniforms, who take no part in the fighting; pretended invalids;

formidable limpers; interloping sutlers, trotting along in little

carts, sometimes accompanied by their wives, and stealing things which

they sell again; beggars offering themselves as guides to officers;

soldiers’ servants; marauders; armies on the march in days gone by,—we

are not speaking of the present,—dragged all this behind them, so that

in the special language they are called “stragglers.” No army, no

nation, was responsible for those beings; they spoke Italian and

followed the Germans, then spoke French and followed the English. It

was by one of these wretches, a Spanish straggler who spoke French,

that the Marquis of Fervacques, deceived by his Picard jargon, and

taking him for one of our own men, was traitorously slain and robbed on

the battle-field itself, in the course of the night which followed the

victory of Cerisoles. The rascal sprang from this marauding. The

detestable maxim, \_Live on the enemy!\_ produced this leprosy, which a

strict discipline alone could heal. There are reputations which are

deceptive; one does not always know why certain generals, great in

other directions, have been so popular. Turenne was adored by his

soldiers because he tolerated pillage; evil permitted constitutes part

of goodness. Turenne was so good that he allowed the Palatinate to be

delivered over to fire and blood. The marauders in the train of an army

were more or less in number, according as the chief was more or less

severe. Hoche and Marceau had no stragglers; Wellington had few, and we

do him the justice to mention it.

Nevertheless, on the night from the 18th to the 19th of June, the dead

were robbed. Wellington was rigid; he gave orders that any one caught

in the act should be shot; but rapine is tenacious. The marauders stole

in one corner of the battlefield while others were being shot in

another.

The moon was sinister over this plain.

Towards midnight, a man was prowling about, or rather, climbing in the

direction of the hollow road of Ohain. To all appearance he was one of

those whom we have just described,—neither English nor French, neither

peasant nor soldier, less a man than a ghoul attracted by the scent of

the dead bodies having theft for his victory, and come to rifle

Waterloo. He was clad in a blouse that was something like a great coat;

he was uneasy and audacious; he walked forwards and gazed behind him.

Who was this man? The night probably knew more of him than the day. He

had no sack, but evidently he had large pockets under his coat. From

time to time he halted, scrutinized the plain around him as though to

see whether he were observed, bent over abruptly, disturbed something

silent and motionless on the ground, then rose and fled. His sliding

motion, his attitudes, his mysterious and rapid gestures, caused him to

resemble those twilight larvæ which haunt ruins, and which ancient

Norman legends call the Alleurs.

Certain nocturnal wading birds produce these silhouettes among the

marshes.

A glance capable of piercing all that mist deeply would have perceived

at some distance a sort of little sutler’s wagon with a fluted wicker

hood, harnessed to a famished nag which was cropping the grass across

its bit as it halted, hidden, as it were, behind the hovel which

adjoins the highway to Nivelles, at the angle of the road from

Mont-Saint-Jean to Braine l’Alleud; and in the wagon, a sort of woman

seated on coffers and packages. Perhaps there was some connection

between that wagon and that prowler.

The darkness was serene. Not a cloud in the zenith. What matters it if

the earth be red! the moon remains white; these are the indifferences

of the sky. In the fields, branches of trees broken by grape-shot, but

not fallen, upheld by their bark, swayed gently in the breeze of night.

A breath, almost a respiration, moved the shrubbery. Quivers which

resembled the departure of souls ran through the grass.

In the distance the coming and going of patrols and the general rounds

of the English camp were audible.

Hougomont and La Haie-Sainte continued to burn, forming, one in the

west, the other in the east, two great flames which were joined by the

cordon of bivouac fires of the English, like a necklace of rubies with

two carbuncles at the extremities, as they extended in an immense

semicircle over the hills along the horizon.

We have described the catastrophe of the road of Ohain. The heart is

terrified at the thought of what that death must have been to so many

brave men.

If there is anything terrible, if there exists a reality which

surpasses dreams, it is this: to live, to see the sun; to be in full

possession of virile force; to possess health and joy; to laugh

valiantly; to rush towards a glory which one sees dazzling in front of

one; to feel in one’s breast lungs which breathe, a heart which beats,

a will which reasons; to speak, think, hope, love; to have a mother, to

have a wife, to have children; to have the light—and all at once, in

the space of a shout, in less than a minute, to sink into an abyss; to

fall, to roll, to crush, to be crushed; to see ears of wheat, flowers,

leaves, branches; not to be able to catch hold of anything; to feel

one’s sword useless, men beneath one, horses on top of one; to struggle

in vain, since one’s bones have been broken by some kick in the

darkness; to feel a heel which makes one’s eyes start from their

sockets; to bite horses’ shoes in one’s rage; to stifle, to yell, to

writhe; to be beneath, and to say to one’s self, “But just a little

while ago I was a living man!”

There, where that lamentable disaster had uttered its death-rattle, all

was silence now. The edges of the hollow road were encumbered with

horses and riders, inextricably heaped up. Terrible entanglement! There

was no longer any slope, for the corpses had levelled the road with the

plain, and reached the brim like a well-filled bushel of barley. A heap

of dead bodies in the upper part, a river of blood in the lower

part—such was that road on the evening of the 18th of June, 1815. The

blood ran even to the Nivelles highway, and there overflowed in a large

pool in front of the abatis of trees which barred the way, at a spot

which is still pointed out.

It will be remembered that it was at the opposite point, in the

direction of the Genappe road, that the destruction of the cuirassiers

had taken place. The thickness of the layer of bodies was proportioned

to the depth of the hollow road. Towards the middle, at the point where

it became level, where Delort’s division had passed, the layer of

corpses was thinner.

The nocturnal prowler whom we have just shown to the reader was going

in that direction. He was searching that vast tomb. He gazed about. He

passed the dead in some sort of hideous review. He walked with his feet

in the blood.

All at once he paused.

A few paces in front of him, in the hollow road, at the point where the

pile of dead came to an end, an open hand, illumined by the moon,

projected from beneath that heap of men. That hand had on its finger

something sparkling, which was a ring of gold.

The man bent over, remained in a crouching attitude for a moment, and

when he rose there was no longer a ring on the hand.

He did not precisely rise; he remained in a stooping and frightened

attitude, with his back turned to the heap of dead, scanning the

horizon on his knees, with the whole upper portion of his body

supported on his two forefingers, which rested on the earth, and his

head peering above the edge of the hollow road. The jackal’s four paws

suit some actions.

Then coming to a decision, he rose to his feet.

At that moment, he gave a terrible start. He felt some one clutch him

from behind.

He wheeled round; it was the open hand, which had closed, and had

seized the skirt of his coat.

An honest man would have been terrified; this man burst into a laugh.

“Come,” said he, “it’s only a dead body. I prefer a spook to a

gendarme.”

But the hand weakened and released him. Effort is quickly exhausted in

the grave.

“Well now,” said the prowler, “is that dead fellow alive? Let’s see.”

He bent down again, fumbled among the heap, pushed aside everything

that was in his way, seized the hand, grasped the arm, freed the head,

pulled out the body, and a few moments later he was dragging the

lifeless, or at least the unconscious, man, through the shadows of

hollow road. He was a cuirassier, an officer, and even an officer of

considerable rank; a large gold epaulette peeped from beneath the

cuirass; this officer no longer possessed a helmet. A furious sword-cut

had scarred his face, where nothing was discernible but blood.

However, he did not appear to have any broken limbs, and, by some happy

chance, if that word is permissible here, the dead had been vaulted

above him in such a manner as to preserve him from being crushed. His

eyes were still closed.

On his cuirass he wore the silver cross of the Legion of Honor.

The prowler tore off this cross, which disappeared into one of the

gulfs which he had beneath his great coat.

Then he felt of the officer’s fob, discovered a watch there, and took

possession of it. Next he searched his waistcoat, found a purse and

pocketed it.

When he had arrived at this stage of succor which he was administering

to this dying man, the officer opened his eyes.

“Thanks,” he said feebly.

The abruptness of the movements of the man who was manipulating him,

the freshness of the night, the air which he could inhale freely, had

roused him from his lethargy.

The prowler made no reply. He raised his head. A sound of footsteps was

audible in the plain; some patrol was probably approaching.

The officer murmured, for the death agony was still in his voice:—

“Who won the battle?”

“The English,” answered the prowler.

The officer went on:—

“Look in my pockets; you will find a watch and a purse. Take them.”

It was already done.

The prowler executed the required feint, and said:—

“There is nothing there.”

“I have been robbed,” said the officer; “I am sorry for that. You

should have had them.”

The steps of the patrol became more and more distinct.

“Some one is coming,” said the prowler, with the movement of a man who

is taking his departure.

The officer raised his arm feebly, and detained him.

“You have saved my life. Who are you?”

The prowler answered rapidly, and in a low voice:—

“Like yourself, I belonged to the French army. I must leave you. If

they were to catch me, they would shoot me. I have saved your life. Now

get out of the scrape yourself.”

“What is your rank?”

“Sergeant.”

“What is your name?”

“Thénardier.”

“I shall not forget that name,” said the officer; “and do you remember

mine. My name is Pontmercy.”

BOOK SECOND—THE SHIP ORION

CHAPTER I—NUMBER 24,601 BECOMES NUMBER 9,430

Jean Valjean had been recaptured.

The reader will be grateful to us if we pass rapidly over the sad

details. We will confine ourselves to transcribing two paragraphs

published by the journals of that day, a few months after the

surprising events which had taken place at M. sur M.

These articles are rather summary. It must be remembered, that at that

epoch the \_Gazette des Tribunaux\_ was not yet in existence.

We borrow the first from the \_Drapeau Blanc\_. It bears the date of July

25, 1823.

An arrondissement of the Pas de Calais has just been the theatre of an

event quite out of the ordinary course. A man, who was a stranger in

the Department, and who bore the name of M. Madeleine, had, thanks to

the new methods, resuscitated some years ago an ancient local industry,

the manufacture of jet and of black glass trinkets. He had made his

fortune in the business, and that of the arrondissement as well, we

will admit. He had been appointed mayor, in recognition of his

services. The police discovered that M. Madeleine was no other than an

ex-convict who had broken his ban, condemned in 1796 for theft, and

named Jean Valjean. Jean Valjean has been recommitted to prison. It

appears that previous to his arrest he had succeeded in withdrawing

from the hands of M. Laffitte, a sum of over half a million which he

had lodged there, and which he had, moreover, and by perfectly

legitimate means, acquired in his business. No one has been able to

discover where Jean Valjean has concealed this money since his return

to prison at Toulon.

The second article, which enters a little more into detail, is an

extract from the \_Journal de Paris\_, of the same date.

A former convict, who had been liberated, named Jean Valjean, has just

appeared before the Court of Assizes of the Var, under circumstances

calculated to attract attention. This wretch had succeeded in escaping

the vigilance of the police, he had changed his name, and had succeeded

in getting himself appointed mayor of one of our small northern towns;

in this town he had established a considerable commerce. He has at last

been unmasked and arrested, thanks to the indefatigable zeal of the

public prosecutor. He had for his concubine a woman of the town, who

died of a shock at the moment of his arrest. This scoundrel, who is

endowed with Herculean strength, found means to escape; but three or

four days after his flight the police laid their hands on him once

more, in Paris itself, at the very moment when he was entering one of

those little vehicles which run between the capital and the village of

Montfermeil (Seine-et-Oise). He is said to have profited by this

interval of three or four days of liberty, to withdraw a considerable

sum deposited by him with one of our leading bankers. This sum has been

estimated at six or seven hundred thousand francs. If the indictment is

to be trusted, he has hidden it in some place known to himself alone,

and it has not been possible to lay hands on it. However that may be,

the said Jean Valjean has just been brought before the Assizes of the

Department of the Var as accused of highway robbery accompanied with

violence, about eight years ago, on the person of one of those honest

children who, as the patriarch of Ferney has said, in immortal verse,

“. . . Arrive from Savoy every year,

And who, with gentle hands, do clear

Those long canals choked up with soot.”

This bandit refused to defend himself. It was proved by the skilful and

eloquent representative of the public prosecutor, that the theft was

committed in complicity with others, and that Jean Valjean was a member

of a band of robbers in the south. Jean Valjean was pronounced guilty

and was condemned to the death penalty in consequence. This criminal

refused to lodge an appeal. The king, in his inexhaustible clemency,

has deigned to commute his penalty to that of penal servitude for life.

Jean Valjean was immediately taken to the prison at Toulon.

The reader has not forgotten that Jean Valjean had religious habits at

M. sur M. Some papers, among others the \_Constitutional\_, presented

this commutation as a triumph of the priestly party.

Jean Valjean changed his number in the galleys. He was called 9,430.

However, and we will mention it at once in order that we may not be

obliged to recur to the subject, the prosperity of M. sur M. vanished

with M. Madeleine; all that he had foreseen during his night of fever

and hesitation was realized; lacking him, there actually was \_a soul

lacking\_. After this fall, there took place at M. sur M. that

egotistical division of great existences which have fallen, that fatal

dismemberment of flourishing things which is accomplished every day,

obscurely, in the human community, and which history has noted only

once, because it occurred after the death of Alexander. Lieutenants are

crowned kings; superintendents improvise manufacturers out of

themselves. Envious rivalries arose. M. Madeleine’s vast workshops were

shut; his buildings fell to ruin, his workmen were scattered. Some of

them quitted the country, others abandoned the trade. Thenceforth,

everything was done on a small scale, instead of on a grand scale; for

lucre instead of the general good. There was no longer a centre;

everywhere there was competition and animosity. M. Madeleine had

reigned over all and directed all. No sooner had he fallen, than each

pulled things to himself; the spirit of combat succeeded to the spirit

of organization, bitterness to cordiality, hatred of one another to the

benevolence of the founder towards all; the threads which M. Madeleine

had set were tangled and broken, the methods were adulterated, the

products were debased, confidence was killed; the market diminished,

for lack of orders; salaries were reduced, the workshops stood still,

bankruptcy arrived. And then there was nothing more for the poor. All

had vanished.

The state itself perceived that some one had been crushed somewhere.

Less than four years after the judgment of the Court of Assizes

establishing the identity of Jean Valjean and M. Madeleine, for the

benefit of the galleys, the cost of collecting taxes had doubled in the

arrondissement of M. sur M.; and M. de Villèle called attention to the

fact in the rostrum, in the month of February, 1827.

CHAPTER II—IN WHICH THE READER WILL PERUSE TWO VERSES, WHICH ARE OF THE

DEVIL’S COMPOSITION, POSSIBLY

Before proceeding further, it will be to the purpose to narrate in some

detail, a singular occurrence which took place at about the same epoch,

in Montfermeil, and which is not lacking in coincidence with certain

conjectures of the indictment.

There exists in the region of Montfermeil a very ancient superstition,

which is all the more curious and all the more precious, because a

popular superstition in the vicinity of Paris is like an aloe in

Siberia. We are among those who respect everything which is in the

nature of a rare plant. Here, then, is the superstition of Montfermeil:

it is thought that the devil, from time immemorial, has selected the

forest as a hiding-place for his treasures. Goodwives affirm that it is

no rarity to encounter at nightfall, in secluded nooks of the forest, a

black man with the air of a carter or a wood-chopper, wearing wooden

shoes, clad in trousers and a blouse of linen, and recognizable by the

fact, that, instead of a cap or hat, he has two immense horns on his

head. This ought, in fact, to render him recognizable. This man is

habitually engaged in digging a hole. There are three ways of profiting

by such an encounter. The first is to approach the man and speak to

him. Then it is seen that the man is simply a peasant, that he appears

black because it is nightfall; that he is not digging any hole

whatever, but is cutting grass for his cows, and that what had been

taken for horns is nothing but a dung-fork which he is carrying on his

back, and whose teeth, thanks to the perspective of evening, seemed to

spring from his head. The man returns home and dies within the week.

The second way is to watch him, to wait until he has dug his hole,

until he has filled it and has gone away; then to run with great speed

to the trench, to open it once more and to seize the “treasure” which

the black man has necessarily placed there. In this case one dies

within the month. Finally, the last method is not to speak to the black

man, not to look at him, and to flee at the best speed of one’s legs.

One then dies within the year.

As all three methods are attended with their special inconveniences,

the second, which at all events, presents some advantages, among others

that of possessing a treasure, if only for a month, is the one most

generally adopted. So bold men, who are tempted by every chance, have

quite frequently, as we are assured, opened the holes excavated by the

black man, and tried to rob the devil. The success of the operation

appears to be but moderate. At least, if the tradition is to be

believed, and in particular the two enigmatical lines in barbarous

Latin, which an evil Norman monk, a bit of a sorcerer, named Tryphon

has left on this subject. This Tryphon is buried at the Abbey of

Saint-Georges de Bocherville, near Rouen, and toads spawn on his grave.

Accordingly, enormous efforts are made. Such trenches are ordinarily

extremely deep; a man sweats, digs, toils all night—for it must be done

at night; he wets his shirt, burns out his candle, breaks his mattock,

and when he arrives at the bottom of the hole, when he lays his hand on

the “treasure,” what does he find? What is the devil’s treasure? A sou,

sometimes a crown-piece, a stone, a skeleton, a bleeding body,

sometimes a spectre folded in four like a sheet of paper in a

portfolio, sometimes nothing. This is what Tryphon’s verses seem to

announce to the indiscreet and curious:—

“Fodit, et in fossa thesauros condit opaca,

As, nummas, lapides, cadaver, simulacra, nihilque.”

It seems that in our day there is sometimes found a powder-horn with

bullets, sometimes an old pack of cards greasy and worn, which has

evidently served the devil. Tryphon does not record these two finds,

since Tryphon lived in the twelfth century, and since the devil does

not appear to have had the wit to invent powder before Roger Bacon’s

time, and cards before the time of Charles VI.

Moreover, if one plays at cards, one is sure to lose all that one

possesses! and as for the powder in the horn, it possesses the property

of making your gun burst in your face.

Now, a very short time after the epoch when it seemed to the

prosecuting attorney that the liberated convict Jean Valjean during his

flight of several days had been prowling around Montfermeil, it was

remarked in that village that a certain old road-laborer, named

Boulatruelle, had “peculiar ways” in the forest. People thereabouts

thought they knew that this Boulatruelle had been in the galleys. He

was subjected to certain police supervision, and, as he could find work

nowhere, the administration employed him at reduced rates as a

road-mender on the crossroad from Gagny to Lagny.

This Boulatruelle was a man who was viewed with disfavor by the

inhabitants of the district as too respectful, too humble, too prompt

in removing his cap to every one, and trembling and smiling in the

presence of the gendarmes,—probably affiliated to robber bands, they

said; suspected of lying in ambush at verge of copses at nightfall. The

only thing in his favor was that he was a drunkard.

This is what people thought they had noticed:—

Of late, Boulatruelle had taken to quitting his task of stone-breaking

and care of the road at a very early hour, and to betaking himself to

the forest with his pickaxe. He was encountered towards evening in the

most deserted clearings, in the wildest thickets; and he had the

appearance of being in search of something, and sometimes he was

digging holes. The goodwives who passed took him at first for

Beelzebub; then they recognized Boulatruelle, and were not in the least

reassured thereby. These encounters seemed to cause Boulatruelle a

lively displeasure. It was evident that he sought to hide, and that

there was some mystery in what he was doing.

It was said in the village: “It is clear that the devil has appeared.

Boulatruelle has seen him, and is on the search. In sooth, he is

cunning enough to pocket Lucifer’s hoard.”

The Voltairians added, “Will Boulatruelle catch the devil, or will the

devil catch Boulatruelle?” The old women made a great many signs of the

cross.

In the meantime, Boulatruelle’s manœuvres in the forest ceased; and he

resumed his regular occupation of roadmending; and people gossiped of

something else.

Some persons, however, were still curious, surmising that in all this

there was probably no fabulous treasure of the legends, but some fine

windfall of a more serious and palpable sort than the devil’s

bank-bills, and that the road-mender had half discovered the secret.

The most “puzzled” were the schoolmaster and Thénardier, the proprietor

of the tavern, who was everybody’s friend, and had not disdained to

ally himself with Boulatruelle.

“He has been in the galleys,” said Thénardier. “Eh! Good God! no one

knows who has been there or will be there.”

One evening the schoolmaster affirmed that in former times the law

would have instituted an inquiry as to what Boulatruelle did in the

forest, and that the latter would have been forced to speak, and that

he would have been put to the torture in case of need, and that

Boulatruelle would not have resisted the water test, for example. “Let

us put him to the wine test,” said Thénardier.

They made an effort, and got the old road-mender to drinking.

Boulatruelle drank an enormous amount, but said very little. He

combined with admirable art, and in masterly proportions, the thirst of

a gormandizer with the discretion of a judge. Nevertheless, by dint of

returning to the charge and of comparing and putting together the few

obscure words which he did allow to escape him, this is what Thénardier

and the schoolmaster imagined that they had made out:—

One morning, when Boulatruelle was on his way to his work, at daybreak,

he had been surprised to see, at a nook of the forest in the

underbrush, a shovel and a pickaxe, \_concealed, as one might say\_.

However, he might have supposed that they were probably the shovel and

pick of Father Six-Fours, the water-carrier, and would have thought no

more about it. But, on the evening of that day, he saw, without being

seen himself, as he was hidden by a large tree, “a person who did not

belong in those parts, and whom he, Boulatruelle, knew well,” directing

his steps towards the densest part of the wood. Translation by

Thénardier: \_A comrade of the galleys\_. Boulatruelle obstinately

refused to reveal his name. This person carried a package—something

square, like a large box or a small trunk. Surprise on the part of

Boulatruelle. However, it was only after the expiration of seven or

eight minutes that the idea of following that “person” had occurred to

him. But it was too late; the person was already in the thicket, night

had descended, and Boulatruelle had not been able to catch up with him.

Then he had adopted the course of watching for him at the edge of the

woods. “It was moonlight.” Two or three hours later, Boulatruelle had

seen this person emerge from the brushwood, carrying no longer the

coffer, but a shovel and pick. Boulatruelle had allowed the person to

pass, and had not dreamed of accosting him, because he said to himself

that the other man was three times as strong as he was, and armed with

a pickaxe, and that he would probably knock him over the head on

recognizing him, and on perceiving that he was recognized. Touching

effusion of two old comrades on meeting again. But the shovel and pick

had served as a ray of light to Boulatruelle; he had hastened to the

thicket in the morning, and had found neither shovel nor pick. From

this he had drawn the inference that this person, once in the forest,

had dug a hole with his pick, buried the coffer, and reclosed the hole

with his shovel. Now, the coffer was too small to contain a body;

therefore it contained money. Hence his researches. Boulatruelle had

explored, sounded, searched the entire forest and the thicket, and had

dug wherever the earth appeared to him to have been recently turned up.

In vain.

He had “ferreted out” nothing. No one in Montfermeil thought any more

about it. There were only a few brave gossips, who said, “You may be

certain that the mender on the Gagny road did not take all that trouble

for nothing; he was sure that the devil had come.”

CHAPTER III—THE ANKLE-CHAIN MUST HAVE UNDERGONE A CERTAIN PREPARATORY

MANIPULATION TO BE THUS BROKEN WITH A BLOW FROM A HAMMER

Towards the end of October, in that same year, 1823, the inhabitants of

Toulon beheld the entry into their port, after heavy weather, and for

the purpose of repairing some damages, of the ship \_Orion\_, which was

employed later at Brest as a school-ship, and which then formed a part

of the Mediterranean squadron.

This vessel, battered as it was,—for the sea had handled it

roughly,—produced a fine effect as it entered the roads. It flew some

colors which procured for it the regulation salute of eleven guns,

which it returned, shot for shot; total, twenty-two. It has been

calculated that what with salvos, royal and military politenesses,

courteous exchanges of uproar, signals of etiquette, formalities of

roadsteads and citadels, sunrises and sunsets, saluted every day by all

fortresses and all ships of war, openings and closings of ports, etc.,

the civilized world, discharged all over the earth, in the course of

four and twenty hours, one hundred and fifty thousand useless shots. At

six francs the shot, that comes to nine hundred thousand francs a day,

three hundred millions a year, which vanish in smoke. This is a mere

detail. All this time the poor were dying of hunger.

The year 1823 was what the Restoration called “the epoch of the Spanish

war.”

This war contained many events in one, and a quantity of peculiarities.

A grand family affair for the house of Bourbon; the branch of France

succoring and protecting the branch of Madrid, that is to say,

performing an act devolving on the elder; an apparent return to our

national traditions, complicated by servitude and by subjection to the

cabinets of the North; M. le Duc d’Angoulême, surnamed by the liberal

sheets \_the hero of Andujar\_, compressing in a triumphal attitude that

was somewhat contradicted by his peaceable air, the ancient and very

powerful terrorism of the Holy Office at variance with the chimerical

terrorism of the liberals; the \_sansculottes\_ resuscitated, to the

great terror of dowagers, under the name of \_descamisados\_; monarchy

opposing an obstacle to progress described as anarchy; the theories of

’89 roughly interrupted in the sap; a European halt, called to the

French idea, which was making the tour of the world; beside the son of

France as generalissimo, the Prince de Carignan, afterwards Charles

Albert, enrolling himself in that crusade of kings against people as a

volunteer, with grenadier epaulets of red worsted; the soldiers of the

Empire setting out on a fresh campaign, but aged, saddened, after eight

years of repose, and under the white cockade; the tricolored standard

waved abroad by a heroic handful of Frenchmen, as the white standard

had been thirty years earlier at Coblentz; monks mingled with our

troops; the spirit of liberty and of novelty brought to its senses by

bayonets; principles slaughtered by cannonades; France undoing by her

arms that which she had done by her mind; in addition to this, hostile

leaders sold, soldiers hesitating, cities besieged by millions; no

military perils, and yet possible explosions, as in every mine which is

surprised and invaded; but little bloodshed, little honor won, shame

for some, glory for no one. Such was this war, made by the princes

descended from Louis XIV., and conducted by generals who had been under

Napoleon. Its sad fate was to recall neither the grand war nor grand

politics.

Some feats of arms were serious; the taking of the Trocadéro, among

others, was a fine military action; but after all, we repeat, the

trumpets of this war give back a cracked sound, the whole effect was

suspicious; history approves of France for making a difficulty about

accepting this false triumph. It seemed evident that certain Spanish

officers charged with resistance yielded too easily; the idea of

corruption was connected with the victory; it appears as though

generals and not battles had been won, and the conquering soldier

returned humiliated. A debasing war, in short, in which the \_Bank of

France\_ could be read in the folds of the flag.

Soldiers of the war of 1808, on whom Saragossa had fallen in formidable

ruin, frowned in 1823 at the easy surrender of citadels, and began to

regret Palafox. It is the nature of France to prefer to have

Rostopchine rather than Ballesteros in front of her.

From a still more serious point of view, and one which it is also

proper to insist upon here, this war, which wounded the military spirit

of France, enraged the democratic spirit. It was an enterprise of

enthralment. In that campaign, the object of the French soldier, the

son of democracy, was the conquest of a yoke for others. A hideous

contradiction. France is made to arouse the soul of nations, not to

stifle it. All the revolutions of Europe since 1792 are the French

Revolution: liberty darts rays from France. That is a solar fact. Blind

is he who will not see! It was Bonaparte who said it.

The war of 1823, an outrage on the generous Spanish nation, was then,

at the same time, an outrage on the French Revolution. It was France

who committed this monstrous violence; by foul means, for, with the

exception of wars of liberation, everything that armies do is by foul

means. The words \_passive obedience\_ indicate this. An army is a

strange masterpiece of combination where force results from an enormous

sum of impotence. Thus is war, made by humanity against humanity,

despite humanity, explained.

As for the Bourbons, the war of 1823 was fatal to them. They took it

for a success. They did not perceive the danger that lies in having an

idea slain to order. They went astray, in their innocence, to such a

degree that they introduced the immense enfeeblement of a crime into

their establishment as an element of strength. The spirit of the ambush

entered into their politics. 1830 had its germ in 1823. The Spanish

campaign became in their counsels an argument for force and for

adventures by right Divine. France, having re-established \_el rey

netto\_ in Spain, might well have re-established the absolute king at

home. They fell into the alarming error of taking the obedience of the

soldier for the consent of the nation. Such confidence is the ruin of

thrones. It is not permitted to fall asleep, either in the shadow of a

machineel tree, nor in the shadow of an army.

Let us return to the ship \_Orion\_.

During the operations of the army commanded by the prince

generalissimo, a squadron had been cruising in the Mediterranean. We

have just stated that the \_Orion\_ belonged to this fleet, and that

accidents of the sea had brought it into port at Toulon.

The presence of a vessel of war in a port has something about it which

attracts and engages a crowd. It is because it is great, and the crowd

loves what is great.

A ship of the line is one of the most magnificent combinations of the

genius of man with the powers of nature.

A ship of the line is composed, at the same time, of the heaviest and

the lightest of possible matter, for it deals at one and the same time

with three forms of substance,—solid, liquid, and fluid,—and it must do

battle with all three. It has eleven claws of iron with which to seize

the granite on the bottom of the sea, and more wings and more antennæ

than winged insects, to catch the wind in the clouds. Its breath pours

out through its hundred and twenty cannons as through enormous

trumpets, and replies proudly to the thunder. The ocean seeks to lead

it astray in the alarming sameness of its billows, but the vessel has

its soul, its compass, which counsels it and always shows it the north.

In the blackest nights, its lanterns supply the place of the stars.

Thus, against the wind, it has its cordage and its canvas; against the

water, wood; against the rocks, its iron, brass, and lead; against the

shadows, its light; against immensity, a needle.

If one wishes to form an idea of all those gigantic proportions which,

taken as a whole, constitute the ship of the line, one has only to

enter one of the six-story covered construction stocks, in the ports of

Brest or Toulon. The vessels in process of construction are under a

bell-glass there, as it were. This colossal beam is a yard; that great

column of wood which stretches out on the earth as far as the eye can

reach is the main-mast. Taking it from its root in the stocks to its

tip in the clouds, it is sixty fathoms long, and its diameter at its

base is three feet. The English main-mast rises to a height of two

hundred and seventeen feet above the water-line. The navy of our

fathers employed cables, ours employs chains. The simple pile of chains

on a ship of a hundred guns is four feet high, twenty feet in breadth,

and eight feet in depth. And how much wood is required to make this

ship? Three thousand cubic metres. It is a floating forest.

And moreover, let this be borne in mind, it is only a question here of

the military vessel of forty years ago, of the simple sailing-vessel;

steam, then in its infancy, has since added new miracles to that

prodigy which is called a war vessel. At the present time, for example,

the mixed vessel with a screw is a surprising machine, propelled by

three thousand square metres of canvas and by an engine of two thousand

five hundred horse-power.

Not to mention these new marvels, the ancient vessel of Christopher

Columbus and of De Ruyter is one of the masterpieces of man. It is as

inexhaustible in force as is the Infinite in gales; it stores up the

wind in its sails, it is precise in the immense vagueness of the

billows, it floats, and it reigns.

There comes an hour, nevertheless, when the gale breaks that sixty-foot

yard like a straw, when the wind bends that mast four hundred feet

tall, when that anchor, which weighs tens of thousands, is twisted in

the jaws of the waves like a fisherman’s hook in the jaws of a pike,

when those monstrous cannons utter plaintive and futile roars, which

the hurricane bears forth into the void and into night, when all that

power and all that majesty are engulfed in a power and majesty which

are superior.

Every time that immense force is displayed to culminate in an immense

feebleness it affords men food for thought. Hence in the ports curious

people abound around these marvellous machines of war and of

navigation, without being able to explain perfectly to themselves why.

Every day, accordingly, from morning until night, the quays, sluices,

and the jetties of the port of Toulon were covered with a multitude of

idlers and loungers, as they say in Paris, whose business consisted in

staring at the \_Orion\_.

The \_Orion\_ was a ship that had been ailing for a long time; in the

course of its previous cruises thick layers of barnacles had collected

on its keel to such a degree as to deprive it of half its speed; it had

gone into the dry dock the year before this, in order to have the

barnacles scraped off, then it had put to sea again; but this cleaning

had affected the bolts of the keel: in the neighborhood of the Balearic

Isles the sides had been strained and had opened; and, as the plating

in those days was not of sheet iron, the vessel had sprung a leak. A

violent equinoctial gale had come up, which had first staved in a

grating and a porthole on the larboard side, and damaged the

foretop-gallant-shrouds; in consequence of these injuries, the \_Orion\_

had run back to Toulon.

It anchored near the Arsenal; it was fully equipped, and repairs were

begun. The hull had received no damage on the starboard, but some of

the planks had been unnailed here and there, according to custom, to

permit of air entering the hold.

One morning the crowd which was gazing at it witnessed an accident.

[Illustration: The Ship Orion, an Accident]

The crew was busy bending the sails; the topman, who had to take the

upper corner of the main-top-sail on the starboard, lost his balance;

he was seen to waver; the multitude thronging the Arsenal quay uttered

a cry; the man’s head overbalanced his body; the man fell around the

yard, with his hands outstretched towards the abyss; on his way he

seized the footrope, first with one hand, then with the other, and

remained hanging from it: the sea lay below him at a dizzy depth; the

shock of his fall had imparted to the foot-rope a violent swinging

motion; the man swayed back and forth at the end of that rope, like a

stone in a sling.

It was incurring a frightful risk to go to his assistance; not one of

the sailors, all fishermen of the coast, recently levied for the

service, dared to attempt it. In the meantime, the unfortunate topman

was losing his strength; his anguish could not be discerned on his

face, but his exhaustion was visible in every limb; his arms were

contracted in horrible twitchings; every effort which he made to

re-ascend served but to augment the oscillations of the foot-rope; he

did not shout, for fear of exhausting his strength. All were awaiting

the minute when he should release his hold on the rope, and, from

instant to instant, heads were turned aside that his fall might not be

seen. There are moments when a bit of rope, a pole, the branch of a

tree, is life itself, and it is a terrible thing to see a living being

detach himself from it and fall like a ripe fruit.

All at once a man was seen climbing into the rigging with the agility

of a tiger-cat; this man was dressed in red; he was a convict; he wore

a green cap; he was a life convict. On arriving on a level with the

top, a gust of wind carried away his cap, and allowed a perfectly white

head to be seen: he was not a young man.

A convict employed on board with a detachment from the galleys had, in

fact, at the very first instant, hastened to the officer of the watch,

and, in the midst of the consternation and the hesitation of the crew,

while all the sailors were trembling and drawing back, he had asked the

officer’s permission to risk his life to save the topman; at an

affirmative sign from the officer he had broken the chain riveted to

his ankle with one blow of a hammer, then he had caught up a rope, and

had dashed into the rigging: no one noticed, at the instant, with what

ease that chain had been broken; it was only later on that the incident

was recalled.

In a twinkling he was on the yard; he paused for a few seconds and

appeared to be measuring it with his eye; these seconds, during which

the breeze swayed the topman at the extremity of a thread, seemed

centuries to those who were looking on. At last, the convict raised his

eyes to heaven and advanced a step: the crowd drew a long breath. He

was seen to run out along the yard: on arriving at the point, he

fastened the rope which he had brought to it, and allowed the other end

to hang down, then he began to descend the rope, hand over hand, and

then,—and the anguish was indescribable,—instead of one man suspended

over the gulf, there were two.

One would have said it was a spider coming to seize a fly, only here

the spider brought life, not death. Ten thousand glances were fastened

on this group; not a cry, not a word; the same tremor contracted every

brow; all mouths held their breath as though they feared to add the

slightest puff to the wind which was swaying the two unfortunate men.

In the meantime, the convict had succeeded in lowering himself to a

position near the sailor. It was high time; one minute more, and the

exhausted and despairing man would have allowed himself to fall into

the abyss. The convict had moored him securely with the cord to which

he clung with one hand, while he was working with the other. At last,

he was seen to climb back on the yard, and to drag the sailor up after

him; he held him there a moment to allow him to recover his strength,

then he grasped him in his arms and carried him, walking on the yard

himself to the cap, and from there to the main-top, where he left him

in the hands of his comrades.

At that moment the crowd broke into applause: old convict-sergeants

among them wept, and women embraced each other on the quay, and all

voices were heard to cry with a sort of tender rage, “Pardon for that

man!”

He, in the meantime, had immediately begun to make his descent to

rejoin his detachment. In order to reach them the more speedily, he

dropped into the rigging, and ran along one of the lower yards; all

eyes were following him. At a certain moment fear assailed them;

whether it was that he was fatigued, or that his head turned, they

thought they saw him hesitate and stagger. All at once the crowd

uttered a loud shout: the convict had fallen into the sea.

The fall was perilous. The frigate \_Algésiras\_ was anchored alongside

the \_Orion\_, and the poor convict had fallen between the two vessels:

it was to be feared that he would slip under one or the other of them.

Four men flung themselves hastily into a boat; the crowd cheered them

on; anxiety again took possession of all souls; the man had not risen

to the surface; he had disappeared in the sea without leaving a ripple,

as though he had fallen into a cask of oil: they sounded, they dived.

In vain. The search was continued until the evening: they did not even

find the body.

On the following day the Toulon newspaper printed these lines:—

“Nov. 17, 1823. Yesterday, a convict belonging to the detachment on

board of the \_Orion\_, on his return from rendering assistance to a

sailor, fell into the sea and was drowned. The body has not yet been

found; it is supposed that it is entangled among the piles of the

Arsenal point: this man was committed under the number 9,430, and his

name was Jean Valjean.”

BOOK THIRD—ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE PROMISE MADE TO THE DEAD WOMAN

CHAPTER I—THE WATER QUESTION AT MONTFERMEIL

Montfermeil is situated between Livry and Chelles, on the southern edge

of that lofty table-land which separates the Ourcq from the Marne. At

the present day it is a tolerably large town, ornamented all the year

through with plaster villas, and on Sundays with beaming bourgeois. In

1823 there were at Montfermeil neither so many white houses nor so many

well-satisfied citizens: it was only a village in the forest. Some

pleasure-houses of the last century were to be met with there, to be

sure, which were recognizable by their grand air, their balconies in

twisted iron, and their long windows, whose tiny panes cast all sorts

of varying shades of green on the white of the closed shutters; but

Montfermeil was nonetheless a village. Retired cloth-merchants and

rusticating attorneys had not discovered it as yet; it was a peaceful

and charming place, which was not on the road to anywhere: there people

lived, and cheaply, that peasant rustic life which is so bounteous and

so easy; only, water was rare there, on account of the elevation of the

plateau.

It was necessary to fetch it from a considerable distance; the end of

the village towards Gagny drew its water from the magnificent ponds

which exist in the woods there. The other end, which surrounds the

church and which lies in the direction of Chelles, found drinking-water

only at a little spring half-way down the slope, near the road to

Chelles, about a quarter of an hour from Montfermeil.

Thus each household found it hard work to keep supplied with water. The

large houses, the aristocracy, of which the Thénardier tavern formed a

part, paid half a farthing a bucketful to a man who made a business of

it, and who earned about eight sous a day in his enterprise of

supplying Montfermeil with water; but this good man only worked until

seven o’clock in the evening in summer, and five in winter; and night

once come and the shutters on the ground floor once closed, he who had

no water to drink went to fetch it for himself or did without it.

This constituted the terror of the poor creature whom the reader has

probably not forgotten,—little Cosette. It will be remembered that

Cosette was useful to the Thénardiers in two ways: they made the mother

pay them, and they made the child serve them. So when the mother ceased

to pay altogether, the reason for which we have read in preceding

chapters, the Thénardiers kept Cosette. She took the place of a servant

in their house. In this capacity she it was who ran to fetch water when

it was required. So the child, who was greatly terrified at the idea of

going to the spring at night, took great care that water should never

be lacking in the house.

Christmas of the year 1823 was particularly brilliant at Montfermeil.

The beginning of the winter had been mild; there had been neither snow

nor frost up to that time. Some mountebanks from Paris had obtained

permission of the mayor to erect their booths in the principal street

of the village, and a band of itinerant merchants, under protection of

the same tolerance, had constructed their stalls on the Church Square,

and even extended them into Boulanger Alley, where, as the reader will

perhaps remember, the Thénardiers’ hostelry was situated. These people

filled the inns and drinking-shops, and communicated to that tranquil

little district a noisy and joyous life. In order to play the part of a

faithful historian, we ought even to add that, among the curiosities

displayed in the square, there was a menagerie, in which frightful

clowns, clad in rags and coming no one knew whence, exhibited to the

peasants of Montfermeil in 1823 one of those horrible Brazilian

vultures, such as our Royal Museum did not possess until 1845, and

which have a tricolored cockade for an eye. I believe that naturalists

call this bird Caracara Polyborus; it belongs to the order of the

Apicides, and to the family of the vultures. Some good old Bonapartist

soldiers, who had retired to the village, went to see this creature

with great devotion. The mountebanks gave out that the tricolored

cockade was a unique phenomenon made by God expressly for their

menagerie.

On Christmas eve itself, a number of men, carters, and peddlers, were

seated at table, drinking and smoking around four or five candles in

the public room of Thénardier’s hostelry. This room resembled all

drinking-shop rooms,—tables, pewter jugs, bottles, drinkers, smokers;

but little light and a great deal of noise. The date of the year 1823

was indicated, nevertheless, by two objects which were then fashionable

in the bourgeois class: to wit, a kaleidoscope and a lamp of ribbed

tin. The female Thénardier was attending to the supper, which was

roasting in front of a clear fire; her husband was drinking with his

customers and talking politics.

Besides political conversations which had for their principal subjects

the Spanish war and M. le Duc d’Angoulême, strictly local parentheses,

like the following, were audible amid the uproar:—

“About Nanterre and Suresnes the vines have flourished greatly. When

ten pieces were reckoned on there have been twelve. They have yielded a

great deal of juice under the press.” “But the grapes cannot be ripe?”

“In those parts the grapes should not be ripe; the wine turns oily as

soon as spring comes.” “Then it is very thin wine?” “There are wines

poorer even than these. The grapes must be gathered while green.” Etc.

Or a miller would call out:—

“Are we responsible for what is in the sacks? We find in them a

quantity of small seed which we cannot sift out, and which we are

obliged to send through the mill-stones; there are tares, fennel,

vetches, hempseed, fox-tail, and a host of other weeds, not to mention

pebbles, which abound in certain wheat, especially in Breton wheat. I

am not fond of grinding Breton wheat, any more than long-sawyers like

to saw beams with nails in them. You can judge of the bad dust that

makes in grinding. And then people complain of the flour. They are in

the wrong. The flour is no fault of ours.”

In a space between two windows a mower, who was seated at table with a

landed proprietor who was fixing on a price for some meadow work to be

performed in the spring, was saying:—

“It does no harm to have the grass wet. It cuts better. Dew is a good

thing, sir. It makes no difference with that grass. Your grass is young

and very hard to cut still. It’s terribly tender. It yields before the

iron.” Etc.

Cosette was in her usual place, seated on the cross-bar of the kitchen

table near the chimney. She was in rags; her bare feet were thrust into

wooden shoes, and by the firelight she was engaged in knitting woollen

stockings destined for the young Thénardiers. A very young kitten was

playing about among the chairs. Laughter and chatter were audible in

the adjoining room, from two fresh children’s voices: it was Éponine

and Azelma.

In the chimney-corner a cat-o’-nine-tails was hanging on a nail.

At intervals the cry of a very young child, which was somewhere in the

house, rang through the noise of the dram-shop. It was a little boy who

had been born to the Thénardiers during one of the preceding

winters,—“she did not know why,” she said, “the result of the

cold,”—and who was a little more than three years old. The mother had

nursed him, but she did not love him. When the persistent clamor of the

brat became too annoying, “Your son is squalling,” Thénardier would

say; “do go and see what he wants.” “Bah!” the mother would reply, “he

bothers me.” And the neglected child continued to shriek in the dark.

CHAPTER II—TWO COMPLETE PORTRAITS

So far in this book the Thénardiers have been viewed only in profile;

the moment has arrived for making the circuit of this couple, and

considering it under all its aspects.

Thénardier had just passed his fiftieth birthday; Madame Thénardier was

approaching her forties, which is equivalent to fifty in a woman; so

that there existed a balance of age between husband and wife.

Our readers have possibly preserved some recollection of this

Thénardier woman, ever since her first appearance,—tall, blond, red,

fat, angular, square, enormous, and agile; she belonged, as we have

said, to the race of those colossal wild women, who contort themselves

at fairs with paving-stones hanging from their hair. She did everything

about the house,—made the beds, did the washing, the cooking, and

everything else. Cosette was her only servant; a mouse in the service

of an elephant. Everything trembled at the sound of her voice,—window

panes, furniture, and people. Her big face, dotted with red blotches,

presented the appearance of a skimmer. She had a beard. She was an

ideal market-porter dressed in woman’s clothes. She swore splendidly;

she boasted of being able to crack a nut with one blow of her fist.

Except for the romances which she had read, and which made the affected

lady peep through the ogress at times, in a very queer way, the idea

would never have occurred to any one to say of her, “That is a woman.”

This Thénardier female was like the product of a wench engrafted on a

fishwife. When one heard her speak, one said, “That is a gendarme”;

when one saw her drink, one said, “That is a carter”; when one saw her

handle Cosette, one said, “That is the hangman.” One of her teeth

projected when her face was in repose.

Thénardier was a small, thin, pale, angular, bony, feeble man, who had

a sickly air and who was wonderfully healthy. His cunning began here;

he smiled habitually, by way of precaution, and was almost polite to

everybody, even to the beggar to whom he refused half a farthing. He

had the glance of a pole-cat and the bearing of a man of letters. He

greatly resembled the portraits of the Abbé Delille. His coquetry

consisted in drinking with the carters. No one had ever succeeded in

rendering him drunk. He smoked a big pipe. He wore a blouse, and under

his blouse an old black coat. He made pretensions to literature and to

materialism. There were certain names which he often pronounced to

support whatever things he might be saying,—Voltaire, Raynal, Parny,

and, singularly enough, Saint Augustine. He declared that he had “a

system.” In addition, he was a great swindler. A \_filousophe\_

[philosophe], a scientific thief. The species does exist. It will be

remembered that he pretended to have served in the army; he was in the

habit of relating with exuberance, how, being a sergeant in the 6th or

the 9th light something or other, at Waterloo, he had alone, and in the

presence of a squadron of death-dealing hussars, covered with his body

and saved from death, in the midst of the grape-shot, “a general, who

had been dangerously wounded.” Thence arose for his wall the flaring

sign, and for his inn the name which it bore in the neighborhood, of

“the cabaret of the Sergeant of Waterloo.” He was a liberal, a classic,

and a Bonapartist. He had subscribed for the Champ d’Asile. It was said

in the village that he had studied for the priesthood.

We believe that he had simply studied in Holland for an inn-keeper.

This rascal of composite order was, in all probability, some Fleming

from Lille, in Flanders, a Frenchman in Paris, a Belgian at Brussels,

being comfortably astride of both frontiers. As for his prowess at

Waterloo, the reader is already acquainted with that. It will be

perceived that he exaggerated it a trifle. Ebb and flow, wandering,

adventure, was the leven of his existence; a tattered conscience

entails a fragmentary life, and, apparently at the stormy epoch of June

18, 1815, Thénardier belonged to that variety of marauding sutlers of

which we have spoken, beating about the country, selling to some,

stealing from others, and travelling like a family man, with wife and

children, in a rickety cart, in the rear of troops on the march, with

an instinct for always attaching himself to the victorious army. This

campaign ended, and having, as he said, “some quibus,” he had come to

Montfermeil and set up an inn there.

This \_quibus\_, composed of purses and watches, of gold rings and silver

crosses, gathered in harvest-time in furrows sown with corpses, did not

amount to a large total, and did not carry this sutler turned

eating-house-keeper very far.

Thénardier had that peculiar rectilinear something about his gestures

which, accompanied by an oath, recalls the barracks, and by a sign of

the cross, the seminary. He was a fine talker. He allowed it to be

thought that he was an educated man. Nevertheless, the schoolmaster had

noticed that he pronounced improperly.12

He composed the travellers’ tariff card in a superior manner, but

practised eyes sometimes spied out orthographical errors in it.

Thénardier was cunning, greedy, slothful, and clever. He did not

disdain his servants, which caused his wife to dispense with them. This

giantess was jealous. It seemed to her that that thin and yellow little

man must be an object coveted by all.

Thénardier, who was, above all, an astute and well-balanced man, was a

scamp of a temperate sort. This is the worst species; hypocrisy enters

into it.

It is not that Thénardier was not, on occasion, capable of wrath to

quite the same degree as his wife; but this was very rare, and at such

times, since he was enraged with the human race in general, as he bore

within him a deep furnace of hatred. And since he was one of those

people who are continually avenging their wrongs, who accuse everything

that passes before them of everything which has befallen them, and who

are always ready to cast upon the first person who comes to hand, as a

legitimate grievance, the sum total of the deceptions, the

bankruptcies, and the calamities of their lives,—when all this leaven

was stirred up in him and boiled forth from his mouth and eyes, he was

terrible. Woe to the person who came under his wrath at such a time!

In addition to his other qualities, Thénardier was attentive and

penetrating, silent or talkative, according to circumstances, and

always highly intelligent. He had something of the look of sailors, who

are accustomed to screw up their eyes to gaze through marine glasses.

Thénardier was a statesman.

Every newcomer who entered the tavern said, on catching sight of Madame

Thénardier, “There is the master of the house.” A mistake. She was not

even the mistress. The husband was both master and mistress. She

worked; he created. He directed everything by a sort of invisible and

constant magnetic action. A word was sufficient for him, sometimes a

sign; the mastodon obeyed. Thénardier was a sort of special and

sovereign being in Madame Thénardier’s eyes, though she did not

thoroughly realize it. She was possessed of virtues after her own kind;

if she had ever had a disagreement as to any detail with “Monsieur

Thénardier,”—which was an inadmissible hypothesis, by the way,—she

would not have blamed her husband in public on any subject whatever.

She would never have committed “before strangers” that mistake so often

committed by women, and which is called in parliamentary language,

“exposing the crown.” Although their concord had only evil as its

result, there was contemplation in Madame Thénardier’s submission to

her husband. That mountain of noise and of flesh moved under the little

finger of that frail despot. Viewed on its dwarfed and grotesque side,

this was that grand and universal thing, the adoration of mind by

matter; for certain ugly features have a cause in the very depths of

eternal beauty. There was an unknown quantity about Thénardier; hence

the absolute empire of the man over that woman. At certain moments she

beheld him like a lighted candle; at others she felt him like a claw.

This woman was a formidable creature who loved no one except her

children, and who did not fear any one except her husband. She was a

mother because she was mammiferous. But her maternity stopped short

with her daughters, and, as we shall see, did not extend to boys. The

man had but one thought,—how to enrich himself.

He did not succeed in this. A theatre worthy of this great talent was

lacking. Thénardier was ruining himself at Montfermeil, if ruin is

possible to zero; in Switzerland or in the Pyrenees this penniless

scamp would have become a millionaire; but an inn-keeper must browse

where fate has hitched him.

It will be understood that the word \_inn-keeper\_ is here employed in a

restricted sense, and does not extend to an entire class.

In this same year, 1823, Thénardier was burdened with about fifteen

hundred francs’ worth of petty debts, and this rendered him anxious.

Whatever may have been the obstinate injustice of destiny in this case,

Thénardier was one of those men who understand best, with the most

profundity and in the most modern fashion, that thing which is a virtue

among barbarous peoples and an object of merchandise among civilized

peoples,—hospitality. Besides, he was an admirable poacher, and quoted

for his skill in shooting. He had a certain cold and tranquil laugh,

which was particularly dangerous.

His theories as a landlord sometimes burst forth in lightning flashes.

He had professional aphorisms, which he inserted into his wife’s mind.

“The duty of the inn-keeper,” he said to her one day, violently, and in

a low voice, “is to sell to the first comer, stews, repose, light,

fire, dirty sheets, a servant, lice, and a smile; to stop passers-by,

to empty small purses, and to honestly lighten heavy ones; to shelter

travelling families respectfully: to shave the man, to pluck the woman,

to pick the child clean; to quote the window open, the window shut, the

chimney-corner, the armchair, the chair, the ottoman, the stool, the

feather-bed, the mattress and the truss of straw; to know how much the

shadow uses up the mirror, and to put a price on it; and, by five

hundred thousand devils, to make the traveller pay for everything, even

for the flies which his dog eats!”

This man and this woman were ruse and rage wedded—a hideous and

terrible team.

While the husband pondered and combined, Madame Thénardier thought not

of absent creditors, took no heed of yesterday nor of to-morrow, and

lived in a fit of anger, all in a minute.

Such were these two beings. Cosette was between them, subjected to

their double pressure, like a creature who is at the same time being

ground up in a mill and pulled to pieces with pincers. The man and the

woman each had a different method: Cosette was overwhelmed with

blows—this was the woman’s; she went barefooted in winter—that was the

man’s doing.

Cosette ran upstairs and down, washed, swept, rubbed, dusted, ran,

fluttered about, panted, moved heavy articles, and weak as she was, did

the coarse work. There was no mercy for her; a fierce mistress and

venomous master. The Thénardier hostelry was like a spider’s web, in

which Cosette had been caught, and where she lay trembling. The ideal

of oppression was realized by this sinister household. It was something

like the fly serving the spiders.

The poor child passively held her peace.

What takes place within these souls when they have but just quitted

God, find themselves thus, at the very dawn of life, very small and in

the midst of men all naked!

CHAPTER III—MEN MUST HAVE WINE, AND HORSES MUST HAVE WATER

Four new travellers had arrived.

Cosette was meditating sadly; for, although she was only eight years

old, she had already suffered so much that she reflected with the

lugubrious air of an old woman. Her eye was black in consequence of a

blow from Madame Thénardier’s fist, which caused the latter to remark

from time to time, “How ugly she is with her fist-blow on her eye!”

Cosette was thinking that it was dark, very dark, that the pitchers and

caraffes in the chambers of the travellers who had arrived must have

been filled and that there was no more water in the cistern.

She was somewhat reassured because no one in the Thénardier

establishment drank much water. Thirsty people were never lacking

there; but their thirst was of the sort which applies to the jug rather

than to the pitcher. Any one who had asked for a glass of water among

all those glasses of wine would have appeared a savage to all these

men. But there came a moment when the child trembled; Madame Thénardier

raised the cover of a stew-pan which was boiling on the stove, then

seized a glass and briskly approached the cistern. She turned the

faucet; the child had raised her head and was following all the woman’s

movements. A thin stream of water trickled from the faucet, and half

filled the glass. “Well,” said she, “there is no more water!” A

momentary silence ensued. The child did not breathe.

“Bah!” resumed Madame Thénardier, examining the half-filled glass,

“this will be enough.”

Cosette applied herself to her work once more, but for a quarter of an

hour she felt her heart leaping in her bosom like a big snow-flake.

She counted the minutes that passed in this manner, and wished it were

the next morning.

From time to time one of the drinkers looked into the street, and

exclaimed, “It’s as black as an oven!” or, “One must needs be a cat to

go about the streets without a lantern at this hour!” And Cosette

trembled.

All at once one of the pedlers who lodged in the hostelry entered, and

said in a harsh voice:—

“My horse has not been watered.”

“Yes, it has,” said Madame Thénardier.

“I tell you that it has not,” retorted the pedler.

Cosette had emerged from under the table.

“Oh, yes, sir!” said she, “the horse has had a drink; he drank out of a

bucket, a whole bucketful, and it was I who took the water to him, and

I spoke to him.”

It was not true; Cosette lied.

“There’s a brat as big as my fist who tells lies as big as the house,”

exclaimed the pedler. “I tell you that he has not been watered, you

little jade! He has a way of blowing when he has had no water, which I

know well.”

Cosette persisted, and added in a voice rendered hoarse with anguish,

and which was hardly audible:—

“And he drank heartily.”

“Come,” said the pedler, in a rage, “this won’t do at all, let my horse

be watered, and let that be the end of it!”

Cosette crept under the table again.

“In truth, that is fair!” said Madame Thénardier, “if the beast has not

been watered, it must be.”

Then glancing about her:—

“Well, now! Where’s that other beast?”

She bent down and discovered Cosette cowering at the other end of the

table, almost under the drinkers’ feet.

“Are you coming?” shrieked Madame Thénardier.

Cosette crawled out of the sort of hole in which she had hidden

herself. The Thénardier resumed:—

“Mademoiselle Dog-lack-name, go and water that horse.”

“But, Madame,” said Cosette, feebly, “there is no water.”

The Thénardier threw the street door wide open:—

“Well, go and get some, then!”

Cosette dropped her head, and went for an empty bucket which stood near

the chimney-corner.

This bucket was bigger than she was, and the child could have set down

in it at her ease.

The Thénardier returned to her stove, and tasted what was in the

stewpan, with a wooden spoon, grumbling the while:—

“There’s plenty in the spring. There never was such a malicious

creature as that. I think I should have done better to strain my

onions.”

Then she rummaged in a drawer which contained sous, pepper, and

shallots.

“See here, Mam’selle Toad,” she added, “on your way back, you will get

a big loaf from the baker. Here’s a fifteen-sou piece.”

Cosette had a little pocket on one side of her apron; she took the coin

without saying a word, and put it in that pocket.

Then she stood motionless, bucket in hand, the open door before her.

She seemed to be waiting for some one to come to her rescue.

“Get along with you!” screamed the Thénardier.

Cosette went out. The door closed behind her.

CHAPTER IV—ENTRANCE ON THE SCENE OF A DOLL

The line of open-air booths starting at the church, extended, as the

reader will remember, as far as the hostelry of the Thénardiers. These

booths were all illuminated, because the citizens would soon pass on

their way to the midnight mass, with candles burning in paper funnels,

which, as the schoolmaster, then seated at the table at the

Thénardiers’ observed, produced “a magical effect.” In compensation,

not a star was visible in the sky.

The last of these stalls, established precisely opposite the

Thénardiers’ door, was a toy-shop all glittering with tinsel, glass,

and magnificent objects of tin. In the first row, and far forwards, the

merchant had placed on a background of white napkins, an immense doll,

nearly two feet high, who was dressed in a robe of pink crepe, with

gold wheat-ears on her head, which had real hair and enamel eyes. All

that day, this marvel had been displayed to the wonderment of all

passers-by under ten years of age, without a mother being found in

Montfermeil sufficiently rich or sufficiently extravagant to give it to

her child. Éponine and Azelma had passed hours in contemplating it, and

Cosette herself had ventured to cast a glance at it, on the sly, it is

true.

At the moment when Cosette emerged, bucket in hand, melancholy and

overcome as she was, she could not refrain from lifting her eyes to

that wonderful doll, towards \_the lady\_, as she called it. The poor

child paused in amazement. She had not yet beheld that doll close to.

The whole shop seemed a palace to her: the doll was not a doll; it was

a vision. It was joy, splendor, riches, happiness, which appeared in a

sort of chimerical halo to that unhappy little being so profoundly

engulfed in gloomy and chilly misery. With the sad and innocent

sagacity of childhood, Cosette measured the abyss which separated her

from that doll. She said to herself that one must be a queen, or at

least a princess, to have a “thing” like that. She gazed at that

beautiful pink dress, that beautiful smooth hair, and she thought, “How

happy that doll must be!” She could not take her eyes from that

fantastic stall. The more she looked, the more dazzled she grew. She

thought she was gazing at paradise. There were other dolls behind the

large one, which seemed to her to be fairies and genii. The merchant,

who was pacing back and forth in front of his shop, produced on her

somewhat the effect of being the Eternal Father.

In this adoration she forgot everything, even the errand with which she

was charged.

All at once the Thénardier’s coarse voice recalled her to reality:

“What, you silly jade! you have not gone? Wait! I’ll give it to you! I

want to know what you are doing there! Get along, you little monster!”

The Thénardier had cast a glance into the street, and had caught sight

of Cosette in her ecstasy.

Cosette fled, dragging her pail, and taking the longest strides of

which she was capable.

CHAPTER V—THE LITTLE ONE ALL ALONE

As the Thénardier hostelry was in that part of the village which is

near the church, it was to the spring in the forest in the direction of

Chelles that Cosette was obliged to go for her water.

She did not glance at the display of a single other merchant. So long

as she was in Boulanger Lane and in the neighborhood of the church, the

lighted stalls illuminated the road; but soon the last light from the

last stall vanished. The poor child found herself in the dark. She

plunged into it. Only, as a certain emotion overcame her, she made as

much motion as possible with the handle of the bucket as she walked

along. This made a noise which afforded her company.

The further she went, the denser the darkness became. There was no one

in the streets. However, she did encounter a woman, who turned around

on seeing her, and stood still, muttering between her teeth: “Where can

that child be going? Is it a werewolf child?” Then the woman recognized

Cosette. “Well,” said she, “it’s the Lark!”

In this manner Cosette traversed the labyrinth of tortuous and deserted

streets which terminate in the village of Montfermeil on the side of

Chelles. So long as she had the houses or even the walls only on both

sides of her path, she proceeded with tolerable boldness. From time to

time she caught the flicker of a candle through the crack of a

shutter—this was light and life; there were people there, and it

reassured her. But in proportion as she advanced, her pace slackened

mechanically, as it were. When she had passed the corner of the last

house, Cosette paused. It had been hard to advance further than the

last stall; it became impossible to proceed further than the last

house. She set her bucket on the ground, thrust her hand into her hair,

and began slowly to scratch her head,—a gesture peculiar to children

when terrified and undecided what to do. It was no longer Montfermeil;

it was the open fields. Black and desert space was before her. She

gazed in despair at that darkness, where there was no longer any one,

where there were beasts, where there were spectres, possibly. She took

a good look, and heard the beasts walking on the grass, and she

distinctly saw spectres moving in the trees. Then she seized her bucket

again; fear had lent her audacity. “Bah!” said she; “I will tell him

that there was no more water!” And she resolutely re-entered

Montfermeil.

Hardly had she gone a hundred paces when she paused and began to

scratch her head again. Now it was the Thénardier who appeared to her,

with her hideous, hyena mouth, and wrath flashing in her eyes. The

child cast a melancholy glance before her and behind her. What was she

to do? What was to become of her? Where was she to go? In front of her

was the spectre of the Thénardier; behind her all the phantoms of the

night and of the forest. It was before the Thénardier that she

recoiled. She resumed her path to the spring, and began to run. She

emerged from the village, she entered the forest at a run, no longer

looking at or listening to anything. She only paused in her course when

her breath failed her; but she did not halt in her advance. She went

straight before her in desperation.

As she ran she felt like crying.

The nocturnal quivering of the forest surrounded her completely.

She no longer thought, she no longer saw. The immensity of night was

facing this tiny creature. On the one hand, all shadow; on the other,

an atom.

It was only seven or eight minutes’ walk from the edge of the woods to

the spring. Cosette knew the way, through having gone over it many

times in daylight. Strange to say, she did not get lost. A remnant of

instinct guided her vaguely. But she did not turn her eyes either to

right or to left, for fear of seeing things in the branches and in the

brushwood. In this manner she reached the spring.

It was a narrow, natural basin, hollowed out by the water in a clayey

soil, about two feet deep, surrounded with moss and with those tall,

crimped grasses which are called Henry IV.’s frills, and paved with

several large stones. A brook ran out of it, with a tranquil little

noise.

Cosette did not take time to breathe. It was very dark, but she was in

the habit of coming to this spring. She felt with her left hand in the

dark for a young oak which leaned over the spring, and which usually

served to support her, found one of its branches, clung to it, bent

down, and plunged the bucket in the water. She was in a state of such

violent excitement that her strength was trebled. While thus bent over,

she did not notice that the pocket of her apron had emptied itself into

the spring. The fifteen-sou piece fell into the water. Cosette neither

saw nor heard it fall. She drew out the bucket nearly full, and set it

on the grass.

That done, she perceived that she was worn out with fatigue. She would

have liked to set out again at once, but the effort required to fill

the bucket had been such that she found it impossible to take a step.

She was forced to sit down. She dropped on the grass, and remained

crouching there.

She shut her eyes; then she opened them again, without knowing why, but

because she could not do otherwise. The agitated water in the bucket

beside her was describing circles which resembled tin serpents.

Overhead the sky was covered with vast black clouds, which were like

masses of smoke. The tragic mask of shadow seemed to bend vaguely over

the child.

Jupiter was setting in the depths.

The child stared with bewildered eyes at this great star, with which

she was unfamiliar, and which terrified her. The planet was, in fact,

very near the horizon and was traversing a dense layer of mist which

imparted to it a horrible ruddy hue. The mist, gloomily empurpled,

magnified the star. One would have called it a luminous wound.

A cold wind was blowing from the plain. The forest was dark, not a leaf

was moving; there were none of the vague, fresh gleams of summertide.

Great boughs uplifted themselves in frightful wise. Slender and

misshapen bushes whistled in the clearings. The tall grasses undulated

like eels under the north wind. The nettles seemed to twist long arms

furnished with claws in search of prey. Some bits of dry heather,

tossed by the breeze, flew rapidly by, and had the air of fleeing in

terror before something which was coming after. On all sides there were

lugubrious stretches.

The darkness was bewildering. Man requires light. Whoever buries

himself in the opposite of day feels his heart contract. When the eye

sees black, the heart sees trouble. In an eclipse in the night, in the

sooty opacity, there is anxiety even for the stoutest of hearts. No one

walks alone in the forest at night without trembling. Shadows and

trees—two formidable densities. A chimerical reality appears in the

indistinct depths. The inconceivable is outlined a few paces distant

from you with a spectral clearness. One beholds floating, either in

space or in one’s own brain, one knows not what vague and intangible

thing, like the dreams of sleeping flowers. There are fierce attitudes

on the horizon. One inhales the effluvia of the great black void. One

is afraid to glance behind him, yet desirous of doing so. The cavities

of night, things grown haggard, taciturn profiles which vanish when one

advances, obscure dishevelments, irritated tufts, livid pools, the

lugubrious reflected in the funereal, the sepulchral immensity of

silence, unknown but possible beings, bendings of mysterious branches,

alarming torsos of trees, long handfuls of quivering plants,—against

all this one has no protection. There is no hardihood which does not

shudder and which does not feel the vicinity of anguish. One is

conscious of something hideous, as though one’s soul were becoming

amalgamated with the darkness. This penetration of the shadows is

indescribably sinister in the case of a child.

Forests are apocalypses, and the beating of the wings of a tiny soul

produces a sound of agony beneath their monstrous vault.

Without understanding her sensations, Cosette was conscious that she

was seized upon by that black enormity of nature; it was no longer

terror alone which was gaining possession of her; it was something more

terrible even than terror; she shivered. There are no words to express

the strangeness of that shiver which chilled her to the very bottom of

her heart; her eye grew wild; she thought she felt that she should not

be able to refrain from returning there at the same hour on the morrow.

Then, by a sort of instinct, she began to count aloud, one, two, three,

four, and so on up to ten, in order to escape from that singular state

which she did not understand, but which terrified her, and, when she

had finished, she began again; this restored her to a true perception

of the things about her. Her hands, which she had wet in drawing the

water, felt cold; she rose; her terror, a natural and unconquerable

terror, had returned: she had but one thought now,—to flee at full

speed through the forest, across the fields to the houses, to the

windows, to the lighted candles. Her glance fell upon the water which

stood before her; such was the fright which the Thénardier inspired in

her, that she dared not flee without that bucket of water: she seized

the handle with both hands; she could hardly lift the pail.

In this manner she advanced a dozen paces, but the bucket was full; it

was heavy; she was forced to set it on the ground once more. She took

breath for an instant, then lifted the handle of the bucket again, and

resumed her march, proceeding a little further this time, but again she

was obliged to pause. After some seconds of repose she set out again.

She walked bent forward, with drooping head, like an old woman; the

weight of the bucket strained and stiffened her thin arms. The iron

handle completed the benumbing and freezing of her wet and tiny hands;

she was forced to halt from time to time, and each time that she did

so, the cold water which splashed from the pail fell on her bare legs.

This took place in the depths of a forest, at night, in winter, far

from all human sight; she was a child of eight: no one but God saw that

sad thing at the moment.

And her mother, no doubt, alas!

For there are things that make the dead open their eyes in their

graves.

She panted with a sort of painful rattle; sobs contracted her throat,

but she dared not weep, so afraid was she of the Thénardier, even at a

distance: it was her custom to imagine the Thénardier always present.

However, she could not make much headway in that manner, and she went

on very slowly. In spite of diminishing the length of her stops, and of

walking as long as possible between them, she reflected with anguish

that it would take her more than an hour to return to Montfermeil in

this manner, and that the Thénardier would beat her. This anguish was

mingled with her terror at being alone in the woods at night; she was

worn out with fatigue, and had not yet emerged from the forest. On

arriving near an old chestnut-tree with which she was acquainted, made

a last halt, longer than the rest, in order that she might get well

rested; then she summoned up all her strength, picked up her bucket

again, and courageously resumed her march, but the poor little

desperate creature could not refrain from crying, “O my God! my God!”

At that moment she suddenly became conscious that her bucket no longer

weighed anything at all: a hand, which seemed to her enormous, had just

seized the handle, and lifted it vigorously. She raised her head. A

large black form, straight and erect, was walking beside her through

the darkness; it was a man who had come up behind her, and whose

approach she had not heard. This man, without uttering a word, had

seized the handle of the bucket which she was carrying.

There are instincts for all the encounters of life.

The child was not afraid.

CHAPTER VI—WHICH POSSIBLY PROVES BOULATRUELLE’S INTELLIGENCE

On the afternoon of that same Christmas Day, 1823, a man had walked for

rather a long time in the most deserted part of the Boulevard de

l’Hôpital in Paris. This man had the air of a person who is seeking

lodgings, and he seemed to halt, by preference, at the most modest

houses on that dilapidated border of the faubourg Saint-Marceau.

We shall see further on that this man had, in fact, hired a chamber in

that isolated quarter.

This man, in his attire, as in all his person, realized the type of

what may be called the well-bred mendicant,—extreme wretchedness

combined with extreme cleanliness. This is a very rare mixture which

inspires intelligent hearts with that double respect which one feels

for the man who is very poor, and for the man who is very worthy. He

wore a very old and very well brushed round hat; a coarse coat, worn

perfectly threadbare, of an ochre yellow, a color that was not in the

least eccentric at that epoch; a large waistcoat with pockets of a

venerable cut; black breeches, worn gray at the knee, stockings of

black worsted; and thick shoes with copper buckles. He would have been

pronounced a preceptor in some good family, returned from the

emigration. He would have been taken for more than sixty years of age,

from his perfectly white hair, his wrinkled brow, his livid lips, and

his countenance, where everything breathed depression and weariness of

life. Judging from his firm tread, from the singular vigor which

stamped all his movements, he would have hardly been thought fifty. The

wrinkles on his brow were well placed, and would have disposed in his

favor any one who observed him attentively. His lip contracted with a

strange fold which seemed severe, and which was humble. There was in

the depth of his glance an indescribable melancholy serenity. In his

left hand he carried a little bundle tied up in a handkerchief; in his

right he leaned on a sort of a cudgel, cut from some hedge. This stick

had been carefully trimmed, and had an air that was not too

threatening; the most had been made of its knots, and it had received a

coral-like head, made from red wax: it was a cudgel, and it seemed to

be a cane.

There are but few passers-by on that boulevard, particularly in the

winter. The man seemed to avoid them rather than to seek them, but this

without any affectation.

At that epoch, King Louis XVIII. went nearly every day to

Choisy-le-Roi: it was one of his favorite excursions. Towards two

o’clock, almost invariably, the royal carriage and cavalcade was seen

to pass at full speed along the Boulevard de l’Hôpital.

This served in lieu of a watch or clock to the poor women of the

quarter who said, “It is two o’clock; there he is returning to the

Tuileries.”

And some rushed forward, and others drew up in line, for a passing king

always creates a tumult; besides, the appearance and disappearance of

Louis XVIII. produced a certain effect in the streets of Paris. It was

rapid but majestic. This impotent king had a taste for a fast gallop;

as he was not able to walk, he wished to run: that cripple would gladly

have had himself drawn by the lightning. He passed, pacific and severe,

in the midst of naked swords. His massive couch, all covered with

gilding, with great branches of lilies painted on the panels, thundered

noisily along. There was hardly time to cast a glance upon it. In the

rear angle on the right there was visible on tufted cushions of white

satin a large, firm, and ruddy face, a brow freshly powdered \_à

l’oiseau royal\_, a proud, hard, crafty eye, the smile of an educated

man, two great epaulets with bullion fringe floating over a bourgeois

coat, the Golden Fleece, the cross of Saint Louis, the cross of the

Legion of Honor, the silver plaque of the Saint-Esprit, a huge belly,

and a wide blue ribbon: it was the king. Outside of Paris, he held his

hat decked with white ostrich plumes on his knees enwrapped in high

English gaiters; when he re-entered the city, he put on his hat and

saluted rarely; he stared coldly at the people, and they returned it in

kind. When he appeared for the first time in the Saint-Marceau quarter,

the whole success which he produced is contained in this remark of an

inhabitant of the faubourg to his comrade, “That big fellow yonder is

the government.”

This infallible passage of the king at the same hour was, therefore,

the daily event of the Boulevard de l’Hôpital.

The promenader in the yellow coat evidently did not belong in the

quarter, and probably did not belong in Paris, for he was ignorant as

to this detail. When, at two o’clock, the royal carriage, surrounded by

a squadron of the body-guard all covered with silver lace, debouched on

the boulevard, after having made the turn of the Salpêtrière, he

appeared surprised and almost alarmed. There was no one but himself in

this cross-lane. He drew up hastily behind the corner of the wall of an

enclosure, though this did not prevent M. le Duc de Havré from spying

him out.

M. le Duc de Havré, as captain of the guard on duty that day, was

seated in the carriage, opposite the king. He said to his Majesty,

“Yonder is an evil-looking man.” Members of the police, who were

clearing the king’s route, took equal note of him: one of them received

an order to follow him. But the man plunged into the deserted little

streets of the faubourg, and as twilight was beginning to fall, the

agent lost trace of him, as is stated in a report addressed that same

evening to M. le Comte d’Anglès, Minister of State, Prefect of Police.

When the man in the yellow coat had thrown the agent off his track, he

redoubled his pace, not without turning round many a time to assure

himself that he was not being followed. At a quarter-past four, that is

to say, when night was fully come, he passed in front of the theatre of

the Porte Saint-Martin, where \_The Two Convicts\_ was being played that

day. This poster, illuminated by the theatre lanterns, struck him; for,

although he was walking rapidly, he halted to read it. An instant later

he was in the blind alley of La Planchette, and he entered the \_Plat

d’Etain\_ [the Pewter Platter], where the office of the coach for Lagny

was then situated. This coach set out at half-past four. The horses

were harnessed, and the travellers, summoned by the coachman, were

hastily climbing the lofty iron ladder of the vehicle.

The man inquired:—

“Have you a place?”

“Only one—beside me on the box,” said the coachman.

“I will take it.”

“Climb up.”

Nevertheless, before setting out, the coachman cast a glance at the

traveller’s shabby dress, at the diminutive size of his bundle, and

made him pay his fare.

“Are you going as far as Lagny?” demanded the coachman.

“Yes,” said the man.

The traveller paid to Lagny.

They started. When they had passed the barrier, the coachman tried to

enter into conversation, but the traveller only replied in

monosyllables. The coachman took to whistling and swearing at his

horses.

The coachman wrapped himself up in his cloak. It was cold. The man did

not appear to be thinking of that. Thus they passed Gournay and

Neuilly-sur-Marne.

Towards six o’clock in the evening they reached Chelles. The coachman

drew up in front of the carters’ inn installed in the ancient buildings

of the Royal Abbey, to give his horses a breathing spell.

“I get down here,” said the man.

He took his bundle and his cudgel and jumped down from the vehicle.

An instant later he had disappeared.

He did not enter the inn.

When the coach set out for Lagny a few minutes later, it did not

encounter him in the principal street of Chelles.

The coachman turned to the inside travellers.

“There,” said he, “is a man who does not belong here, for I do not know

him. He had not the air of owning a sou, but he does not consider

money; he pays to Lagny, and he goes only as far as Chelles. It is

night; all the houses are shut; he does not enter the inn, and he is

not to be found. So he has dived through the earth.”

The man had not plunged into the earth, but he had gone with great

strides through the dark, down the principal street of Chelles, then he

had turned to the right before reaching the church, into the crossroad

leading to Montfermeil, like a person who was acquainted with the

country and had been there before.

He followed this road rapidly. At the spot where it is intersected by

the ancient tree-bordered road which runs from Gagny to Lagny, he heard

people coming. He concealed himself precipitately in a ditch, and there

waited until the passers-by were at a distance. The precaution was

nearly superfluous, however; for, as we have already said, it was a

very dark December night. Not more than two or three stars were visible

in the sky.

It is at this point that the ascent of the hill begins. The man did not

return to the road to Montfermeil; he struck across the fields to the

right, and entered the forest with long strides.

Once in the forest he slackened his pace, and began a careful

examination of all the trees, advancing, step by step, as though

seeking and following a mysterious road known to himself alone. There

came a moment when he appeared to lose himself, and he paused in

indecision. At last he arrived, by dint of feeling his way inch by

inch, at a clearing where there was a great heap of whitish stones. He

stepped up briskly to these stones, and examined them attentively

through the mists of night, as though he were passing them in review. A

large tree, covered with those excrescences which are the warts of

vegetation, stood a few paces distant from the pile of stones. He went

up to this tree and passed his hand over the bark of the trunk, as

though seeking to recognize and count all the warts.

Opposite this tree, which was an ash, there was a chestnut-tree,

suffering from a peeling of the bark, to which a band of zinc had been

nailed by way of dressing. He raised himself on tiptoe and touched this

band of zinc.

Then he trod about for awhile on the ground comprised in the space

between the tree and the heap of stones, like a person who is trying to

assure himself that the soil has not recently been disturbed.

That done, he took his bearings, and resumed his march through the

forest.

It was the man who had just met Cosette.

As he walked through the thicket in the direction of Montfermeil, he

had espied that tiny shadow moving with a groan, depositing a burden on

the ground, then taking it up and setting out again. He drew near, and

perceived that it was a very young child, laden with an enormous bucket

of water. Then he approached the child, and silently grasped the handle

of the bucket.

CHAPTER VII—COSETTE SIDE BY SIDE WITH THE STRANGER IN THE DARK

Cosette, as we have said, was not frightened.

The man accosted her. He spoke in a voice that was grave and almost

bass.

“My child, what you are carrying is very heavy for you.”

Cosette raised her head and replied:—

“Yes, sir.”

“Give it to me,” said the man; “I will carry it for you.”

Cosette let go of the bucket-handle. The man walked along beside her.

“It really is very heavy,” he muttered between his teeth. Then he

added:—

“How old are you, little one?”

“Eight, sir.”

“And have you come from far like this?”

“From the spring in the forest.”

“Are you going far?”

“A good quarter of an hour’s walk from here.”

The man said nothing for a moment; then he remarked abruptly:—

“So you have no mother.”

“I don’t know,” answered the child.

Before the man had time to speak again, she added:—

“I don’t think so. Other people have mothers. I have none.”

And after a silence she went on:—

“I think that I never had any.”

The man halted; he set the bucket on the ground, bent down and placed

both hands on the child’s shoulders, making an effort to look at her

and to see her face in the dark.

Cosette’s thin and sickly face was vaguely outlined by the livid light

in the sky.

“What is your name?” said the man.

“Cosette.”

The man seemed to have received an electric shock. He looked at her

once more; then he removed his hands from Cosette’s shoulders, seized

the bucket, and set out again.

After a moment he inquired:—

“Where do you live, little one?”

“At Montfermeil, if you know where that is.”

“That is where we are going?”

“Yes, sir.”

He paused; then began again:—

“Who sent you at such an hour to get water in the forest?”

“It was Madame Thénardier.”

The man resumed, in a voice which he strove to render indifferent, but

in which there was, nevertheless, a singular tremor:—

“What does your Madame Thénardier do?”

“She is my mistress,” said the child. “She keeps the inn.”

“The inn?” said the man. “Well, I am going to lodge there to-night.

Show me the way.”

“We are on the way there,” said the child.

The man walked tolerably fast. Cosette followed him without difficulty.

She no longer felt any fatigue. From time to time she raised her eyes

towards the man, with a sort of tranquillity and an indescribable

confidence. She had never been taught to turn to Providence and to

pray; nevertheless, she felt within her something which resembled hope

and joy, and which mounted towards heaven.

Several minutes elapsed. The man resumed:—

“Is there no servant in Madame Thénardier’s house?”

“No, sir.”

“Are you alone there?”

“Yes, sir.”

Another pause ensued. Cosette lifted up her voice:—

“That is to say, there are two little girls.”

“What little girls?”

“Ponine and Zelma.”

This was the way the child simplified the romantic names so dear to the

female Thénardier.

“Who are Ponine and Zelma?”

“They are Madame Thénardier’s young ladies; her daughters, as you would

say.”

“And what do those girls do?”

“Oh!” said the child, “they have beautiful dolls; things with gold in

them, all full of affairs. They play; they amuse themselves.”

“All day long?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And you?”

“I? I work.”

“All day long?”

The child raised her great eyes, in which hung a tear, which was not

visible because of the darkness, and replied gently:—

“Yes, sir.”

After an interval of silence she went on:—

“Sometimes, when I have finished my work and they let me, I amuse

myself, too.”

“How do you amuse yourself?”

“In the best way I can. They let me alone; but I have not many

playthings. Ponine and Zelma will not let me play with their dolls. I

have only a little lead sword, no longer than that.”

The child held up her tiny finger.

“And it will not cut?”

“Yes, sir,” said the child; “it cuts salad and the heads of flies.”

They reached the village. Cosette guided the stranger through the

streets. They passed the bakeshop, but Cosette did not think of the

bread which she had been ordered to fetch. The man had ceased to ply

her with questions, and now preserved a gloomy silence.

When they had left the church behind them, the man, on perceiving all

the open-air booths, asked Cosette:—

“So there is a fair going on here?”

“No, sir; it is Christmas.”

As they approached the tavern, Cosette timidly touched his arm:—

“Monsieur?”

“What, my child?”

“We are quite near the house.”

“Well?”

“Will you let me take my bucket now?”

“Why?”

“If Madame sees that some one has carried it for me, she will beat me.”

The man handed her the bucket. An instant later they were at the tavern

door.

CHAPTER VIII—THE UNPLEASANTNESS OF RECEIVING INTO ONE’S HOUSE A POOR

MAN WHO MAY BE A RICH MAN

Cosette could not refrain from casting a sidelong glance at the big

doll, which was still displayed at the toy-merchant’s; then she

knocked. The door opened. The Thénardier appeared with a candle in her

hand.

“Ah! so it’s you, you little wretch! good mercy, but you’ve taken your

time! The hussy has been amusing herself!”

“Madame,” said Cosette, trembling all over, “here’s a gentleman who

wants a lodging.”

The Thénardier speedily replaced her gruff air by her amiable grimace,

a change of aspect common to tavern-keepers, and eagerly sought the

newcomer with her eyes.

“This is the gentleman?” said she.

“Yes, Madame,” replied the man, raising his hand to his hat.

Wealthy travellers are not so polite. This gesture, and an inspection

of the stranger’s costume and baggage, which the Thénardier passed in

review with one glance, caused the amiable grimace to vanish, and the

gruff mien to reappear. She resumed dryly:—

“Enter, my good man.”

The “good man” entered. The Thénardier cast a second glance at him,

paid particular attention to his frock-coat, which was absolutely

threadbare, and to his hat, which was a little battered, and, tossing

her head, wrinkling her nose, and screwing up her eyes, she consulted

her husband, who was still drinking with the carters. The husband

replied by that imperceptible movement of the forefinger, which, backed

up by an inflation of the lips, signifies in such cases: A regular

beggar. Thereupon, the Thénardier exclaimed:—

“Ah! see here, my good man; I am very sorry, but I have no room left.”

“Put me where you like,” said the man; “in the attic, in the stable. I

will pay as though I occupied a room.”

“Forty sous.”

“Forty sous; agreed.”

“Very well, then!”

“Forty sous!” said a carter, in a low tone, to the Thénardier woman;

“why, the charge is only twenty sous!”

“It is forty in his case,” retorted the Thénardier, in the same tone.

“I don’t lodge poor folks for less.”

“That’s true,” added her husband, gently; “it ruins a house to have

such people in it.”

In the meantime, the man, laying his bundle and his cudgel on a bench,

had seated himself at a table, on which Cosette made haste to place a

bottle of wine and a glass. The merchant who had demanded the bucket of

water took it to his horse himself. Cosette resumed her place under the

kitchen table, and her knitting.

The man, who had barely moistened his lips in the wine which he had

poured out for himself, observed the child with peculiar attention.

Cosette was ugly. If she had been happy, she might have been pretty. We

have already given a sketch of that sombre little figure. Cosette was

thin and pale; she was nearly eight years old, but she seemed to be

hardly six. Her large eyes, sunken in a sort of shadow, were almost put

out with weeping. The corners of her mouth had that curve of habitual

anguish which is seen in condemned persons and desperately sick people.

Her hands were, as her mother had divined, “ruined with chilblains.”

The fire which illuminated her at that moment brought into relief all

the angles of her bones, and rendered her thinness frightfully

apparent. As she was always shivering, she had acquired the habit of

pressing her knees one against the other. Her entire clothing was but a

rag which would have inspired pity in summer, and which inspired horror

in winter. All she had on was hole-ridden linen, not a scrap of

woollen. Her skin was visible here and there and everywhere black and

blue spots could be descried, which marked the places where the

Thénardier woman had touched her. Her naked legs were thin and red. The

hollows in her neck were enough to make one weep. This child’s whole

person, her mien, her attitude, the sound of her voice, the intervals

which she allowed to elapse between one word and the next, her glance,

her silence, her slightest gesture, expressed and betrayed one sole

idea,—fear.

Fear was diffused all over her; she was covered with it, so to speak;

fear drew her elbows close to her hips, withdrew her heels under her

petticoat, made her occupy as little space as possible, allowed her

only the breath that was absolutely necessary, and had become what

might be called the habit of her body, admitting of no possible

variation except an increase. In the depths of her eyes there was an

astonished nook where terror lurked.

Her fear was such, that on her arrival, wet as she was, Cosette did not

dare to approach the fire and dry herself, but sat silently down to her

work again.

The expression in the glance of that child of eight years was

habitually so gloomy, and at times so tragic, that it seemed at certain

moments as though she were on the verge of becoming an idiot or a

demon.

As we have stated, she had never known what it is to pray; she had

never set foot in a church. “Have I the time?” said the Thénardier.

The man in the yellow coat never took his eyes from Cosette.

All at once, the Thénardier exclaimed:—

“By the way, where’s that bread?”

Cosette, according to her custom whenever the Thénardier uplifted her

voice, emerged with great haste from beneath the table.

She had completely forgotten the bread. She had recourse to the

expedient of children who live in a constant state of fear. She lied.

“Madame, the baker’s shop was shut.”

“You should have knocked.”

“I did knock, Madame.”

“Well?”

“He did not open the door.”

“I’ll find out to-morrow whether that is true,” said the Thénardier;

“and if you are telling me a lie, I’ll lead you a pretty dance. In the

meantime, give me back my fifteen-sou piece.”

Cosette plunged her hand into the pocket of her apron, and turned

green. The fifteen-sou piece was not there.

“Ah, come now,” said Madame Thénardier, “did you hear me?”

Cosette turned her pocket inside out; there was nothing in it. What

could have become of that money? The unhappy little creature could not

find a word to say. She was petrified.

“Have you lost that fifteen-sou piece?” screamed the Thénardier,

hoarsely, “or do you want to rob me of it?”

At the same time, she stretched out her arm towards the

cat-o’-nine-tails which hung on a nail in the chimney-corner.

This formidable gesture restored to Cosette sufficient strength to

shriek:—

“Mercy, Madame, Madame! I will not do so any more!”

The Thénardier took down the whip.

In the meantime, the man in the yellow coat had been fumbling in the

fob of his waistcoat, without any one having noticed his movements.

Besides, the other travellers were drinking or playing cards, and were

not paying attention to anything.

Cosette contracted herself into a ball, with anguish, within the angle

of the chimney, endeavoring to gather up and conceal her poor half-nude

limbs. The Thénardier raised her arm.

“Pardon me, Madame,” said the man, “but just now I caught sight of

something which had fallen from this little one’s apron pocket, and

rolled aside. Perhaps this is it.”

At the same time he bent down and seemed to be searching on the floor

for a moment.

“Exactly; here it is,” he went on, straightening himself up.

And he held out a silver coin to the Thénardier.

“Yes, that’s it,” said she.

It was not it, for it was a twenty-sou piece; but the Thénardier found

it to her advantage. She put the coin in her pocket, and confined

herself to casting a fierce glance at the child, accompanied with the

remark, “Don’t let this ever happen again!”

Cosette returned to what the Thénardier called “her kennel,” and her

large eyes, which were riveted on the traveller, began to take on an

expression such as they had never worn before. Thus far it was only an

innocent amazement, but a sort of stupefied confidence was mingled with

it.

“By the way, would you like some supper?” the Thénardier inquired of

the traveller.

He made no reply. He appeared to be absorbed in thought.

“What sort of a man is that?” she muttered between her teeth. “He’s

some frightfully poor wretch. He hasn’t a sou to pay for a supper. Will

he even pay me for his lodging? It’s very lucky, all the same, that it

did not occur to him to steal the money that was on the floor.”

In the meantime, a door had opened, and Éponine and Azelma entered.

They were two really pretty little girls, more bourgeois than peasant

in looks, and very charming; the one with shining chestnut tresses, the

other with long black braids hanging down her back, both vivacious,

neat, plump, rosy, and healthy, and a delight to the eye. They were

warmly clad, but with so much maternal art that the thickness of the

stuffs did not detract from the coquetry of arrangement. There was a

hint of winter, though the springtime was not wholly effaced. Light

emanated from these two little beings. Besides this, they were on the

throne. In their toilettes, in their gayety, in the noise which they

made, there was sovereignty. When they entered, the Thénardier said to

them in a grumbling tone which was full of adoration, “Ah! there you

are, you children!”

Then drawing them, one after the other to her knees, smoothing their

hair, tying their ribbons afresh, and then releasing them with that

gentle manner of shaking off which is peculiar to mothers, she

exclaimed, “What frights they are!”

They went and seated themselves in the chimney-corner. They had a doll,

which they turned over and over on their knees with all sorts of joyous

chatter. From time to time Cosette raised her eyes from her knitting,

and watched their play with a melancholy air.

Éponine and Azelma did not look at Cosette. She was the same as a dog

to them. These three little girls did not yet reckon up four and twenty

years between them, but they already represented the whole society of

man; envy on the one side, disdain on the other.

The doll of the Thénardier sisters was very much faded, very old, and

much broken; but it seemed nonetheless admirable to Cosette, who had

never had a doll in her life, \_a real doll\_, to make use of the

expression which all children will understand.

All at once, the Thénardier, who had been going back and forth in the

room, perceived that Cosette’s mind was distracted, and that, instead

of working, she was paying attention to the little ones at their play.

“Ah! I’ve caught you at it!” she cried. “So that’s the way you work!

I’ll make you work to the tune of the whip; that I will.”

The stranger turned to the Thénardier, without quitting his chair.

“Bah, Madame,” he said, with an almost timid air, “let her play!”

Such a wish expressed by a traveller who had eaten a slice of mutton

and had drunk a couple of bottles of wine with his supper, and who had

not the air of being frightfully poor, would have been equivalent to an

order. But that a man with such a hat should permit himself such a

desire, and that a man with such a coat should permit himself to have a

will, was something which Madame Thénardier did not intend to tolerate.

She retorted with acrimony:—

“She must work, since she eats. I don’t feed her to do nothing.”

“What is she making?” went on the stranger, in a gentle voice which

contrasted strangely with his beggarly garments and his porter’s

shoulders.

The Thénardier deigned to reply:—

“Stockings, if you please. Stockings for my little girls, who have

none, so to speak, and who are absolutely barefoot just now.”

The man looked at Cosette’s poor little red feet, and continued:—

“When will she have finished this pair of stockings?”

“She has at least three or four good days’ work on them still, the lazy

creature!”

“And how much will that pair of stockings be worth when she has

finished them?”

The Thénardier cast a glance of disdain on him.

“Thirty sous at least.”

“Will you sell them for five francs?” went on the man.

“Good heavens!” exclaimed a carter who was listening, with a loud

laugh; “five francs! the deuce, I should think so! five balls!”

Thénardier thought it time to strike in.

“Yes, sir; if such is your fancy, you will be allowed to have that pair

of stockings for five francs. We can refuse nothing to travellers.”

“You must pay on the spot,” said the Thénardier, in her curt and

peremptory fashion.

“I will buy that pair of stockings,” replied the man, “and,” he added,

drawing a five-franc piece from his pocket, and laying it on the table,

“I will pay for them.”

Then he turned to Cosette.

“Now I own your work; play, my child.”

The carter was so much touched by the five-franc piece, that he

abandoned his glass and hastened up.

“But it’s true!” he cried, examining it. “A real hind wheel! and not

counterfeit!”

Thénardier approached and silently put the coin in his pocket.

The Thénardier had no reply to make. She bit her lips, and her face

assumed an expression of hatred.

In the meantime, Cosette was trembling. She ventured to ask:—

“Is it true, Madame? May I play?”

“Play!” said the Thénardier, in a terrible voice.

“Thanks, Madame,” said Cosette.

And while her mouth thanked the Thénardier, her whole little soul

thanked the traveller.

Thénardier had resumed his drinking; his wife whispered in his ear:—

“Who can this yellow man be?”

“I have seen millionaires with coats like that,” replied Thénardier, in

a sovereign manner.

Cosette had dropped her knitting, but had not left her seat. Cosette

always moved as little as possible. She picked up some old rags and her

little lead sword from a box behind her.

Éponine and Azelma paid no attention to what was going on. They had

just executed a very important operation; they had just got hold of the

cat. They had thrown their doll on the ground, and Éponine, who was the

elder, was swathing the little cat, in spite of its mewing and its

contortions, in a quantity of clothes and red and blue scraps. While

performing this serious and difficult work she was saying to her sister

in that sweet and adorable language of children, whose grace, like the

splendor of the butterfly’s wing, vanishes when one essays to fix it

fast.

“You see, sister, this doll is more amusing than the other. She twists,

she cries, she is warm. See, sister, let us play with her. She shall be

my little girl. I will be a lady. I will come to see you, and you shall

look at her. Gradually, you will perceive her whiskers, and that will

surprise you. And then you will see her ears, and then you will see her

tail and it will amaze you. And you will say to me, ‘Ah! Mon Dieu!’ and

I will say to you: ‘Yes, Madame, it is my little girl. Little girls are

made like that just at present.’”

Azelma listened admiringly to Éponine.

In the meantime, the drinkers had begun to sing an obscene song, and to

laugh at it until the ceiling shook. Thénardier accompanied and

encouraged them.

As birds make nests out of everything, so children make a doll out of

anything which comes to hand. While Éponine and Azelma were bundling up

the cat, Cosette, on her side, had dressed up her sword. That done, she

laid it in her arms, and sang to it softly, to lull it to sleep.

The doll is one of the most imperious needs and, at the same time, one

of the most charming instincts of feminine childhood. To care for, to

clothe, to deck, to dress, to undress, to redress, to teach, scold a

little, to rock, to dandle, to lull to sleep, to imagine that something

is some one,—therein lies the whole woman’s future. While dreaming and

chattering, making tiny outfits, and baby clothes, while sewing little

gowns, and corsages and bodices, the child grows into a young girl, the

young girl into a big girl, the big girl into a woman. The first child

is the continuation of the last doll.

A little girl without a doll is almost as unhappy, and quite as

impossible, as a woman without children.

So Cosette had made herself a doll out of the sword.

Madame Thénardier approached \_the yellow man\_; “My husband is right,”

she thought; “perhaps it is M. Laffitte; there are such queer rich

men!”

She came and set her elbows on the table.

“Monsieur,” said she. At this word, \_Monsieur\_, the man turned; up to

that time, the Thénardier had addressed him only as \_brave homme\_ or

\_bonhomme\_.

“You see, sir,” she pursued, assuming a sweetish air that was even more

repulsive to behold than her fierce mien, “I am willing that the child

should play; I do not oppose it, but it is good for once, because you

are generous. You see, she has nothing; she must needs work.”

“Then this child is not yours?” demanded the man.

“Oh! mon Dieu! no, sir! she is a little beggar whom we have taken in

through charity; a sort of imbecile child. She must have water on the

brain; she has a large head, as you see. We do what we can for her, for

we are not rich; we have written in vain to her native place, and have

received no reply these six months. It must be that her mother is

dead.”

“Ah!” said the man, and fell into his reverie once more.

“Her mother didn’t amount to much,” added the Thénardier; “she

abandoned her child.”

During the whole of this conversation Cosette, as though warned by some

instinct that she was under discussion, had not taken her eyes from the

Thénardier’s face; she listened vaguely; she caught a few words here

and there.

Meanwhile, the drinkers, all three-quarters intoxicated, were repeating

their unclean refrain with redoubled gayety; it was a highly spiced and

wanton song, in which the Virgin and the infant Jesus were introduced.

The Thénardier went off to take part in the shouts of laughter.

Cosette, from her post under the table, gazed at the fire, which was

reflected from her fixed eyes. She had begun to rock the sort of baby

which she had made, and, as she rocked it, she sang in a low voice, “My

mother is dead! my mother is dead! my mother is dead!”

On being urged afresh by the hostess, the yellow man, “the

millionaire,” consented at last to take supper.

“What does Monsieur wish?”

“Bread and cheese,” said the man.

“Decidedly, he is a beggar” thought Madame Thénardier.

The drunken men were still singing their song, and the child under the

table was singing hers.

All at once, Cosette paused; she had just turned round and caught sight

of the little Thénardiers’ doll, which they had abandoned for the cat

and had left on the floor a few paces from the kitchen table.

Then she dropped the swaddled sword, which only half met her needs, and

cast her eyes slowly round the room. Madame Thénardier was whispering

to her husband and counting over some money; Ponine and Zelma were

playing with the cat; the travellers were eating or drinking or

singing; not a glance was fixed on her. She had not a moment to lose;

she crept out from under the table on her hands and knees, made sure

once more that no one was watching her; then she slipped quickly up to

the doll and seized it. An instant later she was in her place again,

seated motionless, and only turned so as to cast a shadow on the doll

which she held in her arms. The happiness of playing with a doll was so

rare for her that it contained all the violence of voluptuousness.

No one had seen her, except the traveller, who was slowly devouring his

meagre supper.

This joy lasted about a quarter of an hour.

But with all the precautions that Cosette had taken she did not

perceive that one of the doll’s legs stuck out and that the fire on the

hearth lighted it up very vividly. That pink and shining foot,

projecting from the shadow, suddenly struck the eye of Azelma, who said

to Éponine, “Look! sister.”

The two little girls paused in stupefaction; Cosette had dared to take

their doll!

Éponine rose, and, without releasing the cat, she ran to her mother,

and began to tug at her skirt.

“Let me alone!” said her mother; “what do you want?”

“Mother,” said the child, “look there!”

And she pointed to Cosette.

Cosette, absorbed in the ecstasies of possession, no longer saw or

heard anything.

Madame Thénardier’s countenance assumed that peculiar expression which

is composed of the terrible mingled with the trifles of life, and which

has caused this style of woman to be named \_Megaeras\_.

On this occasion, wounded pride exasperated her wrath still further.

Cosette had overstepped all bounds; Cosette had laid violent hands on

the doll belonging to “these young ladies.” A czarina who should see a

muzhik trying on her imperial son’s blue ribbon would wear no other

face.

She shrieked in a voice rendered hoarse with indignation:—

“Cosette!”

Cosette started as though the earth had trembled beneath her; she

turned round.

“Cosette!” repeated the Thénardier.

Cosette took the doll and laid it gently on the floor with a sort of

veneration, mingled with despair; then, without taking her eyes from

it, she clasped her hands, and, what is terrible to relate of a child

of that age, she wrung them; then—not one of the emotions of the day,

neither the trip to the forest, nor the weight of the bucket of water,

nor the loss of the money, nor the sight of the whip, nor even the sad

words which she had heard Madame Thénardier utter had been able to

wring this from her—she wept; she burst out sobbing.

Meanwhile, the traveller had risen to his feet.

“What is the matter?” he said to the Thénardier.

“Don’t you see?” said the Thénardier, pointing to the \_corpus delicti\_

which lay at Cosette’s feet.

“Well, what of it?” resumed the man.

“That beggar,” replied the Thénardier, “has permitted herself to touch

the children’s doll!”

“All this noise for that!” said the man; “well, what if she did play

with that doll?”

“She touched it with her dirty hands!” pursued the Thénardier, “with

her frightful hands!”

Here Cosette redoubled her sobs.

“Will you stop your noise?” screamed the Thénardier.

The man went straight to the street door, opened it, and stepped out.

As soon as he had gone, the Thénardier profited by his absence to give

Cosette a hearty kick under the table, which made the child utter loud

cries.

The door opened again, the man reappeared; he carried in both hands the

fabulous doll which we have mentioned, and which all the village brats

had been staring at ever since the morning, and he set it upright in

front of Cosette, saying:—

“Here; this is for you.”

It must be supposed that in the course of the hour and more which he

had spent there he had taken confused notice through his reverie of

that toy shop, lighted up by fire-pots and candles so splendidly that

it was visible like an illumination through the window of the

drinking-shop.

Cosette raised her eyes; she gazed at the man approaching her with that

doll as she might have gazed at the sun; she heard the unprecedented

words, “It is for you”; she stared at him; she stared at the doll; then

she slowly retreated, and hid herself at the extreme end, under the

table in a corner of the wall.

She no longer cried; she no longer wept; she had the appearance of no

longer daring to breathe.

The Thénardier, Éponine, and Azelma were like statues also; the very

drinkers had paused; a solemn silence reigned through the whole room.

Madame Thénardier, petrified and mute, recommenced her conjectures:

“Who is that old fellow? Is he a poor man? Is he a millionaire? Perhaps

he is both; that is to say, a thief.”

The face of the male Thénardier presented that expressive fold which

accentuates the human countenance whenever the dominant instinct

appears there in all its bestial force. The tavern-keeper stared

alternately at the doll and at the traveller; he seemed to be scenting

out the man, as he would have scented out a bag of money. This did not

last longer than the space of a flash of lightning. He stepped up to

his wife and said to her in a low voice:—

“That machine costs at least thirty francs. No nonsense. Down on your

belly before that man!”

Gross natures have this in common with \_naïve\_ natures, that they

possess no transition state.

“Well, Cosette,” said the Thénardier, in a voice that strove to be

sweet, and which was composed of the bitter honey of malicious women,

“aren’t you going to take your doll?”

Cosette ventured to emerge from her hole.

“The gentleman has given you a doll, my little Cosette,” said

Thénardier, with a caressing air. “Take it; it is yours.”

Cosette gazed at the marvellous doll in a sort of terror. Her face was

still flooded with tears, but her eyes began to fill, like the sky at

daybreak, with strange beams of joy. What she felt at that moment was a

little like what she would have felt if she had been abruptly told,

“Little one, you are the Queen of France.”

It seemed to her that if she touched that doll, lightning would dart

from it.

This was true, up to a certain point, for she said to herself that the

Thénardier would scold and beat her.

Nevertheless, the attraction carried the day. She ended by drawing near

and murmuring timidly as she turned towards Madame Thénardier:—

“May I, Madame?”

No words can render that air, at once despairing, terrified, and

ecstatic.

“Pardi!” cried the Thénardier, “it is yours. The gentleman has given it

to you.”

“Truly, sir?” said Cosette. “Is it true? Is the ‘lady’ mine?”

The stranger’s eyes seemed to be full of tears. He appeared to have

reached that point of emotion where a man does not speak for fear lest

he should weep. He nodded to Cosette, and placed the “lady’s” hand in

her tiny hand.

Cosette hastily withdrew her hand, as though that of the “lady”

scorched her, and began to stare at the floor. We are forced to add

that at that moment she stuck out her tongue immoderately. All at once

she wheeled round and seized the doll in a transport.

“I shall call her Catherine,” she said.

It was an odd moment when Cosette’s rags met and clasped the ribbons

and fresh pink muslins of the doll.

“Madame,” she resumed, “may I put her on a chair?”

“Yes, my child,” replied the Thénardier.

It was now the turn of Éponine and Azelma to gaze at Cosette with envy.

Cosette placed Catherine on a chair, then seated herself on the floor

in front of her, and remained motionless, without uttering a word, in

an attitude of contemplation.

“Play, Cosette,” said the stranger.

“Oh! I am playing,” returned the child.

This stranger, this unknown individual, who had the air of a visit

which Providence was making on Cosette, was the person whom the

Thénardier hated worse than any one in the world at that moment.

However, it was necessary to control herself. Habituated as she was to

dissimulation through endeavoring to copy her husband in all his

actions, these emotions were more than she could endure. She made haste

to send her daughters to bed, then she asked the man’s \_permission\_ to

send Cosette off also; “for she has worked hard all day,” she added

with a maternal air. Cosette went off to bed, carrying Catherine in her

arms.

From time to time the Thénardier went to the other end of the room

where her husband was, to \_relieve her soul\_, as she said. She

exchanged with her husband words which were all the more furious

because she dared not utter them aloud.

“Old beast! What has he got in his belly, to come and upset us in this

manner! To want that little monster to play! to give away forty-franc

dolls to a jade that I would sell for forty sous, so I would! A little

more and he will be saying \_Your Majesty\_ to her, as though to the

Duchesse de Berry! Is there any sense in it? Is he mad, then, that

mysterious old fellow?”

“Why! it is perfectly simple,” replied Thénardier, “if that amuses him!

It amuses you to have the little one work; it amuses him to have her

play. He’s all right. A traveller can do what he pleases when he pays

for it. If the old fellow is a philanthropist, what is that to you? If

he is an imbecile, it does not concern you. What are you worrying for,

so long as he has money?”

The language of a master, and the reasoning of an innkeeper, neither of

which admitted of any reply.

The man had placed his elbows on the table, and resumed his thoughtful

attitude. All the other travellers, both pedlers and carters, had

withdrawn a little, and had ceased singing. They were staring at him

from a distance, with a sort of respectful awe. This poorly dressed

man, who drew “hind-wheels” from his pocket with so much ease, and who

lavished gigantic dolls on dirty little brats in wooden shoes, was

certainly a magnificent fellow, and one to be feared.

Many hours passed. The midnight mass was over, the chimes had ceased,

the drinkers had taken their departure, the drinking-shop was closed,

the public room was deserted, the fire extinct, the stranger still

remained in the same place and the same attitude. From time to time he

changed the elbow on which he leaned. That was all; but he had not said

a word since Cosette had left the room.

The Thénardiers alone, out of politeness and curiosity, had remained in

the room.

“Is he going to pass the night in that fashion?” grumbled the

Thénardier. When two o’clock in the morning struck, she declared

herself vanquished, and said to her husband, “I’m going to bed. Do as

you like.” Her husband seated himself at a table in the corner, lighted

a candle, and began to read the \_Courrier Français\_.

A good hour passed thus. The worthy inn-keeper had perused the

\_Courrier Français\_ at least three times, from the date of the number

to the printer’s name. The stranger did not stir.

Thénardier fidgeted, coughed, spit, blew his nose, and creaked his

chair. Not a movement on the man’s part. “Is he asleep?” thought

Thénardier. The man was not asleep, but nothing could arouse him.

At last Thénardier took off his cap, stepped gently up to him, and

ventured to say:—

“Is not Monsieur going to his repose?”

\_Not going to bed\_ would have seemed to him excessive and familiar. \_To

repose\_ smacked of luxury and respect. These words possess the

mysterious and admirable property of swelling the bill on the following

day. A chamber where one \_sleeps\_ costs twenty sous; a chamber in which

one \_reposes\_ costs twenty francs.

“Well!” said the stranger, “you are right. Where is your stable?”

“Sir!” exclaimed Thénardier, with a smile, “I will conduct you, sir.”

He took the candle; the man picked up his bundle and cudgel, and

Thénardier conducted him to a chamber on the first floor, which was of

rare splendor, all furnished in mahogany, with a low bedstead,

curtained with red calico.

“What is this?” said the traveller.

“It is really our bridal chamber,” said the tavern-keeper. “My wife and

I occupy another. This is only entered three or four times a year.”

“I should have liked the stable quite as well,” said the man, abruptly.

Thénardier pretended not to hear this unamiable remark.

He lighted two perfectly fresh wax candles which figured on the

chimney-piece. A very good fire was flickering on the hearth.

On the chimney-piece, under a glass globe, stood a woman’s head-dress

in silver wire and orange flowers.

“And what is this?” resumed the stranger.

“That, sir,” said Thénardier, “is my wife’s wedding bonnet.”

The traveller surveyed the object with a glance which seemed to say,

“There really was a time, then, when that monster was a maiden?”

Thénardier lied, however. When he had leased this paltry building for

the purpose of converting it into a tavern, he had found this chamber

decorated in just this manner, and had purchased the furniture and

obtained the orange flowers at second hand, with the idea that this

would cast a graceful shadow on “his spouse,” and would result in what

the English call respectability for his house.

When the traveller turned round, the host had disappeared. Thénardier

had withdrawn discreetly, without venturing to wish him a good night,

as he did not wish to treat with disrespectful cordiality a man whom he

proposed to fleece royally the following morning.

The inn-keeper retired to his room. His wife was in bed, but she was

not asleep. When she heard her husband’s step she turned over and said

to him:—

“Do you know, I’m going to turn Cosette out of doors to-morrow.”

Thénardier replied coldly:—

“How you do go on!”

They exchanged no further words, and a few moments later their candle

was extinguished.

As for the traveller, he had deposited his cudgel and his bundle in a

corner. The landlord once gone, he threw himself into an armchair and

remained for some time buried in thought. Then he removed his shoes,

took one of the two candles, blew out the other, opened the door, and

quitted the room, gazing about him like a person who is in search of

something. He traversed a corridor and came upon a staircase. There he

heard a very faint and gentle sound like the breathing of a child. He

followed this sound, and came to a sort of triangular recess built

under the staircase, or rather formed by the staircase itself. This

recess was nothing else than the space under the steps. There, in the

midst of all sorts of old papers and potsherds, among dust and spiders’

webs, was a bed—if one can call by the name of bed a straw pallet so

full of holes as to display the straw, and a coverlet so tattered as to

show the pallet. No sheets. This was placed on the floor.

In this bed Cosette was sleeping.

The man approached and gazed down upon her.

Cosette was in a profound sleep; she was fully dressed. In the winter

she did not undress, in order that she might not be so cold.

Against her breast was pressed the doll, whose large eyes, wide open,

glittered in the dark. From time to time she gave vent to a deep sigh

as though she were on the point of waking, and she strained the doll

almost convulsively in her arms. Beside her bed there was only one of

her wooden shoes.

A door which stood open near Cosette’s pallet permitted a view of a

rather large, dark room. The stranger stepped into it. At the further

extremity, through a glass door, he saw two small, very white beds.

They belonged to Éponine and Azelma. Behind these beds, and half

hidden, stood an uncurtained wicker cradle, in which the little boy who

had cried all the evening lay asleep.

The stranger conjectured that this chamber connected with that of the

Thénardier pair. He was on the point of retreating when his eye fell

upon the fireplace—one of those vast tavern chimneys where there is

always so little fire when there is any fire at all, and which are so

cold to look at. There was no fire in this one, there was not even

ashes; but there was something which attracted the stranger’s gaze,

nevertheless. It was two tiny children’s shoes, coquettish in shape and

unequal in size. The traveller recalled the graceful and immemorial

custom in accordance with which children place their shoes in the

chimney on Christmas eve, there to await in the darkness some sparkling

gift from their good fairy. Éponine and Azelma had taken care not to

omit this, and each of them had set one of her shoes on the hearth.

The traveller bent over them.

The fairy, that is to say, their mother, had already paid her visit,

and in each he saw a brand-new and shining ten-sou piece.

The man straightened himself up, and was on the point of withdrawing,

when far in, in the darkest corner of the hearth, he caught sight of

another object. He looked at it, and recognized a wooden shoe, a

frightful shoe of the coarsest description, half dilapidated and all

covered with ashes and dried mud. It was Cosette’s sabot. Cosette, with

that touching trust of childhood, which can always be deceived yet

never discouraged, had placed her shoe on the hearth-stone also.

Hope in a child who has never known anything but despair is a sweet and

touching thing.

There was nothing in this wooden shoe.

The stranger fumbled in his waistcoat, bent over and placed a louis

d’or in Cosette’s shoe.

Then he regained his own chamber with the stealthy tread of a wolf.

CHAPTER IX— THÉNARDIER AND HIS MANŒUVRES

On the following morning, two hours at least before day-break,

Thénardier, seated beside a candle in the public room of the tavern,

pen in hand, was making out the bill for the traveller with the yellow

coat.

His wife, standing beside him, and half bent over him, was following

him with her eyes. They exchanged not a word. On the one hand, there

was profound meditation, on the other, the religious admiration with

which one watches the birth and development of a marvel of the human

mind. A noise was audible in the house; it was the Lark sweeping the

stairs.

After the lapse of a good quarter of an hour, and some erasures,

Thénardier produced the following masterpiece:—

BILL OF THE GENTLEMAN IN No. 1.

Supper . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 3 francs.

Chamber . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 10 ”

Candle . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 5 ”

Fire . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 4 ”

Service . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 1 ”

———

Total . . . . . . 23 francs.

Service was written \_servisse\_.

“Twenty-three francs!” cried the woman, with an enthusiasm which was

mingled with some hesitation.

Like all great artists, Thénardier was dissatisfied.

“Peuh!” he exclaimed.

It was the accent of Castlereagh auditing France’s bill at the Congress

of Vienna.

“Monsieur Thénardier, you are right; he certainly owes that,” murmured

the wife, who was thinking of the doll bestowed on Cosette in the

presence of her daughters. “It is just, but it is too much. He will not

pay it.”

Thénardier laughed coldly, as usual, and said:—

“He will pay.”

This laugh was the supreme assertion of certainty and authority. That

which was asserted in this manner must needs be so. His wife did not

insist.

She set about arranging the table; her husband paced the room. A moment

later he added:—

“I owe full fifteen hundred francs!”

He went and seated himself in the chimney-corner, meditating, with his

feet among the warm ashes.

“Ah! by the way,” resumed his wife, “you don’t forget that I’m going to

turn Cosette out of doors to-day? The monster! She breaks my heart with

that doll of hers! I’d rather marry Louis XVIII. than keep her another

day in the house!”

Thénardier lighted his pipe, and replied between two puffs:—

“You will hand that bill to the man.”

Then he went out.

Hardly had he left the room when the traveller entered.

Thénardier instantly reappeared behind him and remained motionless in

the half-open door, visible only to his wife.

The yellow man carried his bundle and his cudgel in his hand.

“Up so early?” said Madame Thénardier; “is Monsieur leaving us

already?”

As she spoke thus, she was twisting the bill about in her hands with an

embarrassed air, and making creases in it with her nails. Her hard face

presented a shade which was not habitual with it,—timidity and

scruples.

To present such a bill to a man who had so completely the air “of a

poor wretch” seemed difficult to her.

The traveller appeared to be preoccupied and absent-minded. He

replied:—

“Yes, Madame, I am going.”

“So Monsieur has no business in Montfermeil?”

“No, I was passing through. That is all. What do I owe you, Madame,” he

added.

The Thénardier silently handed him the folded bill.

The man unfolded the paper and glanced at it; but his thoughts were

evidently elsewhere.

“Madame,” he resumed, “is business good here in Montfermeil?”

“So so, Monsieur,” replied the Thénardier, stupefied at not witnessing

another sort of explosion.

She continued, in a dreary and lamentable tone:—

“Oh! Monsieur, times are so hard! and then, we have so few bourgeois in

the neighborhood! All the people are poor, you see. If we had not, now

and then, some rich and generous travellers like Monsieur, we should

not get along at all. We have so many expenses. Just see, that child is

costing us our very eyes.”

“What child?”

“Why, the little one, you know! Cosette—the Lark, as she is called

hereabouts!”

“Ah!” said the man.

She went on:—

“How stupid these peasants are with their nicknames! She has more the

air of a bat than of a lark. You see, sir, we do not ask charity, and

we cannot bestow it. We earn nothing and we have to pay out a great

deal. The license, the imposts, the door and window tax, the

hundredths! Monsieur is aware that the government demands a terrible

deal of money. And then, I have my daughters. I have no need to bring

up other people’s children.”

The man resumed, in that voice which he strove to render indifferent,

and in which there lingered a tremor:—

“What if one were to rid you of her?”

“Who? Cosette?”

“Yes.”

The landlady’s red and violent face brightened up hideously.

“Ah! sir, my dear sir, take her, keep her, lead her off, carry her

away, sugar her, stuff her with truffles, drink her, eat her, and the

blessings of the good holy Virgin and of all the saints of paradise be

upon you!”

“Agreed.”

“Really! You will take her away?”

“I will take her away.”

“Immediately?”

“Immediately. Call the child.”

“Cosette!” screamed the Thénardier.

“In the meantime,” pursued the man, “I will pay you what I owe you. How

much is it?”

He cast a glance on the bill, and could not restrain a start of

surprise:—

“Twenty-three francs!”

He looked at the landlady, and repeated:—

“Twenty-three francs?”

There was in the enunciation of these words, thus repeated, an accent

between an exclamation and an interrogation point.

The Thénardier had had time to prepare herself for the shock. She

replied, with assurance:—

“Good gracious, yes, sir, it is twenty-three francs.”

The stranger laid five five-franc pieces on the table.

“Go and get the child,” said he.

At that moment Thénardier advanced to the middle of the room, and

said:—

“Monsieur owes twenty-six sous.”

“Twenty-six sous!” exclaimed his wife.

“Twenty sous for the chamber,” resumed Thénardier, coldly, “and six

sous for his supper. As for the child, I must discuss that matter a

little with the gentleman. Leave us, wife.”

Madame Thénardier was dazzled as with the shock caused by unexpected

lightning flashes of talent. She was conscious that a great actor was

making his entrance on the stage, uttered not a word in reply, and left

the room.

As soon as they were alone, Thénardier offered the traveller a chair.

The traveller seated himself; Thénardier remained standing, and his

face assumed a singular expression of good-fellowship and simplicity.

“Sir,” said he, “what I have to say to you is this, that I adore that

child.”

The stranger gazed intently at him.

“What child?”

Thénardier continued:—

“How strange it is, one grows attached. What money is that? Take back

your hundred-sou piece. I adore the child.”

“Whom do you mean?” demanded the stranger.

“Eh! our little Cosette! Are you not intending to take her away from

us? Well, I speak frankly; as true as you are an honest man, I will not

consent to it. I shall miss that child. I saw her first when she was a

tiny thing. It is true that she costs us money; it is true that she has

her faults; it is true that we are not rich; it is true that I have

paid out over four hundred francs for drugs for just one of her

illnesses! But one must do something for the good God’s sake. She has

neither father nor mother. I have brought her up. I have bread enough

for her and for myself. In truth, I think a great deal of that child.

You understand, one conceives an affection for a person; I am a good

sort of a beast, I am; I do not reason; I love that little girl; my

wife is quick-tempered, but she loves her also. You see, she is just

the same as our own child. I want to keep her to babble about the

house.”

The stranger kept his eye intently fixed on Thénardier. The latter

continued:—

“Excuse me, sir, but one does not give away one’s child to a passer-by,

like that. I am right, am I not? Still, I don’t say—you are rich; you

have the air of a very good man,—if it were for her happiness. But one

must find out that. You understand: suppose that I were to let her go

and to sacrifice myself, I should like to know what becomes of her; I

should not wish to lose sight of her; I should like to know with whom

she is living, so that I could go to see her from time to time; so that

she may know that her good foster-father is alive, that he is watching

over her. In short, there are things which are not possible. I do not

even know your name. If you were to take her away, I should say: ‘Well,

and the Lark, what has become of her?’ One must, at least, see some

petty scrap of paper, some trifle in the way of a passport, you know!”

The stranger, still surveying him with that gaze which penetrates, as

the saying goes, to the very depths of the conscience, replied in a

grave, firm voice:—

“Monsieur Thénardier, one does not require a passport to travel five

leagues from Paris. If I take Cosette away, I shall take her away, and

that is the end of the matter. You will not know my name, you will not

know my residence, you will not know where she is; and my intention is

that she shall never set eyes on you again so long as she lives. I

break the thread which binds her foot, and she departs. Does that suit

you? Yes or no?”

Since geniuses, like demons, recognize the presence of a superior God

by certain signs, Thénardier comprehended that he had to deal with a

very strong person. It was like an intuition; he comprehended it with

his clear and sagacious promptitude. While drinking with the carters,

smoking, and singing coarse songs on the preceding evening, he had

devoted the whole of the time to observing the stranger, watching him

like a cat, and studying him like a mathematician. He had watched him,

both on his own account, for the pleasure of the thing, and through

instinct, and had spied upon him as though he had been paid for so

doing. Not a movement, not a gesture, on the part of the man in the

yellow great-coat had escaped him. Even before the stranger had so

clearly manifested his interest in Cosette, Thénardier had divined his

purpose. He had caught the old man’s deep glances returning constantly

to the child. Who was this man? Why this interest? Why this hideous

costume, when he had so much money in his purse? Questions which he put

to himself without being able to solve them, and which irritated him.

He had pondered it all night long. He could not be Cosette’s father.

Was he her grandfather? Then why not make himself known at once? When

one has a right, one asserts it. This man evidently had no right over

Cosette. What was it, then? Thénardier lost himself in conjectures. He

caught glimpses of everything, but he saw nothing. Be that as it may,

on entering into conversation with the man, sure that there was some

secret in the case, that the latter had some interest in remaining in

the shadow, he felt himself strong; when he perceived from the

stranger’s clear and firm retort, that this mysterious personage was

mysterious in so simple a way, he became conscious that he was weak. He

had expected nothing of the sort. His conjectures were put to the rout.

He rallied his ideas. He weighed everything in the space of a second.

Thénardier was one of those men who take in a situation at a glance. He

decided that the moment had arrived for proceeding straightforward, and

quickly at that. He did as great leaders do at the decisive moment,

which they know that they alone recognize; he abruptly unmasked his

batteries.

“Sir,” said he, “I am in need of fifteen hundred francs.”

The stranger took from his side pocket an old pocketbook of black

leather, opened it, drew out three bank-bills, which he laid on the

table. Then he placed his large thumb on the notes and said to the

inn-keeper:—

“Go and fetch Cosette.”

While this was taking place, what had Cosette been doing?

On waking up, Cosette had run to get her shoe. In it she had found the

gold piece. It was not a Napoleon; it was one of those perfectly new

twenty-franc pieces of the Restoration, on whose effigy the little

Prussian queue had replaced the laurel wreath. Cosette was dazzled. Her

destiny began to intoxicate her. She did not know what a gold piece

was; she had never seen one; she hid it quickly in her pocket, as

though she had stolen it. Still, she felt that it really was hers; she

guessed whence her gift had come, but the joy which she experienced was

full of fear. She was happy; above all she was stupefied. Such

magnificent and beautiful things did not appear real. The doll

frightened her, the gold piece frightened her. She trembled vaguely in

the presence of this magnificence. The stranger alone did not frighten

her. On the contrary, he reassured her. Ever since the preceding

evening, amid all her amazement, even in her sleep, she had been

thinking in her little childish mind of that man who seemed to be so

poor and so sad, and who was so rich and so kind. Everything had

changed for her since she had met that good man in the forest. Cosette,

less happy than the most insignificant swallow of heaven, had never

known what it was to take refuge under a mother’s shadow and under a

wing. For the last five years, that is to say, as far back as her

memory ran, the poor child had shivered and trembled. She had always

been exposed completely naked to the sharp wind of adversity; now it

seemed to her she was clothed. Formerly her soul had seemed cold, now

it was warm. Cosette was no longer afraid of the Thénardier. She was no

longer alone; there was some one there.

She hastily set about her regular morning duties. That louis, which she

had about her, in the very apron pocket whence the fifteen-sou piece

had fallen on the night before, distracted her thoughts. She dared not

touch it, but she spent five minutes in gazing at it, with her tongue

hanging out, if the truth must be told. As she swept the staircase, she

paused, remained standing there motionless, forgetful of her broom and

of the entire universe, occupied in gazing at that star which was

blazing at the bottom of her pocket.

It was during one of these periods of contemplation that the Thénardier

joined her. She had gone in search of Cosette at her husband’s orders.

What was quite unprecedented, she neither struck her nor said an

insulting word to her.

“Cosette,” she said, almost gently, “come immediately.”

An instant later Cosette entered the public room.

The stranger took up the bundle which he had brought and untied it.

This bundle contained a little woollen gown, an apron, a fustian

bodice, a kerchief, a petticoat, woollen stockings, shoes—a complete

outfit for a girl of seven years. All was black.

“My child,” said the man, “take these, and go and dress yourself

quickly.”

Daylight was appearing when those of the inhabitants of Montfermeil who

had begun to open their doors beheld a poorly clad old man leading a

little girl dressed in mourning, and carrying a pink doll in her arms,

pass along the road to Paris. They were going in the direction of

Livry.

It was our man and Cosette.

No one knew the man; as Cosette was no longer in rags, many did not

recognize her. Cosette was going away. With whom? She did not know.

Whither? She knew not. All that she understood was that she was leaving

the Thénardier tavern behind her. No one had thought of bidding her

farewell, nor had she thought of taking leave of any one. She was

leaving that hated and hating house.

Poor, gentle creature, whose heart had been repressed up to that hour!

Cosette walked along gravely, with her large eyes wide open, and gazing

at the sky. She had put her louis in the pocket of her new apron. From

time to time, she bent down and glanced at it; then she looked at the

good man. She felt something as though she were beside the good God.

CHAPTER X—HE WHO SEEKS TO BETTER HIMSELF MAY RENDER HIS SITUATION WORSE

Madame Thénardier had allowed her husband to have his own way, as was

her wont. She had expected great results. When the man and Cosette had

taken their departure, Thénardier allowed a full quarter of an hour to

elapse; then he took her aside and showed her the fifteen hundred

francs.

“Is that all?” said she.

It was the first time since they had set up housekeeping that she had

dared to criticise one of the master’s acts.

The blow told.

“You are right, in sooth,” said he; “I am a fool. Give me my hat.”

He folded up the three bank-bills, thrust them into his pocket, and ran

out in all haste; but he made a mistake and turned to the right first.

Some neighbors, of whom he made inquiries, put him on the track again;

the Lark and the man had been seen going in the direction of Livry. He

followed these hints, walking with great strides, and talking to

himself the while:—

“That man is evidently a million dressed in yellow, and I am an animal.

First he gave twenty sous, then five francs, then fifty francs, then

fifteen hundred francs, all with equal readiness. He would have given

fifteen thousand francs. But I shall overtake him.”

And then, that bundle of clothes prepared beforehand for the child; all

that was singular; many mysteries lay concealed under it. One does not

let mysteries out of one’s hand when one has once grasped them. The

secrets of the wealthy are sponges of gold; one must know how to

subject them to pressure. All these thoughts whirled through his brain.

“I am an animal,” said he.

When one leaves Montfermeil and reaches the turn which the road takes

that runs to Livry, it can be seen stretching out before one to a great

distance across the plateau. On arriving there, he calculated that he

ought to be able to see the old man and the child. He looked as far as

his vision reached, and saw nothing. He made fresh inquiries, but he

had wasted time. Some passers-by informed him that the man and child of

whom he was in search had gone towards the forest in the direction of

Gagny. He hastened in that direction.

They were far in advance of him; but a child walks slowly, and he

walked fast; and then, he was well acquainted with the country.

All at once he paused and dealt himself a blow on his forehead like a

man who has forgotten some essential point and who is ready to retrace

his steps.

“I ought to have taken my gun,” said he to himself.

Thénardier was one of those double natures which sometimes pass through

our midst without our being aware of the fact, and who disappear

without our finding them out, because destiny has only exhibited one

side of them. It is the fate of many men to live thus half submerged.

In a calm and even situation, Thénardier possessed all that is required

to make—we will not say to be—what people have agreed to call an honest

trader, a good bourgeois. At the same time certain circumstances being

given, certain shocks arriving to bring his under-nature to the

surface, he had all the requisites for a blackguard. He was a

shopkeeper in whom there was some taint of the monster. Satan must have

occasionally crouched down in some corner of the hovel in which

Thénardier dwelt, and have fallen a-dreaming in the presence of this

hideous masterpiece.

After a momentary hesitation:—

“Bah!” he thought; “they will have time to make their escape.”

And he pursued his road, walking rapidly straight ahead, and with

almost an air of certainty, with the sagacity of a fox scenting a covey

of partridges.

In truth, when he had passed the ponds and had traversed in an oblique

direction the large clearing which lies on the right of the Avenue de

Bellevue, and reached that turf alley which nearly makes the circuit of

the hill, and covers the arch of the ancient aqueduct of the Abbey of

Chelles, he caught sight, over the top of the brushwood, of the hat on

which he had already erected so many conjectures; it was that man’s

hat. The brushwood was not high. Thénardier recognized the fact that

the man and Cosette were sitting there. The child could not be seen on

account of her small size, but the head of her doll was visible.

Thénardier was not mistaken. The man was sitting there, and letting

Cosette get somewhat rested. The inn-keeper walked round the brushwood

and presented himself abruptly to the eyes of those whom he was in

search of.

“Pardon, excuse me, sir,” he said, quite breathless, “but here are your

fifteen hundred francs.”

So saying, he handed the stranger the three bank-bills.

The man raised his eyes.

“What is the meaning of this?”

Thénardier replied respectfully:—

“It means, sir, that I shall take back Cosette.”

Cosette shuddered, and pressed close to the old man.

He replied, gazing to the very bottom of Thénardier’s eyes the while,

and enunciating every syllable distinctly:—

“You are go-ing to take back Co-sette?”

“Yes, sir, I am. I will tell you; I have considered the matter. In

fact, I have not the right to give her to you. I am an honest man, you

see; this child does not belong to me; she belongs to her mother. It

was her mother who confided her to me; I can only resign her to her

mother. You will say to me, ‘But her mother is dead.’ Good; in that

case I can only give the child up to the person who shall bring me a

writing, signed by her mother, to the effect that I am to hand the

child over to the person therein mentioned; that is clear.”

The man, without making any reply, fumbled in his pocket, and

Thénardier beheld the pocket-book of bank-bills make its appearance

once more.

The tavern-keeper shivered with joy.

“Good!” thought he; “let us hold firm; he is going to bribe me!”

Before opening the pocket-book, the traveller cast a glance about him:

the spot was absolutely deserted; there was not a soul either in the

woods or in the valley. The man opened his pocket-book once more and

drew from it, not the handful of bills which Thénardier expected, but a

simple little paper, which he unfolded and presented fully open to the

inn-keeper, saying:—

“You are right; read!”

Thénardier took the paper and read:—

“M. SUR M., March 25, 1823.

“MONSIEUR THÉNARDIER:—

You will deliver Cosette to this person.

You will be paid for all the little things.

I have the honor to salute you with respect,

FANTINE.”

“You know that signature?” resumed the man.

It certainly was Fantine’s signature; Thénardier recognized it.

There was no reply to make; he experienced two violent vexations, the

vexation of renouncing the bribery which he had hoped for, and the

vexation of being beaten; the man added:—

“You may keep this paper as your receipt.”

Thénardier retreated in tolerably good order.

“This signature is fairly well imitated,” he growled between his teeth;

“however, let it go!”

Then he essayed a desperate effort.

“It is well, sir,” he said, “since you are the person, but I must be

paid for all those little things. A great deal is owing to me.”

The man rose to his feet, filliping the dust from his threadbare

sleeve:—

“Monsieur Thénardier, in January last, the mother reckoned that she

owed you one hundred and twenty francs. In February, you sent her a

bill of five hundred francs; you received three hundred francs at the

end of February, and three hundred francs at the beginning of March.

Since then nine months have elapsed, at fifteen francs a month, the

price agreed upon, which makes one hundred and thirty-five francs. You

had received one hundred francs too much; that makes thirty-five still

owing you. I have just given you fifteen hundred francs.”

Thénardier’s sensations were those of the wolf at the moment when he

feels himself nipped and seized by the steel jaw of the trap.

“Who is this devil of a man?” he thought.

He did what the wolf does: he shook himself. Audacity had succeeded

with him once.

“Monsieur-I-don’t-know-your-name,” he said resolutely, and this time

casting aside all respectful ceremony, “I shall take back Cosette if

you do not give me a thousand crowns.”

The stranger said tranquilly:—

“Come, Cosette.”

He took Cosette by his left hand, and with his right he picked up his

cudgel, which was lying on the ground.

Thénardier noted the enormous size of the cudgel and the solitude of

the spot.

The man plunged into the forest with the child, leaving the inn-keeper

motionless and speechless.

While they were walking away, Thénardier scrutinized his huge

shoulders, which were a little rounded, and his great fists.

Then, bringing his eyes back to his own person, they fell upon his

feeble arms and his thin hands. “I really must have been exceedingly

stupid not to have thought to bring my gun,” he said to himself, “since

I was going hunting!”

However, the inn-keeper did not give up.

“I want to know where he is going,” said he, and he set out to follow

them at a distance. Two things were left on his hands, an irony in the

shape of the paper signed \_Fantine\_, and a consolation, the fifteen

hundred francs.

The man led Cosette off in the direction of Livry and Bondy. He walked

slowly, with drooping head, in an attitude of reflection and sadness.

The winter had thinned out the forest, so that Thénardier did not lose

them from sight, although he kept at a good distance. The man turned

round from time to time, and looked to see if he was being followed.

All at once he caught sight of Thénardier. He plunged suddenly into the

brushwood with Cosette, where they could both hide themselves. “The

deuce!” said Thénardier, and he redoubled his pace.

The thickness of the undergrowth forced him to draw nearer to them.

When the man had reached the densest part of the thicket, he wheeled

round. It was in vain that Thénardier sought to conceal himself in the

branches; he could not prevent the man seeing him. The man cast upon

him an uneasy glance, then elevated his head and continued his course.

The inn-keeper set out again in pursuit. Thus they continued for two or

three hundred paces. All at once the man turned round once more; he saw

the inn-keeper. This time he gazed at him with so sombre an air that

Thénardier decided that it was “useless” to proceed further. Thénardier

retraced his steps.

CHAPTER XI—NUMBER 9,430 REAPPEARS, AND COSETTE WINS IT IN THE LOTTERY

Jean Valjean was not dead.

When he fell into the sea, or rather, when he threw himself into it, he

was not ironed, as we have seen. He swam under water until he reached a

vessel at anchor, to which a boat was moored. He found means of hiding

himself in this boat until night. At night he swam off again, and

reached the shore a little way from Cape Brun. There, as he did not

lack money, he procured clothing. A small country-house in the

neighborhood of Balaguier was at that time the dressing-room of escaped

convicts,—a lucrative specialty. Then Jean Valjean, like all the sorry

fugitives who are seeking to evade the vigilance of the law and social

fatality, pursued an obscure and undulating itinerary. He found his

first refuge at Pradeaux, near Beausset. Then he directed his course

towards Grand-Villard, near Briançon, in the Hautes-Alpes. It was a

fumbling and uneasy flight,—a mole’s track, whose branchings are

untraceable. Later on, some trace of his passage into Ain, in the

territory of Civrieux, was discovered; in the Pyrenees, at Accons; at

the spot called Grange-de-Doumec, near the market of Chavailles, and in

the environs of Perigueux at Brunies, canton of La Chapelle-Gonaguet.

He reached Paris. We have just seen him at Montfermeil.

His first care on arriving in Paris had been to buy mourning clothes

for a little girl of from seven to eight years of age; then to procure

a lodging. That done, he had betaken himself to Montfermeil. It will be

remembered that already, during his preceding escape, he had made a

mysterious trip thither, or somewhere in that neighborhood, of which

the law had gathered an inkling.

However, he was thought to be dead, and this still further increased

the obscurity which had gathered about him. At Paris, one of the

journals which chronicled the fact fell into his hands. He felt

reassured and almost at peace, as though he had really been dead.

On the evening of the day when Jean Valjean rescued Cosette from the

claws of the Thénardiers, he returned to Paris. He re-entered it at

nightfall, with the child, by way of the Barrier Monceaux. There he

entered a cabriolet, which took him to the esplanade of the

Observatoire. There he got out, paid the coachman, took Cosette by the

hand, and together they directed their steps through the

darkness,—through the deserted streets which adjoin the Ourcine and the

Glacière, towards the Boulevard de l’Hôpital.

The day had been strange and filled with emotions for Cosette. They had

eaten some bread and cheese purchased in isolated taverns, behind

hedges; they had changed carriages frequently; they had travelled short

distances on foot. She made no complaint, but she was weary, and Jean

Valjean perceived it by the way she dragged more and more on his hand

as she walked. He took her on his back. Cosette, without letting go of

Catherine, laid her head on Jean Valjean’s shoulder, and there fell

asleep.

BOOK FOURTH—THE GORBEAU HOVEL

[Illustration: The Gorbeau Hovel]

CHAPTER I—MASTER GORBEAU

Forty years ago, a rambler who had ventured into that unknown country

of the Salpêtrière, and who had mounted to the Barrière d’Italie by way

of the boulevard, reached a point where it might be said that Paris

disappeared. It was no longer solitude, for there were passers-by; it

was not the country, for there were houses and streets; it was not the

city, for the streets had ruts like highways, and the grass grew in

them; it was not a village, the houses were too lofty. What was it,

then? It was an inhabited spot where there was no one; it was a desert

place where there was some one; it was a boulevard of the great city, a

street of Paris; more wild at night than the forest, more gloomy by day

than a cemetery.

It was the old quarter of the Marché-aux-Chevaux.

The rambler, if he risked himself outside the four decrepit walls of

this Marché-aux-Chevaux; if he consented even to pass beyond the Rue du

Petit-Banquier, after leaving on his right a garden protected by high

walls; then a field in which tan-bark mills rose like gigantic beaver

huts; then an enclosure encumbered with timber, with a heap of stumps,

sawdust, and shavings, on which stood a large dog, barking; then a

long, low, utterly dilapidated wall, with a little black door in

mourning, laden with mosses, which were covered with flowers in the

spring; then, in the most deserted spot, a frightful and decrepit

building, on which ran the inscription in large letters: POST NO

BILLS,—this daring rambler would have reached little known latitudes at

the corner of the Rue des Vignes-Saint-Marcel. There, near a factory,

and between two garden walls, there could be seen, at that epoch, a

mean building, which, at the first glance, seemed as small as a

thatched hovel, and which was, in reality, as large as a cathedral. It

presented its side and gable to the public road; hence its apparent

diminutiveness. Nearly the whole of the house was hidden. Only the door

and one window could be seen.

This hovel was only one story high.

The first detail that struck the observer was, that the door could

never have been anything but the door of a hovel, while the window, if

it had been carved out of dressed stone instead of being in rough

masonry, might have been the lattice of a lordly mansion.

The door was nothing but a collection of worm-eaten planks roughly

bound together by cross-beams which resembled roughly hewn logs. It

opened directly on a steep staircase of lofty steps, muddy, chalky,

plaster-stained, dusty steps, of the same width as itself, which could

be seen from the street, running straight up like a ladder and

disappearing in the darkness between two walls. The top of the

shapeless bay into which this door shut was masked by a narrow

scantling in the centre of which a triangular hole had been sawed,

which served both as wicket and air-hole when the door was closed. On

the inside of the door the figures 52 had been traced with a couple of

strokes of a brush dipped in ink, and above the scantling the same hand

had daubed the number 50, so that one hesitated. Where was one? Above

the door it said, “Number 50”; the inside replied, “no, Number 52.” No

one knows what dust-colored figures were suspended like draperies from

the triangular opening.

The window was large, sufficiently elevated, garnished with Venetian

blinds, and with a frame in large square panes; only these large panes

were suffering from various wounds, which were both concealed and

betrayed by an ingenious paper bandage. And the blinds, dislocated and

unpasted, threatened passers-by rather than screened the occupants. The

horizontal slats were missing here and there and had been naïvely

replaced with boards nailed on perpendicularly; so that what began as a

blind ended as a shutter. This door with an unclean, and this window

with an honest though dilapidated air, thus beheld on the same house,

produced the effect of two incomplete beggars walking side by side,

with different miens beneath the same rags, the one having always been

a mendicant, and the other having once been a gentleman.

The staircase led to a very vast edifice which resembled a shed which

had been converted into a house. This edifice had, for its intestinal

tube, a long corridor, on which opened to right and left sorts of

compartments of varied dimensions which were inhabitable under stress

of circumstances, and rather more like stalls than cells. These

chambers received their light from the vague waste grounds in the

neighborhood.

All this was dark, disagreeable, wan, melancholy, sepulchral; traversed

according as the crevices lay in the roof or in the door, by cold rays

or by icy winds. An interesting and picturesque peculiarity of this

sort of dwelling is the enormous size of the spiders.

To the left of the entrance door, on the boulevard side, at about the

height of a man from the ground, a small window which had been walled

up formed a square niche full of stones which the children had thrown

there as they passed by.

A portion of this building has recently been demolished. From what

still remains of it one can form a judgment as to what it was in former

days. As a whole, it was not over a hundred years old. A hundred years

is youth in a church and age in a house. It seems as though man’s

lodging partook of his ephemeral character, and God’s house of his

eternity.

The postmen called the house Number 50-52; but it was known in the

neighborhood as the Gorbeau house.

Let us explain whence this appellation was derived.

Collectors of petty details, who become herbalists of anecdotes, and

prick slippery dates into their memories with a pin, know that there

was in Paris, during the last century, about 1770, two attorneys at the

Châtelet named, one Corbeau (Raven), the other Renard (Fox). The two

names had been forestalled by La Fontaine. The opportunity was too fine

for the lawyers; they made the most of it. A parody was immediately put

in circulation in the galleries of the court-house, in verses that

limped a little:—

Maître Corbeau, sur un dossier perché,

Tenait dans son bec une saisie exécutoire;

Maître Renard, par l’odeur alléché,

Lui fit à peu près cette histoire:

Hé! bonjour. Etc.13

The two honest practitioners, embarrassed by the jests, and finding the

bearing of their heads interfered with by the shouts of laughter which

followed them, resolved to get rid of their names, and hit upon the

expedient of applying to the king.

Their petition was presented to Louis XV. on the same day when the

Papal Nuncio, on the one hand, and the Cardinal de la Roche-Aymon on

the other, both devoutly kneeling, were each engaged in putting on, in

his Majesty’s presence, a slipper on the bare feet of Madame du Barry,

who had just got out of bed. The king, who was laughing, continued to

laugh, passed gayly from the two bishops to the two lawyers, and

bestowed on these limbs of the law their former names, or nearly so. By

the kings command, Maître Corbeau was permitted to add a tail to his

initial letter and to call himself Gorbeau. Maître Renard was less

lucky; all he obtained was leave to place a P in front of his R, and to

call himself Prenard; so that the second name bore almost as much

resemblance as the first.

Now, according to local tradition, this Maître Gorbeau had been the

proprietor of the building numbered 50-52 on the Boulevard de

l’Hôpital. He was even the author of the monumental window.

Hence the edifice bore the name of the Gorbeau house.

Opposite this house, among the trees of the boulevard, rose a great elm

which was three-quarters dead; almost directly facing it opens the Rue

de la Barrière des Gobelins, a street then without houses, unpaved,

planted with unhealthy trees, which was green or muddy according to the

season, and which ended squarely in the exterior wall of Paris. An odor

of copperas issued in puffs from the roofs of the neighboring factory.

The barrier was close at hand. In 1823 the city wall was still in

existence.

This barrier itself evoked gloomy fancies in the mind. It was the road

to Bicêtre. It was through it that, under the Empire and the

Restoration, prisoners condemned to death re-entered Paris on the day

of their execution. It was there, that, about 1829, was committed that

mysterious assassination, called “The assassination of the

Fontainebleau barrier,” whose authors justice was never able to

discover; a melancholy problem which has never been elucidated, a

frightful enigma which has never been unriddled. Take a few steps, and

you come upon that fatal Rue Croulebarbe, where Ulbach stabbed the

goat-girl of Ivry to the sound of thunder, as in the melodramas. A few

paces more, and you arrive at the abominable pollarded elms of the

Barrière Saint-Jacques, that expedient of the philanthropist to conceal

the scaffold, that miserable and shameful Place de Grève of a

shop-keeping and bourgeois society, which recoiled before the death

penalty, neither daring to abolish it with grandeur, nor to uphold it

with authority.

Leaving aside this Place Saint-Jacques, which was, as it were,

predestined, and which has always been horrible, probably the most

mournful spot on that mournful boulevard, seven and thirty years ago,

was the spot which even to-day is so unattractive, where stood the

building Number 50-52.

Bourgeois houses only began to spring up there twenty-five years later.

The place was unpleasant. In addition to the gloomy thoughts which

assailed one there, one was conscious of being between the Salpêtrière,

a glimpse of whose dome could be seen, and Bicêtre, whose outskirts one

was fairly touching; that is to say, between the madness of women and

the madness of men. As far as the eye could see, one could perceive

nothing but the abattoirs, the city wall, and the fronts of a few

factories, resembling barracks or monasteries; everywhere about stood

hovels, rubbish, ancient walls blackened like cerecloths, new white

walls like winding-sheets; everywhere parallel rows of trees, buildings

erected on a line, flat constructions, long, cold rows, and the

melancholy sadness of right angles. Not an unevenness of the ground,

not a caprice in the architecture, not a fold. The \_ensemble\_ was

glacial, regular, hideous. Nothing oppresses the heart like symmetry.

It is because symmetry is ennui, and ennui is at the very foundation of

grief. Despair yawns. Something more terrible than a hell where one

suffers may be imagined, and that is a hell where one is bored. If such

a hell existed, that bit of the Boulevard de l’Hôpital might have

formed the entrance to it.

Nevertheless, at nightfall, at the moment when the daylight is

vanishing, especially in winter, at the hour when the twilight breeze

tears from the elms their last russet leaves, when the darkness is deep

and starless, or when the moon and the wind are making openings in the

clouds and losing themselves in the shadows, this boulevard suddenly

becomes frightful. The black lines sink inwards and are lost in the

shades, like morsels of the infinite. The passer-by cannot refrain from

recalling the innumerable traditions of the place which are connected

with the gibbet. The solitude of this spot, where so many crimes have

been committed, had something terrible about it. One almost had a

presentiment of meeting with traps in that darkness; all the confused

forms of the darkness seemed suspicious, and the long, hollow square,

of which one caught a glimpse between each tree, seemed graves: by day

it was ugly; in the evening melancholy; by night it was sinister.

In summer, at twilight, one saw, here and there, a few old women seated

at the foot of the elm, on benches mouldy with rain. These good old

women were fond of begging.

However, this quarter, which had a superannuated rather than an antique

air, was tending even then to transformation. Even at that time any one

who was desirous of seeing it had to make haste. Each day some detail

of the whole effect was disappearing. For the last twenty years the

station of the Orleans railway has stood beside the old faubourg and

distracted it, as it does to-day. Wherever it is placed on the borders

of a capital, a railway station is the death of a suburb and the birth

of a city. It seems as though, around these great centres of the

movements of a people, the earth, full of germs, trembled and yawned,

to engulf the ancient dwellings of men and to allow new ones to spring

forth, at the rattle of these powerful machines, at the breath of these

monstrous horses of civilization which devour coal and vomit fire. The

old houses crumble and new ones rise.

Since the Orleans railway has invaded the region of the Salpêtrière,

the ancient, narrow streets which adjoin the moats Saint-Victor and the

Jardin des Plantes tremble, as they are violently traversed three or

four times each day by those currents of coach fiacres and omnibuses

which, in a given time, crowd back the houses to the right and the

left; for there are things which are odd when said that are rigorously

exact; and just as it is true to say that in large cities the sun makes

the southern fronts of houses to vegetate and grow, it is certain that

the frequent passage of vehicles enlarges streets. The symptoms of a

new life are evident. In this old provincial quarter, in the wildest

nooks, the pavement shows itself, the sidewalks begin to crawl and to

grow longer, even where there are as yet no pedestrians. One morning,—a

memorable morning in July, 1845,—black pots of bitumen were seen

smoking there; on that day it might be said that civilization had

arrived in the Rue de l’Ourcine, and that Paris had entered the suburb

of Saint-Marceau.

CHAPTER II—A NEST FOR OWL AND A WARBLER

It was in front of this Gorbeau house that Jean Valjean halted. Like

wild birds, he had chosen this desert place to construct his nest.

He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, drew out a sort of a pass-key,

opened the door, entered, closed it again carefully, and ascended the

staircase, still carrying Cosette.

At the top of the stairs he drew from his pocket another key, with

which he opened another door. The chamber which he entered, and which

he closed again instantly, was a kind of moderately spacious attic,

furnished with a mattress laid on the floor, a table, and several

chairs; a stove in which a fire was burning, and whose embers were

visible, stood in one corner. A lantern on the boulevard cast a vague

light into this poor room. At the extreme end there was a dressing-room

with a folding bed; Jean Valjean carried the child to this bed and laid

her down there without waking her.

He struck a match and lighted a candle. All this was prepared

beforehand on the table, and, as he had done on the previous evening,

he began to scrutinize Cosette’s face with a gaze full of ecstasy, in

which the expression of kindness and tenderness almost amounted to

aberration. The little girl, with that tranquil confidence which

belongs only to extreme strength and extreme weakness, had fallen

asleep without knowing with whom she was, and continued to sleep

without knowing where she was.

Jean Valjean bent down and kissed that child’s hand.

Nine months before he had kissed the hand of the mother, who had also

just fallen asleep.

The same sad, piercing, religious sentiment filled his heart.

He knelt beside Cosette’s bed.

lt was broad daylight, and the child still slept. A wan ray of the

December sun penetrated the window of the attic and lay upon the

ceiling in long threads of light and shade. All at once a heavily laden

carrier’s cart, which was passing along the boulevard, shook the frail

bed, like a clap of thunder, and made it quiver from top to bottom.

“Yes, madame!” cried Cosette, waking with a start, “here I am! here I

am!”

And she sprang out of bed, her eyes still half shut with the heaviness

of sleep, extending her arms towards the corner of the wall.

“Ah! mon Dieu, my broom!” said she.

She opened her eyes wide now, and beheld the smiling countenance of

Jean Valjean.

“Ah! so it is true!” said the child. “Good morning, Monsieur.”

Children accept joy and happiness instantly and familiarly, being

themselves by nature joy and happiness.

Cosette caught sight of Catherine at the foot of her bed, and took

possession of her, and, as she played, she put a hundred questions to

Jean Valjean. Where was she? Was Paris very large? Was Madame

Thénardier very far away? Was she to go back? etc., etc. All at once

she exclaimed, “How pretty it is here!”

It was a frightful hole, but she felt free.

“Must I sweep?” she resumed at last.

“Play!” said Jean Valjean.

The day passed thus. Cosette, without troubling herself to understand

anything, was inexpressibly happy with that doll and that kind man.

CHAPTER III—TWO MISFORTUNES MAKE ONE PIECE OF GOOD FORTUNE

On the following morning, at daybreak, Jean Valjean was still by

Cosette’s bedside; he watched there motionless, waiting for her to

wake.

Some new thing had come into his soul.

Jean Valjean had never loved anything; for twenty-five years he had

been alone in the world. He had never been father, lover, husband,

friend. In the prison he had been vicious, gloomy, chaste, ignorant,

and shy. The heart of that ex-convict was full of virginity. His sister

and his sister’s children had left him only a vague and far-off memory

which had finally almost completely vanished; he had made every effort

to find them, and not having been able to find them, he had forgotten

them. Human nature is made thus; the other tender emotions of his

youth, if he had ever had any, had fallen into an abyss.

When he saw Cosette, when he had taken possession of her, carried her

off, and delivered her, he felt his heart moved within him.

All the passion and affection within him awoke, and rushed towards that

child. He approached the bed, where she lay sleeping, and trembled with

joy. He suffered all the pangs of a mother, and he knew not what it

meant; for that great and singular movement of a heart which begins to

love is a very obscure and a very sweet thing.

Poor old man, with a perfectly new heart!

Only, as he was five and fifty, and Cosette eight years of age, all

that might have been love in the whole course of his life flowed

together into a sort of ineffable light.

It was the second white apparition which he had encountered. The Bishop

had caused the dawn of virtue to rise on his horizon; Cosette caused

the dawn of love to rise.

The early days passed in this dazzled state.

Cosette, on her side, had also, unknown to herself, become another

being, poor little thing! She was so little when her mother left her,

that she no longer remembered her. Like all children, who resemble

young shoots of the vine, which cling to everything, she had tried to

love; she had not succeeded. All had repulsed her,—the Thénardiers,

their children, other children. She had loved the dog, and he had died,

after which nothing and nobody would have anything to do with her. It

is a sad thing to say, and we have already intimated it, that, at eight

years of age, her heart was cold. It was not her fault; it was not the

faculty of loving that she lacked; alas! it was the possibility. Thus,

from the very first day, all her sentient and thinking powers loved

this kind man. She felt that which she had never felt before—a

sensation of expansion.

The man no longer produced on her the effect of being old or poor; she

thought Jean Valjean handsome, just as she thought the hovel pretty.

These are the effects of the dawn, of childhood, of joy. The novelty of

the earth and of life counts for something here. Nothing is so charming

as the coloring reflection of happiness on a garret. We all have in our

past a delightful garret.

Nature, a difference of fifty years, had set a profound gulf between

Jean Valjean and Cosette; destiny filled in this gulf. Destiny suddenly

united and wedded with its irresistible power these two uprooted

existences, differing in age, alike in sorrow. One, in fact, completed

the other. Cosette’s instinct sought a father, as Jean Valjean’s

instinct sought a child. To meet was to find each other. At the

mysterious moment when their hands touched, they were welded together.

When these two souls perceived each other, they recognized each other

as necessary to each other, and embraced each other closely.

Taking the words in their most comprehensive and absolute sense, we may

say that, separated from every one by the walls of the tomb, Jean

Valjean was the widower, and Cosette was the orphan: this situation

caused Jean Valjean to become Cosette’s father after a celestial

fashion.

And in truth, the mysterious impression produced on Cosette in the

depths of the forest of Chelles by the hand of Jean Valjean grasping

hers in the dark was not an illusion, but a reality. The entrance of

that man into the destiny of that child had been the advent of God.

Moreover, Jean Valjean had chosen his refuge well. There he seemed

perfectly secure.

The chamber with a dressing-room, which he occupied with Cosette, was

the one whose window opened on the boulevard. This being the only

window in the house, no neighbors’ glances were to be feared from

across the way or at the side.

The ground floor of Number 50-52, a sort of dilapidated penthouse,

served as a wagon-house for market-gardeners, and no communication

existed between it and the first story. It was separated by the

flooring, which had neither traps nor stairs, and which formed the

diaphragm of the building, as it were. The first story contained, as we

have said, numerous chambers and several attics, only one of which was

occupied by the old woman who took charge of Jean Valjean’s

housekeeping; all the rest was uninhabited.

It was this old woman, ornamented with the name of the \_principal

lodger\_, and in reality intrusted with the functions of portress, who

had let him the lodging on Christmas eve. He had represented himself to

her as a gentleman of means who had been ruined by Spanish bonds, who

was coming there to live with his little daughter. He had paid her six

months in advance, and had commissioned the old woman to furnish the

chamber and dressing-room, as we have seen. It was this good woman who

had lighted the fire in the stove, and prepared everything on the

evening of their arrival.

Week followed week; these two beings led a happy life in that hovel.

Cosette laughed, chattered, and sang from daybreak. Children have their

morning song as well as birds.

It sometimes happened that Jean Valjean clasped her tiny red hand, all

cracked with chilblains, and kissed it. The poor child, who was used to

being beaten, did not know the meaning of this, and ran away in

confusion.

At times she became serious and stared at her little black gown.

Cosette was no longer in rags; she was in mourning. She had emerged

from misery, and she was entering into life.

Jean Valjean had undertaken to teach her to read. Sometimes, as he made

the child spell, he remembered that it was with the idea of doing evil

that he had learned to read in prison. This idea had ended in teaching

a child to read. Then the ex-convict smiled with the pensive smile of

the angels.

He felt in it a premeditation from on high, the will of some one who

was not man, and he became absorbed in reverie. Good thoughts have

their abysses as well as evil ones.

To teach Cosette to read, and to let her play, this constituted nearly

the whole of Jean Valjean’s existence. And then he talked of her

mother, and he made her pray.

She called him \_father\_, and knew no other name for him.

He passed hours in watching her dressing and undressing her doll, and

in listening to her prattle. Life, henceforth, appeared to him to be

full of interest; men seemed to him good and just; he no longer

reproached any one in thought; he saw no reason why he should not live

to be a very old man, now that this child loved him. He saw a whole

future stretching out before him, illuminated by Cosette as by a

charming light. The best of us are not exempt from egotistical

thoughts. At times, he reflected with a sort of joy that she would be

ugly.

This is only a personal opinion; but, to utter our whole thought, at

the point where Jean Valjean had arrived when he began to love Cosette,

it is by no means clear to us that he did not need this encouragement

in order that he might persevere in well-doing. He had just viewed the

malice of men and the misery of society under a new aspect—incomplete

aspects, which unfortunately only exhibited one side of the truth, the

fate of woman as summed up in Fantine, and public authority as

personified in Javert. He had returned to prison, this time for having

done right; he had quaffed fresh bitterness; disgust and lassitude were

overpowering him; even the memory of the Bishop probably suffered a

temporary eclipse, though sure to reappear later on luminous and

triumphant; but, after all, that sacred memory was growing dim. Who

knows whether Jean Valjean had not been on the eve of growing

discouraged and of falling once more? He loved and grew strong again.

Alas! he walked with no less indecision than Cosette. He protected her,

and she strengthened him. Thanks to him, she could walk through life;

thanks to her, he could continue in virtue. He was that child’s stay,

and she was his prop. Oh, unfathomable and divine mystery of the

balances of destiny!

CHAPTER IV—THE REMARKS OF THE PRINCIPAL TENANT

Jean Valjean was prudent enough never to go out by day. Every evening,

at twilight, he walked for an hour or two, sometimes alone, often with

Cosette, seeking the most deserted side alleys of the boulevard, and

entering churches at nightfall. He liked to go to Saint-Médard, which

is the nearest church. When he did not take Cosette with him, she

remained with the old woman; but the child’s delight was to go out with

the good man. She preferred an hour with him to all her rapturous

\_tête-à-têtes\_ with Catherine. He held her hand as they walked, and

said sweet things to her.

It turned out that Cosette was a very gay little person.

The old woman attended to the housekeeping and cooking and went to

market.

They lived soberly, always having a little fire, but like people in

very moderate circumstances. Jean Valjean had made no alterations in

the furniture as it was the first day; he had merely had the glass door

leading to Cosette’s dressing-room replaced by a solid door.

He still wore his yellow coat, his black breeches, and his old hat. In

the street, he was taken for a poor man. It sometimes happened that

kind-hearted women turned back to bestow a sou on him. Jean Valjean

accepted the sou with a deep bow. It also happened occasionally that he

encountered some poor wretch asking alms; then he looked behind him to

make sure that no one was observing him, stealthily approached the

unfortunate man, put a piece of money into his hand, often a silver

coin, and walked rapidly away. This had its disadvantages. He began to

be known in the neighborhood under the name of \_the beggar who gives

alms\_.

The old \_principal lodger\_, a cross-looking creature, who was

thoroughly permeated, so far as her neighbors were concerned, with the

inquisitiveness peculiar to envious persons, scrutinized Jean Valjean a

great deal, without his suspecting the fact. She was a little deaf,

which rendered her talkative. There remained to her from her past, two

teeth,—one above, the other below,—which she was continually knocking

against each other. She had questioned Cosette, who had not been able

to tell her anything, since she knew nothing herself except that she

had come from Montfermeil. One morning, this spy saw Jean Valjean, with

an air which struck the old gossip as peculiar, entering one of the

uninhabited compartments of the hovel. She followed him with the step

of an old cat, and was able to observe him without being seen, through

a crack in the door, which was directly opposite him. Jean Valjean had

his back turned towards this door, by way of greater security, no

doubt. The old woman saw him fumble in his pocket and draw thence a

case, scissors, and thread; then he began to rip the lining of one of

the skirts of his coat, and from the opening he took a bit of yellowish

paper, which he unfolded. The old woman recognized, with terror, the

fact that it was a bank-bill for a thousand francs. It was the second

or third only that she had seen in the course of her existence. She

fled in alarm.

A moment later, Jean Valjean accosted her, and asked her to go and get

this thousand-franc bill changed for him, adding that it was his

quarterly income, which he had received the day before. “Where?”

thought the old woman. “He did not go out until six o’clock in the

evening, and the government bank certainly is not open at that hour.”

The old woman went to get the bill changed, and mentioned her surmises.

That thousand-franc note, commented on and multiplied, produced a vast

amount of terrified discussion among the gossips of the Rue des Vignes

Saint-Marcel.

A few days later, it chanced that Jean Valjean was sawing some wood, in

his shirt-sleeves, in the corridor. The old woman was in the chamber,

putting things in order. She was alone. Cosette was occupied in

admiring the wood as it was sawed. The old woman caught sight of the

coat hanging on a nail, and examined it. The lining had been sewed up

again. The good woman felt of it carefully, and thought she observed in

the skirts and revers thicknesses of paper. More thousand-franc

bank-bills, no doubt!

She also noticed that there were all sorts of things in the pockets.

Not only the needles, thread, and scissors which she had seen, but a

big pocket-book, a very large knife, and—a suspicious

circumstance—several wigs of various colors. Each pocket of this coat

had the air of being in a manner provided against unexpected accidents.

Thus the inhabitants of the house reached the last days of winter.

CHAPTER V—A FIVE-FRANC PIECE FALLS ON THE GROUND AND PRODUCES A TUMULT

Near Saint-Médard’s church there was a poor man who was in the habit of

crouching on the brink of a public well which had been condemned, and

on whom Jean Valjean was fond of bestowing charity. He never passed

this man without giving him a few sous. Sometimes he spoke to him.

Those who envied this mendicant said that he belonged to the police. He

was an ex-beadle of seventy-five, who was constantly mumbling his

prayers.

One evening, as Jean Valjean was passing by, when he had not Cosette

with him, he saw the beggar in his usual place, beneath the lantern

which had just been lighted. The man seemed engaged in prayer,

according to his custom, and was much bent over. Jean Valjean stepped

up to him and placed his customary alms in his hand. The mendicant

raised his eyes suddenly, stared intently at Jean Valjean, then dropped

his head quickly. This movement was like a flash of lightning. Jean

Valjean was seized with a shudder. It seemed to him that he had just

caught sight, by the light of the street lantern, not of the placid and

beaming visage of the old beadle, but of a well-known and startling

face. He experienced the same impression that one would have on finding

one’s self, all of a sudden, face to face, in the dark, with a tiger.

He recoiled, terrified, petrified, daring neither to breathe, to speak,

to remain, nor to flee, staring at the beggar who had dropped his head,

which was enveloped in a rag, and no longer appeared to know that he

was there. At this strange moment, an instinct—possibly the mysterious

instinct of self-preservation,—restrained Jean Valjean from uttering a

word. The beggar had the same figure, the same rags, the same

appearance as he had every day. “Bah!” said Jean Valjean, “I am mad! I

am dreaming! Impossible!” And he returned profoundly troubled.

He hardly dared to confess, even to himself, that the face which he

thought he had seen was the face of Javert.

That night, on thinking the matter over, he regretted not having

questioned the man, in order to force him to raise his head a second

time.

On the following day, at nightfall, he went back. The beggar was at his

post. “Good day, my good man,” said Jean Valjean, resolutely, handing

him a sou. The beggar raised his head, and replied in a whining voice,

“Thanks, my good sir.” It was unmistakably the ex-beadle.

Jean Valjean felt completely reassured. He began to laugh. “How the

deuce could I have thought that I saw Javert there?” he thought. “Am I

going to lose my eyesight now?” And he thought no more about it.

A few days afterwards,—it might have been at eight o’clock in the

evening,—he was in his room, and engaged in making Cosette spell aloud,

when he heard the house door open and then shut again. This struck him

as singular. The old woman, who was the only inhabitant of the house

except himself, always went to bed at nightfall, so that she might not

burn out her candles. Jean Valjean made a sign to Cosette to be quiet.

He heard some one ascending the stairs. It might possibly be the old

woman, who might have fallen ill and have been out to the apothecary’s.

Jean Valjean listened.

The step was heavy, and sounded like that of a man; but the old woman

wore stout shoes, and there is nothing which so strongly resembles the

step of a man as that of an old woman. Nevertheless, Jean Valjean blew

out his candle.

He had sent Cosette to bed, saying to her in a low voice, “Get into bed

very softly”; and as he kissed her brow, the steps paused.

Jean Valjean remained silent, motionless, with his back towards the

door, seated on the chair from which he had not stirred, and holding

his breath in the dark.

After the expiration of a rather long interval, he turned round, as he

heard nothing more, and, as he raised his eyes towards the door of his

chamber, he saw a light through the keyhole. This light formed a sort

of sinister star in the blackness of the door and the wall. There was

evidently some one there, who was holding a candle in his hand and

listening.

Several minutes elapsed thus, and the light retreated. But he heard no

sound of footsteps, which seemed to indicate that the person who had

been listening at the door had removed his shoes.

Jean Valjean threw himself, all dressed as he was, on his bed, and

could not close his eyes all night.

At daybreak, just as he was falling into a doze through fatigue, he was

awakened by the creaking of a door which opened on some attic at the

end of the corridor, then he heard the same masculine footstep which

had ascended the stairs on the preceding evening. The step was

approaching. He sprang off the bed and applied his eye to the keyhole,

which was tolerably large, hoping to see the person who had made his

way by night into the house and had listened at his door, as he passed.

It was a man, in fact, who passed, this time without pausing, in front

of Jean Valjean’s chamber. The corridor was too dark to allow of the

person’s face being distinguished; but when the man reached the

staircase, a ray of light from without made it stand out like a

silhouette, and Jean Valjean had a complete view of his back. The man

was of lofty stature, clad in a long frock-coat, with a cudgel under

his arm. The formidable neck and shoulders belonged to Javert.

Jean Valjean might have attempted to catch another glimpse of him

through his window opening on the boulevard, but he would have been

obliged to open the window: he dared not.

It was evident that this man had entered with a key, and like himself.

Who had given him that key? What was the meaning of this?

When the old woman came to do the work, at seven o’clock in the

morning, Jean Valjean cast a penetrating glance on her, but he did not

question her. The good woman appeared as usual.

As she swept up she remarked to him:—

“Possibly Monsieur may have heard some one come in last night?”

At that age, and on that boulevard, eight o’clock in the evening was

the dead of the night.

“That is true, by the way,” he replied, in the most natural tone

possible. “Who was it?”

“It was a new lodger who has come into the house,” said the old woman.

“And what is his name?”

“I don’t know exactly; Dumont, or Daumont, or some name of that sort.”

“And who is this Monsieur Dumont?”

The old woman gazed at him with her little polecat eyes, and answered:—

“A gentleman of property, like yourself.”

Perhaps she had no ulterior meaning. Jean Valjean thought he perceived

one.

When the old woman had taken her departure, he did up a hundred francs

which he had in a cupboard, into a roll, and put it in his pocket. In

spite of all the precautions which he took in this operation so that he

might not be heard rattling silver, a hundred-sou piece escaped from

his hands and rolled noisily on the floor.

When darkness came on, he descended and carefully scrutinized both

sides of the boulevard. He saw no one. The boulevard appeared to be

absolutely deserted. It is true that a person can conceal himself

behind trees.

He went upstairs again.

“Come.” he said to Cosette.

He took her by the hand, and they both went out.

BOOK FIFTH—FOR A BLACK HUNT, A MUTE PACK

CHAPTER I—THE ZIGZAGS OF STRATEGY

An observation here becomes necessary, in view of the pages which the

reader is about to peruse, and of others which will be met with further

on.

The author of this book, who regrets the necessity of mentioning

himself, has been absent from Paris for many years. Paris has been

transformed since he quitted it. A new city has arisen, which is, after

a fashion, unknown to him. There is no need for him to say that he

loves Paris: Paris is his mind’s natal city. In consequence of

demolitions and reconstructions, the Paris of his youth, that Paris

which he bore away religiously in his memory, is now a Paris of days

gone by. He must be permitted to speak of that Paris as though it still

existed. It is possible that when the author conducts his readers to a

spot and says, “In such a street there stands such and such a house,”

neither street nor house will any longer exist in that locality.

Readers may verify the facts if they care to take the trouble. For his

own part, he is unacquainted with the new Paris, and he writes with the

old Paris before his eyes in an illusion which is precious to him. It

is a delight to him to dream that there still lingers behind him

something of that which he beheld when he was in his own country, and

that all has not vanished. So long as you go and come in your native

land, you imagine that those streets are a matter of indifference to

you; that those windows, those roofs, and those doors are nothing to

you; that those walls are strangers to you; that those trees are merely

the first encountered haphazard; that those houses, which you do not

enter, are useless to you; that the pavements which you tread are

merely stones. Later on, when you are no longer there, you perceive

that the streets are dear to you; that you miss those roofs, those

doors; and that those walls are necessary to you, those trees are well

beloved by you; that you entered those houses which you never entered,

every day, and that you have left a part of your heart, of your blood,

of your soul, in those pavements. All those places which you no longer

behold, which you may never behold again, perchance, and whose memory

you have cherished, take on a melancholy charm, recur to your mind with

the melancholy of an apparition, make the holy land visible to you, and

are, so to speak, the very form of France, and you love them; and you

call them up as they are, as they were, and you persist in this, and

you will submit to no change: for you are attached to the figure of

your fatherland as to the face of your mother.

May we, then, be permitted to speak of the past in the present? That

said, we beg the reader to take note of it, and we continue.

Jean Valjean instantly quitted the boulevard and plunged into the

streets, taking the most intricate lines which he could devise,

returning on his track at times, to make sure that he was not being

followed.

[Illustration: The Black Hunt]

This manœuvre is peculiar to the hunted stag. On soil where an imprint

of the track may be left, this manœuvre possesses, among other

advantages, that of deceiving the huntsmen and the dogs, by throwing

them on the wrong scent. In venery this is called \_false

re-imbushment\_.

The moon was full that night. Jean Valjean was not sorry for this. The

moon, still very close to the horizon, cast great masses of light and

shadow in the streets. Jean Valjean could glide along close to the

houses on the dark side, and yet keep watch on the light side. He did

not, perhaps, take sufficiently into consideration the fact that the

dark side escaped him. Still, in the deserted lanes which lie near the

Rue Poliveau, he thought he felt certain that no one was following him.

Cosette walked on without asking any questions. The sufferings of the

first six years of her life had instilled something passive into her

nature. Moreover,—and this is a remark to which we shall frequently

have occasion to recur,—she had grown used, without being herself aware

of it, to the peculiarities of this good man and to the freaks of

destiny. And then she was with him, and she felt safe.

Jean Valjean knew no more where he was going than did Cosette. He

trusted in God, as she trusted in him. It seemed as though he also were

clinging to the hand of some one greater than himself; he thought he

felt a being leading him, though invisible. However, he had no settled

idea, no plan, no project. He was not even absolutely sure that it was

Javert, and then it might have been Javert, without Javert knowing that

he was Jean Valjean. Was not he disguised? Was not he believed to be

dead? Still, queer things had been going on for several days. He wanted

no more of them. He was determined not to return to the Gorbeau house.

Like the wild animal chased from its lair, he was seeking a hole in

which he might hide until he could find one where he might dwell.

Jean Valjean described many and varied labyrinths in the Mouffetard

quarter, which was already asleep, as though the discipline of the

Middle Ages and the yoke of the curfew still existed; he combined in

various manners, with cunning strategy, the Rue Censier and the Rue

Copeau, the Rue du Battoir-Saint-Victor and the Rue du Puits l’Ermite.

There are lodging houses in this locality, but he did not even enter

one, finding nothing which suited him. He had no doubt that if any one

had chanced to be upon his track, they would have lost it.

As eleven o’clock struck from Saint-Étienne-du-Mont, he was traversing

the Rue de Pontoise, in front of the office of the commissary of

police, situated at No. 14. A few moments later, the instinct of which

we have spoken above made him turn round. At that moment he saw

distinctly, thanks to the commissary’s lantern, which betrayed them,

three men who were following him closely, pass, one after the other,

under that lantern, on the dark side of the street. One of the three

entered the alley leading to the commissary’s house. The one who

marched at their head struck him as decidedly suspicious.

“Come, child,” he said to Cosette; and he made haste to quit the Rue

Pontoise.

He took a circuit, turned into the Passage des Patriarches, which was

closed on account of the hour, strode along the Rue de l’Épée-de-Bois

and the Rue de l’Arbalète, and plunged into the Rue des Postes.

At that time there was a square formed by the intersection of streets,

where the College Rollin stands to-day, and where the Rue

Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève turns off.

It is understood, of course, that the Rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève is an

old street, and that a posting-chaise does not pass through the Rue des

Postes once in ten years. In the thirteenth century this Rue des Postes

was inhabited by potters, and its real name is Rue des Pots.

The moon cast a livid light into this open space. Jean Valjean went

into ambush in a doorway, calculating that if the men were still

following him, he could not fail to get a good look at them, as they

traversed this illuminated space.

In point of fact, three minutes had not elapsed when the men made their

appearance. There were four of them now. All were tall, dressed in

long, brown coats, with round hats, and huge cudgels in their hands.

Their great stature and their vast fists rendered them no less alarming

than did their sinister stride through the darkness. One would have

pronounced them four spectres disguised as bourgeois.

They halted in the middle of the space and formed a group, like men in

consultation. They had an air of indecision. The one who appeared to be

their leader turned round and pointed hastily with his right hand in

the direction which Jean Valjean had taken; another seemed to indicate

the contrary direction with considerable obstinacy. At the moment when

the first man wheeled round, the moon fell full in his face. Jean

Valjean recognized Javert perfectly.

CHAPTER II—IT IS LUCKY THAT THE PONT D’AUSTERLITZ BEARS CARRIAGES

Uncertainty was at an end for Jean Valjean: fortunately it still lasted

for the men. He took advantage of their hesitation. It was time lost

for them, but gained for him. He slipped from under the gate where he

had concealed himself, and went down the Rue des Postes, towards the

region of the Jardin des Plantes. Cosette was beginning to be tired. He

took her in his arms and carried her. There were no passers-by, and the

street lanterns had not been lighted on account of there being a moon.

He redoubled his pace.

In a few strides he had reached the Goblet potteries, on the front of

which the moonlight rendered distinctly legible the ancient

inscription:—

De Goblet fils c’est ici la fabrique;

Venez choisir des cruches et des brocs,

Des pots à fleurs, des tuyaux, de la brique.

À tout venant le Cœur vend des Carreaux.14

He left behind him the Rue de la Clef, then the Fountain Saint-Victor,

skirted the Jardin des Plantes by the lower streets, and reached the

quay. There he turned round. The quay was deserted. The streets were

deserted. There was no one behind him. He drew a long breath.

He gained the Pont d’Austerlitz.

Tolls were still collected there at that epoch.

He presented himself at the toll office and handed over a sou.

“It is two sous,” said the old soldier in charge of the bridge. “You

are carrying a child who can walk. Pay for two.”

He paid, vexed that his passage should have aroused remark. Every

flight should be an imperceptible slipping away.

A heavy cart was crossing the Seine at the same time as himself, and on

its way, like him, to the right bank. This was of use to him. He could

traverse the bridge in the shadow of the cart.

Towards the middle of the Bridge, Cosette, whose feet were benumbed,

wanted to walk. He set her on the ground and took her hand again.

The bridge once crossed, he perceived some timber-yards on his right.

He directed his course thither. In order to reach them, it was

necessary to risk himself in a tolerably large unsheltered and

illuminated space. He did not hesitate. Those who were on his track had

evidently lost the scent, and Jean Valjean believed himself to be out

of danger. Hunted, yes; followed, no.

A little street, the Rue du Chemin-Vert-Saint-Antoine, opened out

between two timber-yards enclosed in walls. This street was dark and

narrow and seemed made expressly for him. Before entering it he cast a

glance behind him.

From the point where he stood he could see the whole extent of the Pont

d’Austerlitz.

Four shadows were just entering on the bridge.

These shadows had their backs turned to the Jardin des Plantes and were

on their way to the right bank.

These four shadows were the four men.

Jean Valjean shuddered like the wild beast which is recaptured.

One hope remained to him; it was, that the men had not, perhaps,

stepped on the bridge, and had not caught sight of him while he was

crossing the large illuminated space, holding Cosette by the hand.

In that case, by plunging into the little street before him, he might

escape, if he could reach the timber-yards, the marshes, the

market-gardens, the uninhabited ground which was not built upon.

It seemed to him that he might commit himself to that silent little

street. He entered it.

CHAPTER III—TO WIT, THE PLAN OF PARIS IN 1727

Three hundred paces further on, he arrived at a point where the street

forked. It separated into two streets, which ran in a slanting line,

one to the right, and the other to the left.

Jean Valjean had before him what resembled the two branches of a Y.

Which should he choose? He did not hesitate, but took the one on the

right.

Why?

Because that to the left ran towards a suburb, that is to say, towards

inhabited regions, and the right branch towards the open country, that

is to say, towards deserted regions.

However, they no longer walked very fast. Cosette’s pace retarded Jean

Valjean’s.

He took her up and carried her again. Cosette laid her head on the

shoulder of the good man and said not a word.

He turned round from time to time and looked behind him. He took care

to keep always on the dark side of the street. The street was straight

in his rear. The first two or three times that he turned round he saw

nothing; the silence was profound, and he continued his march somewhat

reassured. All at once, on turning round, he thought he perceived in

the portion of the street which he had just passed through, far off in

the obscurity, something which was moving.

He rushed forward precipitately rather than walked, hoping to find some

side-street, to make his escape through it, and thus to break his scent

once more.

He arrived at a wall.

This wall, however, did not absolutely prevent further progress; it was

a wall which bordered a transverse street, in which the one he had

taken ended.

Here again, he was obliged to come to a decision; should he go to the

right or to the left.

He glanced to the right. The fragmentary lane was prolonged between

buildings which were either sheds or barns, then ended at a blind

alley. The extremity of the cul-de-sac was distinctly visible,—a lofty

white wall.

He glanced to the left. On that side the lane was open, and about two

hundred paces further on, ran into a street of which it was the

affluent. On that side lay safety.

At the moment when Jean Valjean was meditating a turn to the left, in

an effort to reach the street which he saw at the end of the lane, he

perceived a sort of motionless, black statue at the corner of the lane

and the street towards which he was on the point of directing his

steps.

It was some one, a man, who had evidently just been posted there, and

who was barring the passage and waiting.

Jean Valjean recoiled.

The point of Paris where Jean Valjean found himself, situated between

the Faubourg Saint-Antoine and la Râpée, is one of those which recent

improvements have transformed from top to bottom,—resulting in

disfigurement according to some, and in a transfiguration according to

others. The market-gardens, the timber-yards, and the old buildings

have been effaced. To-day, there are brand-new, wide streets, arenas,

circuses, hippodromes, railway stations, and a prison, Mazas, there;

progress, as the reader sees, with its antidote.

Half a century ago, in that ordinary, popular tongue, which is all

compounded of traditions, which persists in calling the Institut \_les

Quatre-Nations\_, and the Opera-Comique \_Feydeau\_, the precise spot

whither Jean Valjean had arrived was called \_le Petit-Picpus\_. The

Porte Saint-Jacques, the Porte Paris, the Barrière des Sergents, the

Porcherons, la Galiote, les Célestins, les Capucins, le Mail, la

Bourbe, l’Arbre de Cracovie, la Petite-Pologne—these are the names of

old Paris which survive amid the new. The memory of the populace hovers

over these relics of the past.

Le Petit-Picpus, which, moreover, hardly ever had any existence, and

never was more than the outline of a quarter, had nearly the monkish

aspect of a Spanish town. The roads were not much paved; the streets

were not much built up. With the exception of the two or three streets,

of which we shall presently speak, all was wall and solitude there. Not

a shop, not a vehicle, hardly a candle lighted here and there in the

windows; all lights extinguished after ten o’clock. Gardens, convents,

timber-yards, marshes; occasional lowly dwellings and great walls as

high as the houses.

Such was this quarter in the last century. The Revolution snubbed it

soundly. The republican government demolished and cut through it.

Rubbish shoots were established there. Thirty years ago, this quarter

was disappearing under the erasing process of new buildings. To-day, it

has been utterly blotted out. The Petit-Picpus, of which no existing

plan has preserved a trace, is indicated with sufficient clearness in

the plan of 1727, published at Paris by Denis Thierry, Rue

Saint-Jacques, opposite the Rue du Plâtre; and at Lyons, by Jean Girin,

Rue Mercière, at the sign of Prudence. Petit-Picpus had, as we have

just mentioned, a Y of streets, formed by the Rue du

Chemin-Vert-Saint-Antoine, which spread out in two branches, taking on

the left the name of Little Picpus Street, and on the right the name of

the Rue Polonceau. The two limbs of the Y were connected at the apex as

by a bar; this bar was called Rue Droit-Mur. The Rue Polonceau ended

there; Rue Petit-Picpus passed on, and ascended towards the Lenoir

market. A person coming from the Seine reached the extremity of the Rue

Polonceau, and had on his right the Rue Droit-Mur, turning abruptly at

a right angle, in front of him the wall of that street, and on his

right a truncated prolongation of the Rue Droit-Mur, which had no issue

and was called the Cul-de-Sac Genrot.

It was here that Jean Valjean stood.

As we have just said, on catching sight of that black silhouette

standing on guard at the angle of the Rue Droit-Mur and the Rue

Petit-Picpus, he recoiled. There could be no doubt of it. That phantom

was lying in wait for him.

What was he to do?

The time for retreating was passed. That which he had perceived in

movement an instant before, in the distant darkness, was Javert and his

squad without a doubt. Javert was probably already at the commencement

of the street at whose end Jean Valjean stood. Javert, to all

appearances, was acquainted with this little labyrinth, and had taken

his precautions by sending one of his men to guard the exit. These

surmises, which so closely resembled proofs, whirled suddenly, like a

handful of dust caught up by an unexpected gust of wind, through Jean

Valjean’s mournful brain. He examined the Cul-de-Sac Genrot; there he

was cut off. He examined the Rue Petit-Picpus; there stood a sentinel.

He saw that black form standing out in relief against the white

pavement, illuminated by the moon; to advance was to fall into this

man’s hands; to retreat was to fling himself into Javert’s arms. Jean

Valjean felt himself caught, as in a net, which was slowly contracting;

he gazed heavenward in despair.

CHAPTER IV—THE GROPINGS OF FLIGHT

In order to understand what follows, it is requisite to form an exact

idea of the Droit-Mur lane, and, in particular, of the angle which one

leaves on the left when one emerges from the Rue Polonceau into this

lane. Droit-Mur lane was almost entirely bordered on the right, as far

as the Rue Petit-Picpus, by houses of mean aspect; on the left by a

solitary building of severe outlines, composed of numerous parts which

grew gradually higher by a story or two as they approached the Rue

Petit-Picpus side; so that this building, which was very lofty on the

Rue Petit-Picpus side, was tolerably low on the side adjoining the Rue

Polonceau. There, at the angle of which we have spoken, it descended to

such a degree that it consisted of merely a wall. This wall did not

abut directly on the street; it formed a deeply retreating niche,

concealed by its two corners from two observers who might have been,

one in the Rue Polonceau, the other in the Rue Droit-Mur.

Beginning with these angles of the niche, the wall extended along the

Rue Polonceau as far as a house which bore the number 49, and along the

Rue Droit-Mur, where the fragment was much shorter, as far as the

gloomy building which we have mentioned and whose gable it intersected,

thus forming another retreating angle in the street. This gable was

sombre of aspect; only one window was visible, or, to speak more

correctly, two shutters covered with a sheet of zinc and kept

constantly closed.

The state of the places of which we are here giving a description is

rigorously exact, and will certainly awaken a very precise memory in

the mind of old inhabitants of the quarter.

The niche was entirely filled by a thing which resembled a colossal and

wretched door; it was a vast, formless assemblage of perpendicular

planks, the upper ones being broader than the lower, bound together by

long transverse strips of iron. At one side there was a carriage gate

of the ordinary dimensions, and which had evidently not been cut more

than fifty years previously.

A linden-tree showed its crest above the niche, and the wall was

covered with ivy on the side of the Rue Polonceau.

In the imminent peril in which Jean Valjean found himself, this sombre

building had about it a solitary and uninhabited look which tempted

him. He ran his eyes rapidly over it; he said to himself, that if he

could contrive to get inside it, he might save himself. First he

conceived an idea, then a hope.

In the central portion of the front of this building, on the Rue

Droit-Mur side, there were at all the windows of the different stories

ancient cistern pipes of lead. The various branches of the pipes which

led from one central pipe to all these little basins sketched out a

sort of tree on the front. These ramifications of pipes with their

hundred elbows imitated those old leafless vine-stocks which writhe

over the fronts of old farm-houses.

This odd espalier, with its branches of lead and iron, was the first

thing that struck Jean Valjean. He seated Cosette with her back against

a stone post, with an injunction to be silent, and ran to the spot

where the conduit touched the pavement. Perhaps there was some way of

climbing up by it and entering the house. But the pipe was dilapidated

and past service, and hardly hung to its fastenings. Moreover, all the

windows of this silent dwelling were grated with heavy iron bars, even

the attic windows in the roof. And then, the moon fell full upon that

façade, and the man who was watching at the corner of the street would

have seen Jean Valjean in the act of climbing. And finally, what was to

be done with Cosette? How was she to be drawn up to the top of a

three-story house?

He gave up all idea of climbing by means of the drain-pipe, and crawled

along the wall to get back into the Rue Polonceau.

When he reached the slant of the wall where he had left Cosette, he

noticed that no one could see him there. As we have just explained, he

was concealed from all eyes, no matter from which direction they were

approaching; besides this, he was in the shadow. Finally, there were

two doors; perhaps they might be forced. The wall above which he saw

the linden-tree and the ivy evidently abutted on a garden where he

could, at least, hide himself, although there were as yet no leaves on

the trees, and spend the remainder of the night.

Time was passing; he must act quickly.

He felt over the carriage door, and immediately recognized the fact

that it was impracticable outside and in.

He approached the other door with more hope; it was frightfully

decrepit; its very immensity rendered it less solid; the planks were

rotten; the iron bands—there were only three of them—were rusted. It

seemed as though it might be possible to pierce this worm-eaten

barrier.

On examining it he found that the door was not a door; it had neither

hinges, cross-bars, lock, nor fissure in the middle; the iron bands

traversed it from side to side without any break. Through the crevices

in the planks he caught a view of unhewn slabs and blocks of stone

roughly cemented together, which passers-by might still have seen there

ten years ago. He was forced to acknowledge with consternation that

this apparent door was simply the wooden decoration of a building

against which it was placed. It was easy to tear off a plank; but then,

one found one’s self face to face with a wall.

CHAPTER V—WHICH WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE WITH GAS LANTERNS

At that moment a heavy and measured sound began to be audible at some

distance. Jean Valjean risked a glance round the corner of the street.

Seven or eight soldiers, drawn up in a platoon, had just debouched into

the Rue Polonceau. He saw the gleam of their bayonets. They were

advancing towards him; these soldiers, at whose head he distinguished

Javert’s tall figure, advanced slowly and cautiously. They halted

frequently; it was plain that they were searching all the nooks of the

walls and all the embrasures of the doors and alleys.

This was some patrol that Javert had encountered—there could be no

mistake as to this surmise—and whose aid he had demanded.

Javert’s two acolytes were marching in their ranks.

At the rate at which they were marching, and in consideration of the

halts which they were making, it would take them about a quarter of an

hour to reach the spot where Jean Valjean stood. It was a frightful

moment. A few minutes only separated Jean Valjean from that terrible

precipice which yawned before him for the third time. And the galleys

now meant not only the galleys, but Cosette lost to him forever; that

is to say, a life resembling the interior of a tomb.

There was but one thing which was possible.

Jean Valjean had this peculiarity, that he carried, as one might say,

two beggar’s pouches: in one he kept his saintly thoughts; in the other

the redoubtable talents of a convict. He rummaged in the one or the

other, according to circumstances.

Among his other resources, thanks to his numerous escapes from the

prison at Toulon, he was, as it will be remembered, a past master in

the incredible art of crawling up without ladder or climbing-irons, by

sheer muscular force, by leaning on the nape of his neck, his

shoulders, his hips, and his knees, by helping himself on the rare

projections of the stone, in the right angle of a wall, as high as the

sixth story, if need be; an art which has rendered so celebrated and so

alarming that corner of the wall of the Conciergerie of Paris by which

Battemolle, condemned to death, made his escape twenty years ago.

Jean Valjean measured with his eyes the wall above which he espied the

linden; it was about eighteen feet in height. The angle which it formed

with the gable of the large building was filled, at its lower

extremity, by a mass of masonry of a triangular shape, probably

intended to preserve that too convenient corner from the rubbish of

those dirty creatures called the passers-by. This practice of filling

up corners of the wall is much in use in Paris.

This mass was about five feet in height; the space above the summit of

this mass which it was necessary to climb was not more than fourteen

feet.

The wall was surmounted by a flat stone without a coping.

Cosette was the difficulty, for she did not know how to climb a wall.

Should he abandon her? Jean Valjean did not once think of that. It was

impossible to carry her. A man’s whole strength is required to

successfully carry out these singular ascents. The least burden would

disturb his centre of gravity and pull him downwards.

A rope would have been required; Jean Valjean had none. Where was he to

get a rope at midnight, in the Rue Polonceau? Certainly, if Jean

Valjean had had a kingdom, he would have given it for a rope at that

moment.

All extreme situations have their lightning flashes which sometimes

dazzle, sometimes illuminate us.

Jean Valjean’s despairing glance fell on the street lantern-post of the

blind alley Genrot.

At that epoch there were no gas-jets in the streets of Paris. At

nightfall lanterns placed at regular distances were lighted; they were

ascended and descended by means of a rope, which traversed the street

from side to side, and was adjusted in a groove of the post. The pulley

over which this rope ran was fastened underneath the lantern in a

little iron box, the key to which was kept by the lamp-lighter, and the

rope itself was protected by a metal case.

Jean Valjean, with the energy of a supreme struggle, crossed the street

at one bound, entered the blind alley, broke the latch of the little

box with the point of his knife, and an instant later he was beside

Cosette once more. He had a rope. These gloomy inventors of expedients

work rapidly when they are fighting against fatality.

We have already explained that the lanterns had not been lighted that

night. The lantern in the Cul-de-Sac Genrot was thus naturally extinct,

like the rest; and one could pass directly under it without even

noticing that it was no longer in its place.

Nevertheless, the hour, the place, the darkness, Jean Valjean’s

absorption, his singular gestures, his goings and comings, all had

begun to render Cosette uneasy. Any other child than she would have

given vent to loud shrieks long before. She contented herself with

plucking Jean Valjean by the skirt of his coat. They could hear the

sound of the patrol’s approach ever more and more distinctly.

“Father,” said she, in a very low voice, “I am afraid. Who is coming

yonder?”

“Hush!” replied the unhappy man; “it is Madame Thénardier.”

Cosette shuddered. He added:—

“Say nothing. Don’t interfere with me. If you cry out, if you weep, the

Thénardier is lying in wait for you. She is coming to take you back.”

Then, without haste, but without making a useless movement, with firm

and curt precision, the more remarkable at a moment when the patrol and

Javert might come upon him at any moment, he undid his cravat, passed

it round Cosette’s body under the armpits, taking care that it should

not hurt the child, fastened this cravat to one end of the rope, by

means of that knot which seafaring men call a “swallow knot,” took the

other end of the rope in his teeth, pulled off his shoes and stockings,

which he threw over the wall, stepped upon the mass of masonry, and

began to raise himself in the angle of the wall and the gable with as

much solidity and certainty as though he had the rounds of a ladder

under his feet and elbows. Half a minute had not elapsed when he was

resting on his knees on the wall.

Cosette gazed at him in stupid amazement, without uttering a word. Jean

Valjean’s injunction, and the name of Madame Thénardier, had chilled

her blood.

All at once she heard Jean Valjean’s voice crying to her, though in a

very low tone:—

“Put your back against the wall.”

She obeyed.

“Don’t say a word, and don’t be alarmed,” went on Jean Valjean.

And she felt herself lifted from the ground.

Before she had time to recover herself, she was on the top of the wall.

Jean Valjean grasped her, put her on his back, took her two tiny hands

in his large left hand, lay down flat on his stomach and crawled along

on top of the wall as far as the cant. As he had guessed, there stood a

building whose roof started from the top of the wooden barricade and

descended to within a very short distance of the ground, with a gentle

slope which grazed the linden-tree. A lucky circumstance, for the wall

was much higher on this side than on the street side. Jean Valjean

could only see the ground at a great depth below him.

He had just reached the slope of the roof, and had not yet left the

crest of the wall, when a violent uproar announced the arrival of the

patrol. The thundering voice of Javert was audible:—

“Search the blind alley! The Rue Droit-Mur is guarded! so is the Rue

Petit-Picpus. I’ll answer for it that he is in the blind alley.”

The soldiers rushed into the Genrot alley.

Jean Valjean allowed himself to slide down the roof, still holding fast

to Cosette, reached the linden-tree, and leaped to the ground. Whether

from terror or courage, Cosette had not breathed a sound, though her

hands were a little abraded.

CHAPTER VI—THE BEGINNING OF AN ENIGMA

Jean Valjean found himself in a sort of garden which was very vast and

of singular aspect; one of those melancholy gardens which seem made to

be looked at in winter and at night. This garden was oblong in shape,

with an alley of large poplars at the further end, tolerably tall

forest trees in the corners, and an unshaded space in the centre, where

could be seen a very large, solitary tree, then several fruit-trees,

gnarled and bristling like bushes, beds of vegetables, a melon patch,

whose glass frames sparkled in the moonlight, and an old well. Here and

there stood stone benches which seemed black with moss. The alleys were

bordered with gloomy and very erect little shrubs. The grass had half

taken possession of them, and a green mould covered the rest.

Jean Valjean had beside him the building whose roof had served him as a

means of descent, a pile of fagots, and, behind the fagots, directly

against the wall, a stone statue, whose mutilated face was no longer

anything more than a shapeless mask which loomed vaguely through the

gloom.

The building was a sort of ruin, where dismantled chambers were

distinguishable, one of which, much encumbered, seemed to serve as a

shed.

The large building of the Rue Droit-Mur, which had a wing on the Rue

Petit-Picpus, turned two façades, at right angles, towards this garden.

These interior façades were even more tragic than the exterior. All the

windows were grated. Not a gleam of light was visible at any one of

them. The upper story had scuttles like prisons. One of those façades

cast its shadow on the other, which fell over the garden like an

immense black pall.

No other house was visible. The bottom of the garden was lost in mist

and darkness. Nevertheless, walls could be confusedly made out, which

intersected as though there were more cultivated land beyond, and the

low roofs of the Rue Polonceau.

Nothing more wild and solitary than this garden could be imagined.

There was no one in it, which was quite natural in view of the hour;

but it did not seem as though this spot were made for any one to walk

in, even in broad daylight.

Jean Valjean’s first care had been to get hold of his shoes and put

them on again, then to step under the shed with Cosette. A man who is

fleeing never thinks himself sufficiently hidden. The child, whose

thoughts were still on the Thénardier, shared his instinct for

withdrawing from sight as much as possible.

Cosette trembled and pressed close to him. They heard the tumultuous

noise of the patrol searching the blind alley and the streets; the

blows of their gun-stocks against the stones; Javert’s appeals to the

police spies whom he had posted, and his imprecations mingled with

words which could not be distinguished.

At the expiration of a quarter of an hour it seemed as though that

species of stormy roar were becoming more distant. Jean Valjean held

his breath.

He had laid his hand lightly on Cosette’s mouth.

However, the solitude in which he stood was so strangely calm, that

this frightful uproar, close and furious as it was, did not disturb him

by so much as the shadow of a misgiving. It seemed as though those

walls had been built of the deaf stones of which the Scriptures speak.

All at once, in the midst of this profound calm, a fresh sound arose; a

sound as celestial, divine, ineffable, ravishing, as the other had been

horrible. It was a hymn which issued from the gloom, a dazzling burst

of prayer and harmony in the obscure and alarming silence of the night;

women’s voices, but voices composed at one and the same time of the

pure accents of virgins and the innocent accents of children,—voices

which are not of the earth, and which resemble those that the newborn

infant still hears, and which the dying man hears already. This song

proceeded from the gloomy edifice which towered above the garden. At

the moment when the hubbub of demons retreated, one would have said

that a choir of angels was approaching through the gloom.

Cosette and Jean Valjean fell on their knees.

They knew not what it was, they knew not where they were; but both of

them, the man and the child, the penitent and the innocent, felt that

they must kneel.

These voices had this strange characteristic, that they did not prevent

the building from seeming to be deserted. It was a supernatural chant

in an uninhabited house.

While these voices were singing, Jean Valjean thought of nothing. He no

longer beheld the night; he beheld a blue sky. It seemed to him that he

felt those wings which we all have within us, unfolding.

The song died away. It may have lasted a long time. Jean Valjean could

not have told. Hours of ecstasy are never more than a moment.

All fell silent again. There was no longer anything in the street;

there was nothing in the garden. That which had menaced, that which had

reassured him,—all had vanished. The breeze swayed a few dry weeds on

the crest of the wall, and they gave out a faint, sweet, melancholy

sound.

CHAPTER VII—CONTINUATION OF THE ENIGMA

The night wind had risen, which indicated that it must be between one

and two o’clock in the morning. Poor Cosette said nothing. As she had

seated herself beside him and leaned her head against him, Jean Valjean

had fancied that she was asleep. He bent down and looked at her.

Cosette’s eyes were wide open, and her thoughtful air pained Jean

Valjean.

She was still trembling.

“Are you sleepy?” said Jean Valjean.

“I am very cold,” she replied.

A moment later she resumed:—

“Is she still there?”

“Who?” said Jean Valjean.

“Madame Thénardier.”

Jean Valjean had already forgotten the means which he had employed to

make Cosette keep silent.

“Ah!” said he, “she is gone. You need fear nothing further.”

The child sighed as though a load had been lifted from her breast.

The ground was damp, the shed open on all sides, the breeze grew more

keen every instant. The goodman took off his coat and wrapped it round

Cosette.

“Are you less cold now?” said he.

“Oh, yes, father.”

“Well, wait for me a moment. I will soon be back.”

He quitted the ruin and crept along the large building, seeking a

better shelter. He came across doors, but they were closed. There were

bars at all the windows of the ground floor.

Just after he had turned the inner angle of the edifice, he observed

that he was coming to some arched windows, where he perceived a light.

He stood on tiptoe and peeped through one of these windows. They all

opened on a tolerably vast hall, paved with large flagstones, cut up by

arcades and pillars, where only a tiny light and great shadows were

visible. The light came from a taper which was burning in one corner.

The apartment was deserted, and nothing was stirring in it.

Nevertheless, by dint of gazing intently he thought he perceived on the

ground something which appeared to be covered with a winding-sheet, and

which resembled a human form. This form was lying face downward, flat

on the pavement, with the arms extended in the form of a cross, in the

immobility of death. One would have said, judging from a sort of

serpent which undulated over the floor, that this sinister form had a

rope round its neck.

The whole chamber was bathed in that mist of places which are sparely

illuminated, which adds to horror.

Jean Valjean often said afterwards, that, although many funereal

spectres had crossed his path in life, he had never beheld anything

more blood-curdling and terrible than that enigmatical form

accomplishing some inexplicable mystery in that gloomy place, and

beheld thus at night. It was alarming to suppose that that thing was

perhaps dead; and still more alarming to think that it was perhaps

alive.

He had the courage to plaster his face to the glass, and to watch

whether the thing would move. In spite of his remaining thus what

seemed to him a very long time, the outstretched form made no movement.

All at once he felt himself overpowered by an inexpressible terror, and

he fled. He began to run towards the shed, not daring to look behind

him. It seemed to him, that if he turned his head, he should see that

form following him with great strides and waving its arms.

He reached the ruin all out of breath. His knees were giving way

beneath him; the perspiration was pouring from him.

Where was he? Who could ever have imagined anything like that sort of

sepulchre in the midst of Paris! What was this strange house? An

edifice full of nocturnal mystery, calling to souls through the

darkness with the voice of angels, and when they came, offering them

abruptly that terrible vision; promising to open the radiant portals of

heaven, and then opening the horrible gates of the tomb! And it

actually was an edifice, a house, which bore a number on the street! It

was not a dream! He had to touch the stones to convince himself that

such was the fact.

Cold, anxiety, uneasiness, the emotions of the night, had given him a

genuine fever, and all these ideas were clashing together in his brain.

He stepped up to Cosette. She was asleep.

CHAPTER VIII—THE ENIGMA BECOMES DOUBLY MYSTERIOUS

The child had laid her head on a stone and fallen asleep.

He sat down beside her and began to think. Little by little, as he

gazed at her, he grew calm and regained possession of his freedom of

mind.

He clearly perceived this truth, the foundation of his life henceforth,

that so long as she was there, so long as he had her near him, he

should need nothing except for her, he should fear nothing except for

her. He was not even conscious that he was very cold, since he had

taken off his coat to cover her.

Nevertheless, athwart this reverie into which he had fallen he had

heard for some time a peculiar noise. It was like the tinkling of a

bell. This sound proceeded from the garden. It could be heard

distinctly though faintly. It resembled the faint, vague music produced

by the bells of cattle at night in the pastures.

This noise made Valjean turn round.

He looked and saw that there was some one in the garden.

A being resembling a man was walking amid the bell-glasses of the melon

beds, rising, stooping, halting, with regular movements, as though he

were dragging or spreading out something on the ground. This person

appeared to limp.

Jean Valjean shuddered with the continual tremor of the unhappy. For

them everything is hostile and suspicious. They distrust the day

because it enables people to see them, and the night because it aids in

surprising them. A little while before he had shivered because the

garden was deserted, and now he shivered because there was some one

there.

He fell back from chimerical terrors to real terrors. He said to

himself that Javert and the spies had, perhaps, not taken their

departure; that they had, no doubt, left people on the watch in the

street; that if this man should discover him in the garden, he would

cry out for help against thieves and deliver him up. He took the

sleeping Cosette gently in his arms and carried her behind a heap of

old furniture, which was out of use, in the most remote corner of the

shed. Cosette did not stir.

From that point he scrutinized the appearance of the being in the melon

patch. The strange thing about it was, that the sound of the bell

followed each of this man’s movements. When the man approached, the

sound approached; when the man retreated, the sound retreated; if he

made any hasty gesture, a tremolo accompanied the gesture; when he

halted, the sound ceased. It appeared evident that the bell was

attached to that man; but what could that signify? Who was this man who

had a bell suspended about him like a ram or an ox?

As he put these questions to himself, he touched Cosette’s hands. They

were icy cold.

“Ah! good God!” he cried.

He spoke to her in a low voice:—

“Cosette!”

She did not open her eyes.

He shook her vigorously.

She did not wake.

“Is she dead?” he said to himself, and sprang to his feet, quivering

from head to foot.

The most frightful thoughts rushed pell-mell through his mind. There

are moments when hideous surmises assail us like a cohort of furies,

and violently force the partitions of our brains. When those we love

are in question, our prudence invents every sort of madness. He

remembered that sleep in the open air on a cold night may be fatal.

Cosette was pale, and had fallen at full length on the ground at his

feet, without a movement.

He listened to her breathing: she still breathed, but with a

respiration which seemed to him weak and on the point of extinction.

How was he to warm her back to life? How was he to rouse her? All that

was not connected with this vanished from his thoughts. He rushed

wildly from the ruin.

It was absolutely necessary that Cosette should be in bed and beside a

fire in less than a quarter of an hour.

CHAPTER IX—THE MAN WITH THE BELL

He walked straight up to the man whom he saw in the garden. He had

taken in his hand the roll of silver which was in the pocket of his

waistcoat.

The man’s head was bent down, and he did not see him approaching. In a

few strides Jean Valjean stood beside him.

Jean Valjean accosted him with the cry:—

“One hundred francs!”

The man gave a start and raised his eyes.

“You can earn a hundred francs,” went on Jean Valjean, “if you will

grant me shelter for this night.”

The moon shone full upon Jean Valjean’s terrified countenance.

“What! so it is you, Father Madeleine!” said the man.

That name, thus pronounced, at that obscure hour, in that unknown spot,

by that strange man, made Jean Valjean start back.

He had expected anything but that. The person who thus addressed him

was a bent and lame old man, dressed almost like a peasant, who wore on

his left knee a leather knee-cap, whence hung a moderately large bell.

His face, which was in the shadow, was not distinguishable.

However, the goodman had removed his cap, and exclaimed, trembling all

over:—

“Ah, good God! How come you here, Father Madeleine? Where did you

enter? Dieu-Jésus! Did you fall from heaven? There is no trouble about

that: if ever you do fall, it will be from there. And what a state you

are in! You have no cravat; you have no hat; you have no coat! Do you

know, you would have frightened any one who did not know you? No coat!

Lord God! Are the saints going mad nowadays? But how did you get in

here?”

His words tumbled over each other. The goodman talked with a rustic

volubility, in which there was nothing alarming. All this was uttered

with a mixture of stupefaction and \_naïve\_ kindliness.

“Who are you? and what house is this?” demanded Jean Valjean.

“Ah! pardieu, this is too much!” exclaimed the old man. “I am the

person for whom you got the place here, and this house is the one where

you had me placed. What! You don’t recognize me?”

“No,” said Jean Valjean; “and how happens it that you know me?”

“You saved my life,” said the man.

He turned. A ray of moonlight outlined his profile, and Jean Valjean

recognized old Fauchelevent.

“Ah!” said Jean Valjean, “so it is you? Yes, I recollect you.”

“That is very lucky,” said the old man, in a reproachful tone.

“And what are you doing here?” resumed Jean Valjean.

“Why, I am covering my melons, of course!”

In fact, at the moment when Jean Valjean accosted him, old Fauchelevent

held in his hand the end of a straw mat which he was occupied in

spreading over the melon bed. During the hour or thereabouts that he

had been in the garden he had already spread out a number of them. It

was this operation which had caused him to execute the peculiar

movements observed from the shed by Jean Valjean.

He continued:—

“I said to myself, ‘The moon is bright: it is going to freeze. What if

I were to put my melons into their greatcoats?’ And,” he added, looking

at Jean Valjean with a broad smile,—“pardieu! you ought to have done

the same! But how do you come here?”

Jean Valjean, finding himself known to this man, at least only under

the name of Madeleine, thenceforth advanced only with caution. He

multiplied his questions. Strange to say, their rôles seemed to be

reversed. It was he, the intruder, who interrogated.

“And what is this bell which you wear on your knee?”

“This,” replied Fauchelevent, “is so that I may be avoided.”

“What! so that you may be avoided?”

Old Fauchelevent winked with an indescribable air.

“Ah, goodness! there are only women in this house—many young girls. It

appears that I should be a dangerous person to meet. The bell gives

them warning. When I come, they go.”

“What house is this?”

“Come, you know well enough.”

“But I do not.”

“Not when you got me the place here as gardener?”

“Answer me as though I knew nothing.”

“Well, then, this is the Petit-Picpus convent.”

Memories recurred to Jean Valjean. Chance, that is to say, Providence,

had cast him into precisely that convent in the Quartier Saint-Antoine

where old Fauchelevent, crippled by the fall from his cart, had been

admitted on his recommendation two years previously. He repeated, as

though talking to himself:—

“The Petit-Picpus convent.”

“Exactly,” returned old Fauchelevent. “But to come to the point, how

the deuce did you manage to get in here, you, Father Madeleine? No

matter if you are a saint; you are a man as well, and no man enters

here.”

“You certainly are here.”

“There is no one but me.”

“Still,” said Jean Valjean, “I must stay here.”

“Ah, good God!” cried Fauchelevent.

Jean Valjean drew near to the old man, and said to him in a grave

voice:—

“Father Fauchelevent, I saved your life.”

“I was the first to recall it,” returned Fauchelevent.

“Well, you can do to-day for me that which I did for you in the olden

days.”

Fauchelevent took in his aged, trembling, and wrinkled hands Jean

Valjean’s two robust hands, and stood for several minutes as though

incapable of speaking. At length he exclaimed:—

“Oh! that would be a blessing from the good God, if I could make you

some little return for that! Save your life! Monsieur le Maire, dispose

of the old man!”

A wonderful joy had transfigured this old man. His countenance seemed

to emit a ray of light.

“What do you wish me to do?” he resumed.

“That I will explain to you. You have a chamber?”

“I have an isolated hovel yonder, behind the ruins of the old convent,

in a corner which no one ever looks into. There are three rooms in it.”

The hut was, in fact, so well hidden behind the ruins, and so cleverly

arranged to prevent it being seen, that Jean Valjean had not perceived

it.

“Good,” said Jean Valjean. “Now I am going to ask two things of you.”

“What are they, Mr. Mayor?”

“In the first place, you are not to tell any one what you know about

me. In the second, you are not to try to find out anything more.”

“As you please. I know that you can do nothing that is not honest, that

you have always been a man after the good God’s heart. And then,

moreover, you it was who placed me here. That concerns you. I am at

your service.”

“That is settled then. Now, come with me. We will go and get the

child.”

“Ah!” said Fauchelevent, “so there is a child?”

He added not a word further, and followed Jean Valjean as a dog follows

his master.

Less than half an hour afterwards Cosette, who had grown rosy again

before the flame of a good fire, was lying asleep in the old gardener’s

bed. Jean Valjean had put on his cravat and coat once more; his hat,

which he had flung over the wall, had been found and picked up. While

Jean Valjean was putting on his coat, Fauchelevent had removed the bell

and kneecap, which now hung on a nail beside a vintage basket that

adorned the wall. The two men were warming themselves with their elbows

resting on a table upon which Fauchelevent had placed a bit of cheese,

black bread, a bottle of wine, and two glasses, and the old man was

saying to Jean Valjean, as he laid his hand on the latter’s knee: “Ah!

Father Madeleine! You did not recognize me immediately; you save

people’s lives, and then you forget them! That is bad! But they

remember you! You are an ingrate!”

CHAPTER X—WHICH EXPLAINS HOW JAVERT GOT ON THE SCENT

The events of which we have just beheld the reverse side, so to speak,

had come about in the simplest possible manner.

When Jean Valjean, on the evening of the very day when Javert had

arrested him beside Fantine’s death-bed, had escaped from the town jail

of M. sur M., the police had supposed that he had betaken himself to

Paris. Paris is a maelstrom where everything is lost, and everything

disappears in this belly of the world, as in the belly of the sea. No

forest hides a man as does that crowd. Fugitives of every sort know

this. They go to Paris as to an abyss; there are gulfs which save. The

police know it also, and it is in Paris that they seek what they have

lost elsewhere. They sought the ex-mayor of M. sur M. Javert was

summoned to Paris to throw light on their researches. Javert had, in

fact, rendered powerful assistance in the recapture of Jean Valjean.

Javert’s zeal and intelligence on that occasion had been remarked by M.

Chabouillet, secretary of the Prefecture under Comte Anglès. M.

Chabouillet, who had, moreover, already been Javert’s patron, had the

inspector of M. sur M. attached to the police force of Paris. There

Javert rendered himself useful in divers and, though the word may seem

strange for such services, honorable manners.

He no longer thought of Jean Valjean,—the wolf of to-day causes these

dogs who are always on the chase to forget the wolf of yesterday,—when,

in December, 1823, he read a newspaper, he who never read newspapers;

but Javert, a monarchical man, had a desire to know the particulars of

the triumphal entry of the “Prince Generalissimo” into Bayonne. Just as

he was finishing the article, which interested him; a name, the name of

Jean Valjean, attracted his attention at the bottom of a page. The

paper announced that the convict Jean Valjean was dead, and published

the fact in such formal terms that Javert did not doubt it. He confined

himself to the remark, “That’s a good entry.” Then he threw aside the

paper, and thought no more about it.

Some time afterwards, it chanced that a police report was transmitted

from the prefecture of the Seine-et-Oise to the prefecture of police in

Paris, concerning the abduction of a child, which had taken place,

under peculiar circumstances, as it was said, in the commune of

Montfermeil. A little girl of seven or eight years of age, the report

said, who had been intrusted by her mother to an inn-keeper of that

neighborhood, had been stolen by a stranger; this child answered to the

name of Cosette, and was the daughter of a girl named Fantine, who had

died in the hospital, it was not known where or when.

This report came under Javert’s eye and set him to thinking.

The name of Fantine was well known to him. He remembered that Jean

Valjean had made him, Javert, burst into laughter, by asking him for a

respite of three days, for the purpose of going to fetch that

creature’s child. He recalled the fact that Jean Valjean had been

arrested in Paris at the very moment when he was stepping into the

coach for Montfermeil. Some signs had made him suspect at the time that

this was the second occasion of his entering that coach, and that he

had already, on the previous day, made an excursion to the neighborhood

of that village, for he had not been seen in the village itself. What

had he been intending to do in that region of Montfermeil? It could not

even be surmised. Javert understood it now. Fantine’s daughter was

there. Jean Valjean was going there in search of her. And now this

child had been stolen by a stranger! Who could that stranger be? Could

it be Jean Valjean? But Jean Valjean was dead. Javert, without saying

anything to anybody, took the coach from the \_Pewter Platter\_,

Cul-de-Sac de la Planchette, and made a trip to Montfermeil.

He expected to find a great deal of light on the subject there; he

found a great deal of obscurity.

For the first few days the Thénardiers had chattered in their rage. The

disappearance of the Lark had created a sensation in the village. He

immediately obtained numerous versions of the story, which ended in the

abduction of a child. Hence the police report. But their first vexation

having passed off, Thénardier, with his wonderful instinct, had very

quickly comprehended that it is never advisable to stir up the

prosecutor of the Crown, and that his complaints with regard to the

\_abduction\_ of Cosette would have as their first result to fix upon

himself, and upon many dark affairs which he had on hand, the

glittering eye of justice. The last thing that owls desire is to have a

candle brought to them. And in the first place, how explain the fifteen

hundred francs which he had received? He turned squarely round, put a

gag on his wife’s mouth, and feigned astonishment when the \_stolen

child\_ was mentioned to him. He understood nothing about it; no doubt

he had grumbled for awhile at having that dear little creature “taken

from him” so hastily; he should have liked to keep her two or three

days longer, out of tenderness; but her “grandfather” had come for her

in the most natural way in the world. He added the “grandfather,” which

produced a good effect. This was the story that Javert hit upon when he

arrived at Montfermeil. The grandfather caused Jean Valjean to vanish.

Nevertheless, Javert dropped a few questions, like plummets, into

Thénardier’s history. “Who was that grandfather? and what was his

name?” Thénardier replied with simplicity: “He is a wealthy farmer. I

saw his passport. I think his name was M. Guillaume Lambert.”

Lambert is a respectable and extremely reassuring name. Thereupon

Javert returned to Paris.

“Jean Valjean is certainly dead,” said he, “and I am a ninny.”

He had again begun to forget this history, when, in the course of

March, 1824, he heard of a singular personage who dwelt in the parish

of Saint-Médard and who had been surnamed “the mendicant who gives

alms.” This person, the story ran, was a man of means, whose name no

one knew exactly, and who lived alone with a little girl of eight

years, who knew nothing about herself, save that she had come from

Montfermeil. Montfermeil! that name was always coming up, and it made

Javert prick up his ears. An old beggar police spy, an ex-beadle, to

whom this person had given alms, added a few more details. This

gentleman of property was very shy,—never coming out except in the

evening, speaking to no one, except, occasionally to the poor, and

never allowing any one to approach him. He wore a horrible old yellow

frock-coat, which was worth many millions, being all wadded with

bank-bills. This piqued Javert’s curiosity in a decided manner. In

order to get a close look at this fantastic gentleman without alarming

him, he borrowed the beadle’s outfit for a day, and the place where the

old spy was in the habit of crouching every evening, whining orisons

through his nose, and playing the spy under cover of prayer.

“The suspected individual” did indeed approach Javert thus disguised,

and bestow alms on him. At that moment Javert raised his head, and the

shock which Jean Valjean received on recognizing Javert was equal to

the one received by Javert when he thought he recognized Jean Valjean.

However, the darkness might have misled him; Jean Valjean’s death was

official; Javert cherished very grave doubts; and when in doubt,

Javert, the man of scruples, never laid a finger on any one’s collar.

He followed his man to the Gorbeau house, and got “the old woman” to

talking, which was no difficult matter. The old woman confirmed the

fact regarding the coat lined with millions, and narrated to him the

episode of the thousand-franc bill. She had seen it! She had handled

it! Javert hired a room; that evening he installed himself in it. He

came and listened at the mysterious lodger’s door, hoping to catch the

sound of his voice, but Jean Valjean saw his candle through the

key-hole, and foiled the spy by keeping silent.

On the following day Jean Valjean decamped; but the noise made by the

fall of the five-franc piece was noticed by the old woman, who, hearing

the rattling of coin, suspected that he might be intending to leave,

and made haste to warn Javert. At night, when Jean Valjean came out,

Javert was waiting for him behind the trees of the boulevard with two

men.

Javert had demanded assistance at the Prefecture, but he had not

mentioned the name of the individual whom he hoped to seize; that was

his secret, and he had kept it for three reasons: in the first place,

because the slightest indiscretion might put Jean Valjean on the alert;

next, because, to lay hands on an ex-convict who had made his escape

and was reputed dead, on a criminal whom justice had formerly classed

forever as \_among malefactors of the most dangerous sort\_, was a

magnificent success which the old members of the Parisian police would

assuredly not leave to a newcomer like Javert, and he was afraid of

being deprived of his convict; and lastly, because Javert, being an

artist, had a taste for the unforeseen. He hated those well-heralded

successes which are talked of long in advance and have had the bloom

brushed off. He preferred to elaborate his masterpieces in the dark and

to unveil them suddenly at the last.

Javert had followed Jean Valjean from tree to tree, then from corner to

corner of the street, and had not lost sight of him for a single

instant; even at the moments when Jean Valjean believed himself to be

the most secure Javert’s eye had been on him. Why had not Javert

arrested Jean Valjean? Because he was still in doubt.

It must be remembered that at that epoch the police was not precisely

at its ease; the free press embarrassed it; several arbitrary arrests

denounced by the newspapers, had echoed even as far as the Chambers,

and had rendered the Prefecture timid. Interference with individual

liberty was a grave matter. The police agents were afraid of making a

mistake; the prefect laid the blame on them; a mistake meant dismissal.

The reader can imagine the effect which this brief paragraph,

reproduced by twenty newspapers, would have caused in Paris:

“Yesterday, an aged grandfather, with white hair, a respectable and

well-to-do gentleman, who was walking with his grandchild, aged eight,

was arrested and conducted to the agency of the Prefecture as an

escaped convict!”

Let us repeat in addition that Javert had scruples of his own;

injunctions of his conscience were added to the injunctions of the

prefect. He was really in doubt.

Jean Valjean turned his back on him and walked in the dark.

Sadness, uneasiness, anxiety, depression, this fresh misfortune of

being forced to flee by night, to seek a chance refuge in Paris for

Cosette and himself, the necessity of regulating his pace to the pace

of the child—all this, without his being aware of it, had altered Jean

Valjean’s walk, and impressed on his bearing such senility, that the

police themselves, incarnate in the person of Javert, might, and did in

fact, make a mistake. The impossibility of approaching too close, his

costume of an \_émigré\_ preceptor, the declaration of Thénardier which

made a grandfather of him, and, finally, the belief in his death in

prison, added still further to the uncertainty which gathered thick in

Javert’s mind.

For an instant it occurred to him to make an abrupt demand for his

papers; but if the man was not Jean Valjean, and if this man was not a

good, honest old fellow living on his income, he was probably some

merry blade deeply and cunningly implicated in the obscure web of

Parisian misdeeds, some chief of a dangerous band, who gave alms to

conceal his other talents, which was an old dodge. He had trusty

fellows, accomplices’ retreats in case of emergencies, in which he

would, no doubt, take refuge. All these turns which he was making

through the streets seemed to indicate that he was not a simple and

honest man. To arrest him too hastily would be “to kill the hen that

laid the golden eggs.” Where was the inconvenience in waiting? Javert

was very sure that he would not escape.

Thus he proceeded in a tolerably perplexed state of mind, putting to

himself a hundred questions about this enigmatical personage.

It was only quite late in the Rue de Pontoise, that, thanks to the

brilliant light thrown from a dram-shop, he decidedly recognized Jean

Valjean.

There are in this world two beings who give a profound start,—the

mother who recovers her child and the tiger who recovers his prey.

Javert gave that profound start.

As soon as he had positively recognized Jean Valjean, the formidable

convict, he perceived that there were only three of them, and he asked

for reinforcements at the police station of the Rue de Pontoise. One

puts on gloves before grasping a thorn cudgel.

This delay and the halt at the Carrefour Rollin to consult with his

agents came near causing him to lose the trail. He speedily divined,

however, that Jean Valjean would want to put the river between his

pursuers and himself. He bent his head and reflected like a blood-hound

who puts his nose to the ground to make sure that he is on the right

scent. Javert, with his powerful rectitude of instinct, went straight

to the bridge of Austerlitz. A word with the toll-keeper furnished him

with the information which he required: “Have you seen a man with a

little girl?” “I made him pay two sous,” replied the toll-keeper.

Javert reached the bridge in season to see Jean Valjean traverse the

small illuminated spot on the other side of the water, leading Cosette

by the hand. He saw him enter the Rue du Chemin-Vert-Saint-Antoine; he

remembered the Cul-de-Sac Genrot arranged there like a trap, and of the

sole exit of the Rue Droit-Mur into the Rue Petit-Picpus. \_He made sure

of his back burrows\_, as huntsmen say; he hastily despatched one of his

agents, by a roundabout way, to guard that issue. A patrol which was

returning to the Arsenal post having passed him, he made a requisition

on it, and caused it to accompany him. In such games soldiers are aces.

Moreover, the principle is, that in order to get the best of a wild

boar, one must employ the science of venery and plenty of dogs. These

combinations having been effected, feeling that Jean Valjean was caught

between the blind alley Genrot on the right, his agent on the left, and

himself, Javert, in the rear, he took a pinch of snuff.

Then he began the game. He experienced one ecstatic and infernal

moment; he allowed his man to go on ahead, knowing that he had him

safe, but desirous of postponing the moment of arrest as long as

possible, happy at the thought that he was taken and yet at seeing him

free, gloating over him with his gaze, with that voluptuousness of the

spider which allows the fly to flutter, and of the cat which lets the

mouse run. Claws and talons possess a monstrous sensuality,—the obscure

movements of the creature imprisoned in their pincers. What a delight

this strangling is!

Javert was enjoying himself. The meshes of his net were stoutly

knotted. He was sure of success; all he had to do now was to close his

hand.

Accompanied as he was, the very idea of resistance was impossible,

however vigorous, energetic, and desperate Jean Valjean might be.

[Illustration: Javert on the Hunt]

Javert advanced slowly, sounding, searching on his way all the nooks of

the street like so many pockets of thieves.

When he reached the centre of the web he found the fly no longer there.

His exasperation can be imagined.

He interrogated his sentinel of the Rues Droit-Mur and Petit-Picpus;

that agent, who had remained imperturbably at his post, had not seen

the man pass.

It sometimes happens that a stag is lost head and horns; that is to

say, he escapes although he has the pack on his very heels, and then

the oldest huntsmen know not what to say. Duvivier, Ligniville, and

Desprez halt short. In a discomfiture of this sort, Artonge exclaims,

“It was not a stag, but a sorcerer.” Javert would have liked to utter

the same cry.

His disappointment bordered for a moment on despair and rage.

It is certain that Napoleon made mistakes during the war with Russia,

that Alexander committed blunders in the war in India, that Cæsar made

mistakes in the war in Africa, that Cyrus was at fault in the war in

Scythia, and that Javert blundered in this campaign against Jean

Valjean. He was wrong, perhaps, in hesitating in his recognition of the

exconvict. The first glance should have sufficed him. He was wrong in

not arresting him purely and simply in the old building; he was wrong

in not arresting him when he positively recognized him in the Rue de

Pontoise. He was wrong in taking counsel with his auxiliaries in the

full light of the moon in the Carrefour Rollin. Advice is certainly

useful; it is a good thing to know and to interrogate those of the dogs

who deserve confidence; but the hunter cannot be too cautious when he

is chasing uneasy animals like the wolf and the convict. Javert, by

taking too much thought as to how he should set the bloodhounds of the

pack on the trail, alarmed the beast by giving him wind of the dart,

and so made him run. Above all, he was wrong in that after he had

picked up the scent again on the bridge of Austerlitz, he played that

formidable and puerile game of keeping such a man at the end of a

thread. He thought himself stronger than he was, and believed that he

could play at the game of the mouse and the lion. At the same time, he

reckoned himself as too weak, when he judged it necessary to obtain

reinforcement. Fatal precaution, waste of precious time! Javert

committed all these blunders, and nonetheless was one of the cleverest

and most correct spies that ever existed. He was, in the full force of

the term, what is called in venery a \_knowing dog\_. But what is there

that is perfect?

Great strategists have their eclipses.

The greatest follies are often composed, like the largest ropes, of a

multitude of strands. Take the cable thread by thread, take all the

petty determining motives separately, and you can break them one after

the other, and you say, “That is all there is of it!” Braid them, twist

them together; the result is enormous: it is Attila hesitating between

Marcian on the east and Valentinian on the west; it is Hannibal

tarrying at Capua; it is Danton falling asleep at Arcis-sur-Aube.

However that may be, even at the moment when he saw that Jean Valjean

had escaped him, Javert did not lose his head. Sure that the convict

who had broken his ban could not be far off, he established sentinels,

he organized traps and ambuscades, and beat the quarter all that night.

The first thing he saw was the disorder in the street lantern whose

rope had been cut. A precious sign which, however, led him astray,

since it caused him to turn all his researches in the direction of the

Cul-de-Sac Genrot. In this blind alley there were tolerably low walls

which abutted on gardens whose bounds adjoined the immense stretches of

waste land. Jean Valjean evidently must have fled in that direction.

The fact is, that had he penetrated a little further in the Cul-de-Sac

Genrot, he would probably have done so and have been lost. Javert

explored these gardens and these waste stretches as though he had been

hunting for a needle.

At daybreak he left two intelligent men on the outlook, and returned to

the Prefecture of Police, as much ashamed as a police spy who had been

captured by a robber might have been.

BOOK SIXTH—LE PETIT-PICPUS

CHAPTER I—NUMBER 62 RUE PETIT-PICPUS

Nothing, half a century ago, more resembled every other carriage gate

than the carriage gate of Number 62 Rue Petit-Picpus. This entrance,

which usually stood ajar in the most inviting fashion, permitted a view

of two things, neither of which have anything very funereal about

them,—a courtyard surrounded by walls hung with vines, and the face of

a lounging porter. Above the wall, at the bottom of the court, tall

trees were visible. When a ray of sunlight enlivened the courtyard,

when a glass of wine cheered up the porter, it was difficult to pass

Number 62 Little Picpus Street without carrying away a smiling

impression of it. Nevertheless, it was a sombre place of which one had

had a glimpse.

The threshold smiled; the house prayed and wept.

If one succeeded in passing the porter, which was not easy,—which was

even nearly impossible for every one, for there was an \_open sesame!\_

which it was necessary to know,—if, the porter once passed, one entered

a little vestibule on the right, on which opened a staircase shut in

between two walls and so narrow that only one person could ascend it at

a time, if one did not allow one’s self to be alarmed by a daubing of

canary yellow, with a dado of chocolate which clothed this staircase,

if one ventured to ascend it, one crossed a first landing, then a

second, and arrived on the first story at a corridor where the yellow

wash and the chocolate-hued plinth pursued one with a peaceable

persistency. Staircase and corridor were lighted by two beautiful

windows. The corridor took a turn and became dark. If one doubled this

cape, one arrived a few paces further on, in front of a door which was

all the more mysterious because it was not fastened. If one opened it,

one found one’s self in a little chamber about six feet square, tiled,

well-scrubbed, clean, cold, and hung with nankin paper with green

flowers, at fifteen sous the roll. A white, dull light fell from a

large window, with tiny panes, on the left, which usurped the whole

width of the room. One gazed about, but saw no one; one listened, one

heard neither a footstep nor a human murmur. The walls were bare, the

chamber was not furnished; there was not even a chair.

One looked again, and beheld on the wall facing the door a quadrangular

hole, about a foot square, with a grating of interlacing iron bars,

black, knotted, solid, which formed squares—I had almost said meshes—of

less than an inch and a half in diagonal length. The little green

flowers of the nankin paper ran in a calm and orderly manner to those

iron bars, without being startled or thrown into confusion by their

funereal contact. Supposing that a living being had been so wonderfully

thin as to essay an entrance or an exit through the square hole, this

grating would have prevented it. It did not allow the passage of the

body, but it did allow the passage of the eyes; that is to say, of the

mind. This seems to have occurred to them, for it had been re-enforced

by a sheet of tin inserted in the wall a little in the rear, and

pierced with a thousand holes more microscopic than the holes of a

strainer. At the bottom of this plate, an aperture had been pierced

exactly similar to the orifice of a letter box. A bit of tape attached

to a bell-wire hung at the right of the grated opening.

If the tape was pulled, a bell rang, and one heard a voice very near at

hand, which made one start.

“Who is there?” the voice demanded.

It was a woman’s voice, a gentle voice, so gentle that it was mournful.

Here, again, there was a magical word which it was necessary to know.

If one did not know it, the voice ceased, the wall became silent once

more, as though the terrified obscurity of the sepulchre had been on

the other side of it.

If one knew the password, the voice resumed, “Enter on the right.”

One then perceived on the right, facing the window, a glass door

surmounted by a frame glazed and painted gray. On raising the latch and

crossing the threshold, one experienced precisely the same impression

as when one enters at the theatre into a grated \_baignoire\_, before the

grating is lowered and the chandelier is lighted. One was, in fact, in

a sort of theatre-box, narrow, furnished with two old chairs, and a

much-frayed straw matting, sparely illuminated by the vague light from

the glass door; a regular box, with its front just of a height to lean

upon, bearing a tablet of black wood. This box was grated, only the

grating of it was not of gilded wood, as at the opera; it was a

monstrous lattice of iron bars, hideously interlaced and riveted to the

wall by enormous fastenings which resembled clenched fists.

The first minutes passed; when one’s eyes began to grow used to this

cellar-like half-twilight, one tried to pass the grating, but got no

further than six inches beyond it. There he encountered a barrier of

black shutters, re-enforced and fortified with transverse beams of wood

painted a gingerbread yellow. These shutters were divided into long,

narrow slats, and they masked the entire length of the grating. They

were always closed. At the expiration of a few moments one heard a

voice proceeding from behind these shutters, and saying:—

“I am here. What do you wish with me?”

It was a beloved, sometimes an adored, voice. No one was visible.

Hardly the sound of a breath was audible. It seemed as though it were a

spirit which had been evoked, that was speaking to you across the walls

of the tomb.

If one chanced to be within certain prescribed and very rare

conditions, the slat of one of the shutters opened opposite you; the

evoked spirit became an apparition. Behind the grating, behind the

shutter, one perceived so far as the grating permitted sight, a head,

of which only the mouth and the chin were visible; the rest was covered

with a black veil. One caught a glimpse of a black guimpe, and a form

that was barely defined, covered with a black shroud. That head spoke

with you, but did not look at you and never smiled at you.

The light which came from behind you was adjusted in such a manner that

you saw her in the white, and she saw you in the black. This light was

symbolical.

Nevertheless, your eyes plunged eagerly through that opening which was

made in that place shut off from all glances. A profound vagueness

enveloped that form clad in mourning. Your eyes searched that

vagueness, and sought to make out the surroundings of the apparition.

At the expiration of a very short time you discovered that you could

see nothing. What you beheld was night, emptiness, shadows, a wintry

mist mingled with a vapor from the tomb, a sort of terrible peace, a

silence from which you could gather nothing, not even sighs, a gloom in

which you could distinguish nothing, not even phantoms.

What you beheld was the interior of a cloister.

It was the interior of that severe and gloomy edifice which was called

the Convent of the Bernardines of the Perpetual Adoration. The box in

which you stood was the parlor. The first voice which had addressed you

was that of the portress who always sat motionless and silent, on the

other side of the wall, near the square opening, screened by the iron

grating and the plate with its thousand holes, as by a double visor.

The obscurity which bathed the grated box arose from the fact that the

parlor, which had a window on the side of the world, had none on the

side of the convent. Profane eyes must see nothing of that sacred

place.

Nevertheless, there was something beyond that shadow; there was a

light; there was life in the midst of that death. Although this was the

most strictly walled of all convents, we shall endeavor to make our way

into it, and to take the reader in, and to say, without transgressing

the proper bounds, things which story-tellers have never seen, and

have, therefore, never described.

CHAPTER II—THE OBEDIENCE OF MARTIN VERGA

This convent, which in 1824 had already existed for many a long year in

the Rue Petit-Picpus, was a community of Bernardines of the obedience

of Martin Verga.

These Bernardines were attached, in consequence, not to Clairvaux, like

the Bernardine monks, but to Cîteaux, like the Benedictine monks. In

other words, they were the subjects, not of Saint Bernard, but of Saint

Benoît.

Any one who has turned over old folios to any extent knows that Martin

Verga founded in 1425 a congregation of Bernardines-Benedictines, with

Salamanca for the head of the order, and Alcala as the branch

establishment.

This congregation had sent out branches throughout all the Catholic

countries of Europe.

There is nothing unusual in the Latin Church in these grafts of one

order on another. To mention only a single order of Saint-Benoît, which

is here in question: there are attached to this order, without counting

the obedience of Martin Verga, four congregations,—two in Italy,

Mont-Cassin and Sainte-Justine of Padua; two in France, Cluny and

Saint-Maur; and nine orders,—Vallombrosa, Granmont, the Célestins, the

Camaldules, the Carthusians, the Humiliés, the Olivateurs, the

Silvestrins, and lastly, Cîteaux; for Cîteaux itself, a trunk for other

orders, is only an offshoot of Saint-Benoît. Cîteaux dates from Saint

Robert, Abbé de Molesme, in the diocese of Langres, in 1098. Now it was

in 529 that the devil, having retired to the desert of Subiaco—he was

old—had he turned hermit?—was chased from the ancient temple of Apollo,

where he dwelt, by Saint-Benoît, then aged seventeen.

After the rule of the Carmelites, who go barefoot, wear a bit of willow

on their throats, and never sit down, the harshest rule is that of the

Bernardines-Benedictines of Martin Verga. They are clothed in black,

with a guimpe, which, in accordance with the express command of

Saint-Benoît, mounts to the chin. A robe of serge with large sleeves, a

large woollen veil, the guimpe which mounts to the chin cut square on

the breast, the band which descends over their brow to their eyes,—this

is their dress. All is black except the band, which is white. The

novices wear the same habit, but all in white. The professed nuns also

wear a rosary at their side.

The Bernardines-Benedictines of Martin Verga practise the Perpetual

Adoration, like the Benedictines called Ladies of the Holy Sacrament,

who, at the beginning of this century, had two houses in Paris,—one at

the Temple, the other in the Rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève. However, the

Bernardines-Benedictines of the Petit-Picpus, of whom we are speaking,

were a totally different order from the Ladies of the Holy Sacrament,

cloistered in the Rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève and at the Temple. There

were numerous differences in their rule; there were some in their

costume. The Bernardines-Benedictines of the Petit-Picpus wore the

black guimpe, and the Benedictines of the Holy Sacrament and of the Rue

Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève wore a white one, and had, besides, on their

breasts, a Holy Sacrament about three inches long, in silver gilt or

gilded copper. The nuns of the Petit-Picpus did not wear this Holy

Sacrament. The Perpetual Adoration, which was common to the house of

the Petit-Picpus and to the house of the Temple, leaves those two

orders perfectly distinct. Their only resemblance lies in this practice

of the Ladies of the Holy Sacrament and the Bernardines of Martin

Verga, just as there existed a similarity in the study and the

glorification of all the mysteries relating to the infancy, the life,

and death of Jesus Christ and the Virgin, between the two orders, which

were, nevertheless, widely separated, and on occasion even hostile. The

Oratory of Italy, established at Florence by Philip de Neri, and the

Oratory of France, established by Pierre de Bérulle. The Oratory of

France claimed the precedence, since Philip de Neri was only a saint,

while Bérulle was a cardinal.

Let us return to the harsh Spanish rule of Martin Verga.

The Bernardines-Benedictines of this obedience fast all the year round,

abstain from meat, fast in Lent and on many other days which are

peculiar to them, rise from their first sleep, from one to three

o’clock in the morning, to read their breviary and chant matins, sleep

in all seasons between serge sheets and on straw, make no use of the

bath, never light a fire, scourge themselves every Friday, observe the

rule of silence, speak to each other only during the recreation hours,

which are very brief, and wear drugget chemises for six months in the

year, from September 14th, which is the Exaltation of the Holy Cross,

until Easter. These six months are a modification: the rule says all

the year, but this drugget chemise, intolerable in the heat of summer,

produced fevers and nervous spasms. The use of it had to be restricted.

Even with this palliation, when the nuns put on this chemise on the

14th of September, they suffer from fever for three or four days.

Obedience, poverty, chastity, perseverance in their seclusion,—these

are their vows, which the rule greatly aggravates.

The prioress is elected for three years by the mothers, who are called

\_mères vocales\_ because they have a voice in the chapter. A prioress

can only be re-elected twice, which fixes the longest possible reign of

a prioress at nine years.

They never see the officiating priest, who is always hidden from them

by a serge curtain nine feet in height. During the sermon, when the

preacher is in the chapel, they drop their veils over their faces. They

must always speak low, walk with their eyes on the ground and their

heads bowed. One man only is allowed to enter the convent,—the

archbishop of the diocese.

There is really one other,—the gardener. But he is always an old man,

and, in order that he may always be alone in the garden, and that the

nuns may be warned to avoid him, a bell is attached to his knee.

Their submission to the prioress is absolute and passive. It is the

canonical subjection in the full force of its abnegation. As at the

voice of Christ, \_ut voci Christi\_, at a gesture, at the first sign,

\_ad nutum, ad primum signum\_, immediately, with cheerfulness, with

perseverance, with a certain blind obedience, \_prompte, hilariter,

perseveranter et cæca quadam obedientia\_, as the file in the hand of

the workman, \_quasi limam in manibus fabri\_, without power to read or

to write without express permission, \_legere vel scribere non

addiscerit sine expressa superioris licentia\_.

Each one of them in turn makes what they call \_reparation\_. The

reparation is the prayer for all the sins, for all the faults, for all

the dissensions, for all the violations, for all the iniquities, for

all the crimes committed on earth. For the space of twelve consecutive

hours, from four o’clock in the afternoon till four o’clock in the

morning, or from four o’clock in the morning until four o’clock in the

afternoon, the sister who is making \_reparation\_ remains on her knees

on the stone before the Holy Sacrament, with hands clasped, a rope

around her neck. When her fatigue becomes unendurable, she prostrates

herself flat on her face against the earth, with her arms outstretched

in the form of a cross; this is her only relief. In this attitude she

prays for all the guilty in the universe. This is great to sublimity.

As this act is performed in front of a post on which burns a candle, it

is called without distinction, \_to make reparation\_ or \_to be at the

post\_. The nuns even prefer, out of humility, this last expression,

which contains an idea of torture and abasement.

\_To make reparation\_ is a function in which the whole soul is absorbed.

The sister at the post would not turn round were a thunderbolt to fall

directly behind her.

Besides this, there is always a sister kneeling before the Holy

Sacrament. This station lasts an hour. They relieve each other like

soldiers on guard. This is the Perpetual Adoration.

The prioresses and the mothers almost always bear names stamped with

peculiar solemnity, recalling, not the saints and martyrs, but moments

in the life of Jesus Christ: as Mother Nativity, Mother Conception,

Mother Presentation, Mother Passion. But the names of saints are not

interdicted.

When one sees them, one never sees anything but their mouths.

All their teeth are yellow. No tooth-brush ever entered that convent.

Brushing one’s teeth is at the top of a ladder at whose bottom is the

loss of one’s soul.

They never say \_my\_. They possess nothing of their own, and they must

not attach themselves to anything. They call everything \_our\_; thus:

our veil, our chaplet; if they were speaking of their chemise, they

would say \_our chemise\_. Sometimes they grow attached to some petty

object,—to a book of hours, a relic, a medal that has been blessed. As

soon as they become aware that they are growing attached to this

object, they must give it up. They recall the words of Saint Thérèse,

to whom a great lady said, as she was on the point of entering her

order, “Permit me, mother, to send for a Bible to which I am greatly

attached.” “Ah, you are attached to something! In that case, do not

enter our order!”

Every person whatever is forbidden to shut herself up, to have \_a place

of her own, a chamber\_. They live with their cells open. When they

meet, one says, “Blessed and adored be the most Holy Sacrament of the

altar!” The other responds, “Forever.” The same ceremony when one taps

at the other’s door. Hardly has she touched the door when a soft voice

on the other side is heard to say hastily, “Forever!” Like all

practices, this becomes mechanical by force of habit; and one sometimes

says \_forever\_ before the other has had time to say the rather long

sentence, “Praised and adored be the most Holy Sacrament of the altar.”

Among the Visitandines the one who enters says: “Ave Maria,” and the

one whose cell is entered says, “Gratia plena.” It is their way of

saying good day, which is in fact full of grace.

At each hour of the day three supplementary strokes sound from the

church bell of the convent. At this signal prioress, vocal mothers,

professed nuns, lay-sisters, novices, postulants, interrupt what they

are saying, what they are doing, or what they are thinking, and all say

in unison if it is five o’clock, for instance, “At five o’clock and at

all hours praised and adored be the most Holy Sacrament of the altar!”

If it is eight o’clock, “At eight o’clock and at all hours!” and so on,

according to the hour.

This custom, the object of which is to break the thread of thought and

to lead it back constantly to God, exists in many communities; the

formula alone varies. Thus at The Infant Jesus they say, “At this hour

and at every hour may the love of Jesus kindle my heart!” The

Bernardines-Benedictines of Martin Verga, cloistered fifty years ago at

Petit-Picpus, chant the offices to a solemn psalmody, a pure Gregorian

chant, and always with full voice during the whole course of the

office. Everywhere in the missal where an asterisk occurs they pause,

and say in a low voice, “Jesus-Marie-Joseph.” For the office of the

dead they adopt a tone so low that the voices of women can hardly

descend to such a depth. The effect produced is striking and tragic.

The nuns of the Petit-Picpus had made a vault under their grand altar

for the burial of their community. \_The Government\_, as they say, does

not permit this vault to receive coffins so they leave the convent when

they die. This is an affliction to them, and causes them consternation

as an infraction of the rules.

They had obtained a mediocre consolation at best,—permission to be

interred at a special hour and in a special corner in the ancient

Vaugirard cemetery, which was made of land which had formerly belonged

to their community.

On Fridays the nuns hear high mass, vespers, and all the offices, as on

Sunday. They scrupulously observe in addition all the little festivals

unknown to people of the world, of which the Church of France was so

prodigal in the olden days, and of which it is still prodigal in Spain

and Italy. Their stations in the chapel are interminable. As for the

number and duration of their prayers we can convey no better idea of

them than by quoting the ingenuous remark of one of them: “The prayers

of the postulants are frightful, the prayers of the novices are still

worse, and the prayers of the professed nuns are still worse.”

Once a week the chapter assembles: the prioress presides; the vocal

mothers assist. Each sister kneels in turn on the stones, and confesses

aloud, in the presence of all, the faults and sins which she has

committed during the week. The vocal mothers consult after each

confession and inflict the penance aloud.

Besides this confession in a loud tone, for which all faults in the

least serious are reserved, they have for their venial offences what

they call the \_coulpe. To make one’s coulpe\_ means to prostrate one’s

self flat on one’s face during the office in front of the prioress

until the latter, who is never called anything but \_our mother\_,

notifies the culprit by a slight tap of her foot against the wood of

her stall that she can rise. The \_coulpe\_ or \_peccavi\_, is made for a

very small matter—a broken glass, a torn veil, an involuntary delay of

a few seconds at an office, a false note in church, etc.; this

suffices, and the \_coulpe\_ is made. The \_coulpe\_ is entirely

spontaneous; it is the culpable person herself (the word is

etymologically in its place here) who judges herself and inflicts it on

herself. On festival days and Sundays four mother precentors intone the

offices before a large reading-desk with four places. One day one of

the mother precentors intoned a psalm beginning with \_Ecce\_, and

instead of \_Ecce\_ she uttered aloud the three notes \_do si sol\_; for

this piece of absent-mindedness she underwent a \_coulpe\_ which lasted

during the whole service: what rendered the fault enormous was the fact

that the chapter had laughed.

When a nun is summoned to the parlor, even were it the prioress

herself, she drops her veil, as will be remembered, so that only her

mouth is visible.

The prioress alone can hold communication with strangers. The others

can see only their immediate family, and that very rarely. If, by

chance, an outsider presents herself to see a nun, or one whom she has

known and loved in the outer world, a regular series of negotiations is

required. If it is a woman, the authorization may sometimes be granted;

the nun comes, and they talk to her through the shutters, which are

opened only for a mother or sister. It is unnecessary to say that

permission is always refused to men.

Such is the rule of Saint-Benoît, aggravated by Martin Verga.

These nuns are not gay, rosy, and fresh, as the daughters of other

orders often are. They are pale and grave. Between 1825 and 1830 three

of them went mad.

CHAPTER III—AUSTERITIES

One is a postulant for two years at least, often for four; a novice for

four. It is rare that the definitive vows can be pronounced earlier

than the age of twenty-three or twenty-four years. The

Bernardines-Benedictines of Martin Verga do not admit widows to their

order.

In their cells, they deliver themselves up to many unknown macerations,

of which they must never speak.

On the day when a novice makes her profession, she is dressed in her

handsomest attire, she is crowned with white roses, her hair is brushed

until it shines, and curled. Then she prostrates herself; a great black

veil is thrown over her, and the office for the dead is sung. Then the

nuns separate into two files; one file passes close to her, saying in

plaintive accents, “Our sister is dead”; and the other file responds in

a voice of ecstasy, “Our sister is alive in Jesus Christ!”

At the epoch when this story takes place, a boarding-school was

attached to the convent—a boarding-school for young girls of noble and

mostly wealthy families, among whom could be remarked Mademoiselle de

Saint-Aulaire and de Bélissen, and an English girl bearing the

illustrious Catholic name of Talbot. These young girls, reared by these

nuns between four walls, grew up with a horror of the world and of the

age. One of them said to us one day, “The sight of the street pavement

made me shudder from head to foot.” They were dressed in blue, with a

white cap and a Holy Spirit of silver gilt or of copper on their

breast. On certain grand festival days, particularly Saint Martha’s

day, they were permitted, as a high favor and a supreme happiness, to

dress themselves as nuns and to carry out the offices and practice of

Saint-Benoît for a whole day. In the early days the nuns were in the

habit of lending them their black garments. This seemed profane, and

the prioress forbade it. Only the novices were permitted to lend. It is

remarkable that these performances, tolerated and encouraged, no doubt,

in the convent out of a secret spirit of proselytism and in order to

give these children a foretaste of the holy habit, were a genuine

happiness and a real recreation for the scholars. They simply amused

themselves with it. \_It was new; it gave them a change\_. Candid reasons

of childhood, which do not, however, succeed in making us worldlings

comprehend the felicity of holding a holy water sprinkler in one’s hand

and standing for hours together singing hard enough for four in front

of a reading-desk.

The pupils conformed, with the exception of the austerities, to all the

practices of the convent. There was a certain young woman who entered

the world, and who after many years of married life had not succeeded

in breaking herself of the habit of saying in great haste whenever any

one knocked at her door, “forever!” Like the nuns, the pupils saw their

relatives only in the parlor. Their very mothers did not obtain

permission to embrace them. The following illustrates to what a degree

severity on that point was carried. One day a young girl received a

visit from her mother, who was accompanied by a little sister three

years of age. The young girl wept, for she wished greatly to embrace

her sister. Impossible. She begged that, at least, the child might be

permitted to pass her little hand through the bars so that she could

kiss it. This was almost indignantly refused.

CHAPTER IV—GAYETIES

Nonetheless, these young girls filled this grave house with charming

souvenirs.

At certain hours childhood sparkled in that cloister. The recreation

hour struck. A door swung on its hinges. The birds said, “Good; here

come the children!” An irruption of youth inundated that garden

intersected with a cross like a shroud. Radiant faces, white foreheads,

innocent eyes, full of merry light, all sorts of auroras, were

scattered about amid these shadows. After the psalmodies, the bells,

the peals, and knells and offices, the sound of these little girls

burst forth on a sudden more sweetly than the noise of bees. The hive

of joy was opened, and each one brought her honey. They played, they

called to each other, they formed into groups, they ran about; pretty

little white teeth chattered in the corners; the veils superintended

the laughs from a distance, shades kept watch of the sunbeams, but what

mattered it? Still they beamed and laughed. Those four lugubrious walls

had their moment of dazzling brilliancy. They looked on, vaguely

blanched with the reflection of so much joy at this sweet swarming of

the hives. It was like a shower of roses falling athwart this house of

mourning. The young girls frolicked beneath the eyes of the nuns; the

gaze of impeccability does not embarrass innocence. Thanks to these

children, there was, among so many austere hours, one hour of

ingenuousness. The little ones skipped about; the elder ones danced. In

this cloister play was mingled with heaven. Nothing is so delightful

and so august as all these fresh, expanding young souls. Homer would

have come thither to laugh with Perrault; and there was in that black

garden, youth, health, noise, cries, giddiness, pleasure, happiness

enough to smooth out the wrinkles of all their ancestresses, those of

the epic as well as those of the fairy-tale, those of the throne as

well as those of the thatched cottage from Hecuba to la Mère-Grand.

In that house more than anywhere else, perhaps, arise those children’s

sayings which are so graceful and which evoke a smile that is full of

thoughtfulness. It was between those four gloomy walls that a child of

five years exclaimed one day: “Mother! one of the big girls has just

told me that I have only nine years and ten months longer to remain

here. What happiness!”

It was here, too, that this memorable dialogue took place:—

\_A Vocal Mother\_. Why are you weeping, my child?

\_The child\_ (aged six). I told Alix that I knew my French history. She

says that I do not know it, but I do.

\_Alix\_, the big girl (aged nine). No; she does not know it.

\_The Mother\_. How is that, my child?

\_Alix\_. She told me to open the book at random and to ask her any

question in the book, and she would answer it.

“Well?”

“She did not answer it.”

“Let us see about it. What did you ask her?”

“I opened the book at random, as she proposed, and I put the first

question that I came across.”

“And what was the question?”

“It was, ‘What happened after that?’”

It was there that that profound remark was made anent a rather greedy

paroquet which belonged to a lady boarder:—

“How well bred! it eats the top of the slice of bread and butter just

like a person!”

It was on one of the flagstones of this cloister that there was once

picked up a confession which had been written out in advance, in order

that she might not forget it, by a sinner of seven years:—

“Father, I accuse myself of having been avaricious.

“Father, I accuse myself of having been an adulteress.

“Father, I accuse myself of having raised my eyes to the gentlemen.”

It was on one of the turf benches of this garden that a rosy mouth six

years of age improvised the following tale, which was listened to by

blue eyes aged four and five years:—

“There were three little cocks who owned a country where there were a

great many flowers. They plucked the flowers and put them in their

pockets. After that they plucked the leaves and put them in their

playthings. There was a wolf in that country; there was a great deal of

forest; and the wolf was in the forest; and he ate the little cocks.”

And this other poem:—

“There came a blow with a stick.

“It was Punchinello who bestowed it on the cat.

“It was not good for her; it hurt her.

“Then a lady put Punchinello in prison.”

It was there that a little abandoned child, a foundling whom the

convent was bringing up out of charity, uttered this sweet and

heart-breaking saying. She heard the others talking of their mothers,

and she murmured in her corner:—

“As for me, my mother was not there when I was born!”

There was a stout portress who could always be seen hurrying through

the corridors with her bunch of keys, and whose name was Sister Agatha.

The \_big big girls\_—those over ten years of age—called her

\_Agathocles\_.

The refectory, a large apartment of an oblong square form, which

received no light except through a vaulted cloister on a level with the

garden, was dark and damp, and, as the children say, full of beasts.

All the places round about furnished their contingent of insects.

Each of its four corners had received, in the language of the pupils, a

special and expressive name. There was Spider corner, Caterpillar

corner, Wood-louse corner, and Cricket corner.

Cricket corner was near the kitchen and was highly esteemed. It was not

so cold there as elsewhere. From the refectory the names had passed to

the boarding-school, and there served as in the old College Mazarin to

distinguish four nations. Every pupil belonged to one of these four

nations according to the corner of the refectory in which she sat at

meals. One day Monseigneur the Archbishop while making his pastoral

visit saw a pretty little rosy girl with beautiful golden hair enter

the class-room through which he was passing.

He inquired of another pupil, a charming brunette with rosy cheeks, who

stood near him:—

“Who is that?”

“She is a spider, Monseigneur.”

“Bah! And that one yonder?”

“She is a cricket.”

“And that one?”

“She is a caterpillar.”

“Really! and yourself?”

“I am a wood-louse, Monseigneur.”

Every house of this sort has its own peculiarities. At the beginning of

this century Écouen was one of those strict and graceful places where

young girls pass their childhood in a shadow that is almost august. At

Écouen, in order to take rank in the procession of the Holy Sacrament,

a distinction was made between virgins and florists. There were also

the “dais” and the “censors,”—the first who held the cords of the dais,

and the others who carried incense before the Holy Sacrament. The

flowers belonged by right to the florists. Four “virgins” walked in

advance. On the morning of that great day it was no rare thing to hear

the question put in the dormitory, “Who is a virgin?”

Madame Campan used to quote this saying of a “little one” of seven

years, to a “big girl” of sixteen, who took the head of the procession,

while she, the little one, remained at the rear, “You are a virgin, but

I am not.”

CHAPTER V—DISTRACTIONS

Above the door of the refectory this prayer, which was called the

\_white Paternoster\_, and which possessed the property of bearing people

straight to paradise, was inscribed in large black letters:—

“Little white Paternoster, which God made, which God said, which God

placed in paradise. In the evening, when I went to bed, I found three

angels sitting on my bed, one at the foot, two at the head, the good

Virgin Mary in the middle, who told me to lie down without hesitation.

The good God is my father, the good Virgin is my mother, the three

apostles are my brothers, the three virgins are my sisters. The shirt

in which God was born envelopes my body; Saint Margaret’s cross is

written on my breast. Madame the Virgin was walking through the

meadows, weeping for God, when she met M. Saint John. ‘Monsieur Saint

John, whence come you?’ ‘I come from \_Ave Salus\_.’ ‘You have not seen

the good God; where is he?’ ‘He is on the tree of the Cross, his feet

hanging, his hands nailed, a little cap of white thorns on his head.’

Whoever shall say this thrice at eventide, thrice in the morning, shall

win paradise at the last.”

In 1827 this characteristic orison had disappeared from the wall under

a triple coating of daubing paint. At the present time it is finally

disappearing from the memories of several who were young girls then,

and who are old women now.

A large crucifix fastened to the wall completed the decoration of this

refectory, whose only door, as we think we have mentioned, opened on

the garden. Two narrow tables, each flanked by two wooden benches,

formed two long parallel lines from one end to the other of the

refectory. The walls were white, the tables were black; these two

mourning colors constitute the only variety in convents. The meals were

plain, and the food of the children themselves severe. A single dish of

meat and vegetables combined, or salt fish—such was their luxury. This

meagre fare, which was reserved for the pupils alone, was,

nevertheless, an exception. The children ate in silence, under the eye

of the mother whose turn it was, who, if a fly took a notion to fly or

to hum against the rule, opened and shut a wooden book from time to

time. This silence was seasoned with the lives of the saints, read

aloud from a little pulpit with a desk, which was situated at the foot

of the crucifix. The reader was one of the big girls, in weekly turn.

At regular distances, on the bare tables, there were large, varnished

bowls in which the pupils washed their own silver cups and knives and

forks, and into which they sometimes threw some scrap of tough meat or

spoiled fish; this was punished. These bowls were called \_ronds d’eau\_.

The child who broke the silence “made a cross with her tongue.” Where?

On the ground. She licked the pavement. The dust, that end of all joys,

was charged with the chastisement of those poor little rose-leaves

which had been guilty of chirping.

There was in the convent a book which has never been printed except as

a \_unique copy\_, and which it is forbidden to read. It is the rule of

Saint-Benoît. An arcanum which no profane eye must penetrate. \_Nemo

regulas, seu constitutiones nostras, externis communicabit\_.

The pupils one day succeeded in getting possession of this book, and

set to reading it with avidity, a reading which was often interrupted

by the fear of being caught, which caused them to close the volume

precipitately.

From the great danger thus incurred they derived but a very moderate

amount of pleasure. The most “interesting thing” they found were some

unintelligible pages about the sins of young boys.

They played in an alley of the garden bordered with a few shabby

fruit-trees. In spite of the extreme surveillance and the severity of

the punishments administered, when the wind had shaken the trees, they

sometimes succeeded in picking up a green apple or a spoiled apricot or

an inhabited pear on the sly. I will now cede the privilege of speech

to a letter which lies before me, a letter written five and twenty

years ago by an old pupil, now Madame la Duchesse de ——, one of the

most elegant women in Paris. I quote literally: “One hides one’s pear

or one’s apple as best one may. When one goes upstairs to put the veil

on the bed before supper, one stuffs them under one’s pillow and at

night one eats them in bed, and when one cannot do that, one eats them

in the closet.” That was one of their greatest luxuries.

Once—it was at the epoch of the visit from the archbishop to the

convent—one of the young girls, Mademoiselle Bouchard, who was

connected with the Montmorency family, laid a wager that she would ask

for a day’s leave of absence—an enormity in so austere a community. The

wager was accepted, but not one of those who bet believed that she

would do it. When the moment came, as the archbishop was passing in

front of the pupils, Mademoiselle Bouchard, to the indescribable terror

of her companions, stepped out of the ranks, and said, “Monseigneur, a

day’s leave of absence.” Mademoiselle Bouchard was tall, blooming, with

the prettiest little rosy face in the world. M. de Quélen smiled and

said, “What, my dear child, a day’s leave of absence! Three days if you

like. I grant you three days.” The prioress could do nothing; the

archbishop had spoken. Horror of the convent, but joy of the pupil. The

effect may be imagined.

This stern cloister was not so well walled off, however, but that the

life of the passions of the outside world, drama, and even romance, did

not make their way in. To prove this, we will confine ourselves to

recording here and to briefly mentioning a real and incontestable fact,

which, however, bears no reference in itself to, and is not connected

by any thread whatever with the story which we are relating. We mention

the fact for the sake of completing the physiognomy of the convent in

the reader’s mind.

About this time there was in the convent a mysterious person who was

not a nun, who was treated with great respect, and who was addressed as

\_Madame Albertine\_. Nothing was known about her, save that she was mad,

and that in the world she passed for dead. Beneath this history it was

said there lay the arrangements of fortune necessary for a great

marriage.

This woman, hardly thirty years of age, of dark complexion and

tolerably pretty, had a vague look in her large black eyes. Could she

see? There was some doubt about this. She glided rather than walked,

she never spoke; it was not quite known whether she breathed. Her

nostrils were livid and pinched as after yielding up their last sigh.

To touch her hand was like touching snow. She possessed a strange

spectral grace. Wherever she entered, people felt cold. One day a

sister, on seeing her pass, said to another sister, “She passes for a

dead woman.” “Perhaps she is one,” replied the other.

A hundred tales were told of Madame Albertine. This arose from the

eternal curiosity of the pupils. In the chapel there was a gallery

called \_L’Œil de Bœuf\_. It was in this gallery, which had only a

circular bay, an \_œil de bœuf\_, that Madame Albertine listened to the

offices. She always occupied it alone because this gallery, being on

the level of the first story, the preacher or the officiating priest

could be seen, which was interdicted to the nuns. One day the pulpit

was occupied by a young priest of high rank, M. Le Duc de Rohan, peer

of France, officer of the Red Musketeers in 1815 when he was Prince de

Léon, and who died afterward, in 1830, as cardinal and Archbishop of

Besançon. It was the first time that M. de Rohan had preached at the

Petit-Picpus convent. Madame Albertine usually preserved perfect

calmness and complete immobility during the sermons and services. That

day, as soon as she caught sight of M. de Rohan, she half rose, and

said, in a loud voice, amid the silence of the chapel, “Ah! Auguste!”

The whole community turned their heads in amazement, the preacher

raised his eyes, but Madame Albertine had relapsed into her immobility.

A breath from the outer world, a flash of life, had passed for an

instant across that cold and lifeless face and had then vanished, and

the mad woman had become a corpse again.

Those two words, however, had set every one in the convent who had the

privilege of speech to chattering. How many things were contained in

that “Ah! Auguste!” what revelations! M. de Rohan’s name really was

Auguste. It was evident that Madame Albertine belonged to the very

highest society, since she knew M. de Rohan, and that her own rank

there was of the highest, since she spoke thus familiarly of so great a

lord, and that there existed between them some connection, of

relationship, perhaps, but a very close one in any case, since she knew

his “pet name.”

Two very severe duchesses, Mesdames de Choiseul and de Sérent, often

visited the community, whither they penetrated, no doubt, in virtue of

the privilege \_Magnates mulieres\_, and caused great consternation in

the boarding-school. When these two old ladies passed by, all the poor

young girls trembled and dropped their eyes.

Moreover, M. de Rohan, quite unknown to himself, was an object of

attention to the school-girls. At that epoch he had just been made,

while waiting for the episcopate, vicar-general of the Archbishop of

Paris. It was one of his habits to come tolerably often to celebrate

the offices in the chapel of the nuns of the Petit-Picpus. Not one of

the young recluses could see him, because of the serge curtain, but he

had a sweet and rather shrill voice, which they had come to know and to

distinguish. He had been a mousquetaire, and then, he was said to be

very coquettish, that his handsome brown hair was very well dressed in

a roll around his head, and that he had a broad girdle of magnificent

moire, and that his black cassock was of the most elegant cut in the

world. He held a great place in all these imaginations of sixteen

years.

Not a sound from without made its way into the convent. But there was

one year when the sound of a flute penetrated thither. This was an

event, and the girls who were at school there at the time still recall

it.

It was a flute which was played in the neighborhood. This flute always

played the same air, an air which is very far away nowadays,—“My

Zétulbé, come reign o’er my soul,”—and it was heard two or three times

a day. The young girls passed hours in listening to it, the vocal

mothers were upset by it, brains were busy, punishments descended in

showers. This lasted for several months. The girls were all more or

less in love with the unknown musician. Each one dreamed that she was

Zétulbé. The sound of the flute proceeded from the direction of the Rue

Droit-Mur; and they would have given anything, compromised everything,

attempted anything for the sake of seeing, of catching a glance, if

only for a second, of the “young man” who played that flute so

deliciously, and who, no doubt, played on all these souls at the same

time. There were some who made their escape by a back door, and

ascended to the third story on the Rue Droit-Mur side, in order to

attempt to catch a glimpse through the gaps. Impossible! One even went

so far as to thrust her arm through the grating, and to wave her white

handkerchief. Two were still bolder. They found means to climb on a

roof, and risked their lives there, and succeeded at last in seeing

“the young man.” He was an old \_émigré\_ gentleman, blind and penniless,

who was playing his flute in his attic, in order to pass the time.

CHAPTER VI—THE LITTLE CONVENT

In this enclosure of the Petit-Picpus there were three perfectly

distinct buildings,—the Great Convent, inhabited by the nuns, the

Boarding-school, where the scholars were lodged; and lastly, what was

called the Little Convent. It was a building with a garden, in which

lived all sorts of aged nuns of various orders, the relics of cloisters

destroyed in the Revolution; a reunion of all the black, gray, and

white medleys of all communities and all possible varieties; what might

be called, if such a coupling of words is permissible, a sort of

harlequin convent.

When the Empire was established, all these poor old dispersed and

exiled women had been accorded permission to come and take shelter

under the wings of the Bernardines-Benedictines. The government paid

them a small pension, the ladies of the Petit-Picpus received them

cordially. It was a singular pell-mell. Each followed her own rule.

Sometimes the pupils of the boarding-school were allowed, as a great

recreation, to pay them a visit; the result is, that all those young

memories have retained among other souvenirs that of Mother

Sainte-Bazile, Mother Sainte-Scolastique, and Mother Jacob.

One of these refugees found herself almost at home. She was a nun of

Sainte-Aure, the only one of her order who had survived. The ancient

convent of the ladies of Sainte-Aure occupied, at the beginning of the

eighteenth century, this very house of the Petit-Picpus, which belonged

later to the Benedictines of Martin Verga. This holy woman, too poor to

wear the magnificent habit of her order, which was a white robe with a

scarlet scapulary, had piously put it on a little manikin, which she

exhibited with complacency and which she bequeathed to the house at her

death. In 1824, only one nun of this order remained; to-day, there

remains only a doll.

In addition to these worthy mothers, some old society women had

obtained permission of the prioress, like Madame Albertine, to retire

into the Little Convent. Among the number were Madame Beaufort

d’Hautpoul and Marquise Dufresne. Another was never known in the

convent except by the formidable noise which she made when she blew her

nose. The pupils called her Madame Vacarmini (hubbub).

About 1820 or 1821, Madame de Genlis, who was at that time editing a

little periodical publication called \_l’Intrépide\_, asked to be allowed

to enter the convent of the Petit-Picpus as lady resident. The Duc

d’Orléans recommended her. Uproar in the hive; the vocal-mothers were

all in a flutter; Madame de Genlis had made romances. But she declared

that she was the first to detest them, and then, she had reached her

fierce stage of devotion. With the aid of God, and of the Prince, she

entered. She departed at the end of six or eight months, alleging as a

reason, that there was no shade in the garden. The nuns were delighted.

Although very old, she still played the harp, and did it very well.

When she went away she left her mark in her cell. Madame de Genlis was

superstitious and a Latinist. These two words furnish a tolerably good

profile of her. A few years ago, there were still to be seen, pasted in

the inside of a little cupboard in her cell in which she locked up her

silverware and her jewels, these five lines in Latin, written with her

own hand in red ink on yellow paper, and which, in her opinion,

possessed the property of frightening away robbers:—

Imparibus meritis pendent tria corpora ramis:

Dismas et Gesmas, media est divina potestas;

Alta petit Dismas, infelix, infima, Gesmas;

Nos et res nostras conservet summa potestas.

Hos versus dicas, ne tu furto tua perdas.15

These verses in sixth century Latin raise the question whether the two

thieves of Calvary were named, as is commonly believed, Dismas and

Gestas, or Dismas and Gesmas. This orthography might have confounded

the pretensions put forward in the last century by the Vicomte de

Gestas, of a descent from the wicked thief. However, the useful virtue

attached to these verses forms an article of faith in the order of the

Hospitallers.

The church of the house, constructed in such a manner as to separate

the Great Convent from the Boarding-school like a veritable

intrenchment, was, of course, common to the Boarding-school, the Great

Convent, and the Little Convent. The public was even admitted by a sort

of lazaretto entrance on the street. But all was so arranged, that none

of the inhabitants of the cloister could see a face from the outside

world. Suppose a church whose choir is grasped in a gigantic hand, and

folded in such a manner as to form, not, as in ordinary churches, a

prolongation behind the altar, but a sort of hall, or obscure cellar,

to the right of the officiating priest; suppose this hall to be shut

off by a curtain seven feet in height, of which we have already spoken;

in the shadow of that curtain, pile up on wooden stalls the nuns in the

choir on the left, the school-girls on the right, the lay-sisters and

the novices at the bottom, and you will have some idea of the nuns of

the Petit-Picpus assisting at divine service. That cavern, which was

called the choir, communicated with the cloister by a lobby. The church

was lighted from the garden. When the nuns were present at services

where their rule enjoined silence, the public was warned of their

presence only by the folding seats of the stalls noisily rising and

falling.

CHAPTER VII—SOME SILHOUETTES OF THIS DARKNESS

During the six years which separate 1819 from 1825, the prioress of the

Petit-Picpus was Mademoiselle de Blemeur, whose name, in religion, was

Mother Innocente. She came of the family of Marguerite de Blemeur,

author of \_Lives of the Saints of the Order of Saint-Benoît\_. She had

been re-elected. She was a woman about sixty years of age, short,

thick, “singing like a cracked pot,” says the letter which we have

already quoted; an excellent woman, moreover, and the only merry one in

the whole convent, and for that reason adored. She was learned,

erudite, wise, competent, curiously proficient in history, crammed with

Latin, stuffed with Greek, full of Hebrew, and more of a Benedictine

monk than a Benedictine nun.

The sub-prioress was an old Spanish nun, Mother Cineres, who was almost

blind.

The most esteemed among the vocal mothers were Mother Sainte-Honorine;

the treasurer, Mother Sainte-Gertrude, the chief mistress of the

novices; Mother-Saint-Ange, the assistant mistress; Mother

Annonciation, the sacristan; Mother Saint-Augustin, the nurse, the only

one in the convent who was malicious; then Mother Sainte-Mechtilde

(Mademoiselle Gauvain), very young and with a beautiful voice; Mother

des Anges (Mademoiselle Drouet), who had been in the convent of the

Filles-Dieu, and in the convent du Trésor, between Gisors and Magny;

Mother Saint-Joseph (Mademoiselle de Cogolludo), Mother Sainte-Adélaide

(Mademoiselle d’Auverney), Mother Miséricorde (Mademoiselle de

Cifuentes, who could not resist austerities), Mother Compassion

(Mademoiselle de la Miltière, received at the age of sixty in defiance

of the rule, and very wealthy); Mother Providence (Mademoiselle de

Laudinière), Mother Présentation (Mademoiselle de Siguenza), who was

prioress in 1847; and finally, Mother Sainte-Céligne (sister of the

sculptor Ceracchi), who went mad; Mother Sainte-Chantal (Mademoiselle

de Suzon), who went mad.

There was also, among the prettiest of them, a charming girl of three

and twenty, who was from the Isle de Bourbon, a descendant of the

Chevalier Roze, whose name had been Mademoiselle Roze, and who was

called Mother Assumption.

Mother Sainte-Mechtilde, intrusted with the singing and the choir, was

fond of making use of the pupils in this quarter. She usually took a

complete scale of them, that is to say, seven, from ten to sixteen

years of age, inclusive, of assorted voices and sizes, whom she made

sing standing, drawn up in a line, side by side, according to age, from

the smallest to the largest. This presented to the eye, something in

the nature of a reed-pipe of young girls, a sort of living Pan-pipe

made of angels.

Those of the lay-sisters whom the scholars loved most were Sister

Euphrasie, Sister Sainte-Marguérite, Sister Sainte-Marthe, who was in

her dotage, and Sister Sainte-Michel, whose long nose made them laugh.

All these women were gentle with the children. The nuns were severe

only towards themselves. No fire was lighted except in the school, and

the food was choice compared to that in the convent. Moreover, they

lavished a thousand cares on their scholars. Only, when a child passed

near a nun and addressed her, the nun never replied.

This rule of silence had had this effect, that throughout the whole

convent, speech had been withdrawn from human creatures, and bestowed

on inanimate objects. Now it was the church-bell which spoke, now it

was the gardener’s bell. A very sonorous bell, placed beside the

portress, and which was audible throughout the house, indicated by its

varied peals, which formed a sort of acoustic telegraph, all the

actions of material life which were to be performed, and summoned to

the parlor, in case of need, such or such an inhabitant of the house.

Each person and each thing had its own peal. The prioress had one and

one, the sub-prioress one and two. Six-five announced lessons, so that

the pupils never said “to go to lessons,” but “to go to six-five.”

Four-four was Madame de Genlis’s signal. It was very often heard.

“C’est le diable a quatre,”—it’s the very deuce—said the uncharitable.

Tennine strokes announced a great event. It was the opening of \_the

door of seclusion\_, a frightful sheet of iron bristling with bolts

which only turned on its hinges in the presence of the archbishop.

With the exception of the archbishop and the gardener, no man entered

the convent, as we have already said. The schoolgirls saw two others:

one, the chaplain, the Abbé Banés, old and ugly, whom they were

permitted to contemplate in the choir, through a grating; the other the

drawing-master, M. Ansiaux, whom the letter, of which we have perused a

few lines, calls \_M. Anciot\_, and describes as \_a frightful old

hunchback\_.

It will be seen that all these men were carefully chosen.

Such was this curious house.

CHAPTER VIII—POST CORDA LAPIDES

After having sketched its moral face, it will not prove unprofitable to

point out, in a few words, its material configuration. The reader

already has some idea of it.

The convent of the Petit-Picpus-Sainte-Antoine filled almost the whole

of the vast trapezium which resulted from the intersection of the Rue

Polonceau, the Rue Droit-Mur, the Rue Petit-Picpus, and the unused

lane, called Rue Aumarais on old plans. These four streets surrounded

this trapezium like a moat. The convent was composed of several

buildings and a garden. The principal building, taken in its entirety,

was a juxtaposition of hybrid constructions which, viewed from a

bird’s-eye view, outlined, with considerable exactness, a gibbet laid

flat on the ground. The main arm of the gibbet occupied the whole of

the fragment of the Rue Droit-Mur comprised between the Rue

Petit-Picpus and the Rue Polonceau; the lesser arm was a lofty, gray,

severe grated façade which faced the Rue Petit-Picpus; the carriage

entrance No. 62 marked its extremity. Towards the centre of this façade

was a low, arched door, whitened with dust and ashes, where the spiders

wove their webs, and which was open only for an hour or two on Sundays,

and on rare occasions, when the coffin of a nun left the convent. This

was the public entrance of the church. The elbow of the gibbet was a

square hall which was used as the servants’ hall, and which the nuns

called \_the buttery\_. In the main arm were the cells of the mothers,

the sisters, and the novices. In the lesser arm lay the kitchens, the

refectory, backed up by the cloisters and the church. Between the door

No. 62 and the corner of the closed Aumarais Lane, was the school,

which was not visible from without. The remainder of the trapezium

formed the garden, which was much lower than the level of the Rue

Polonceau, which caused the walls to be very much higher on the inside

than on the outside. The garden, which was slightly arched, had in its

centre, on the summit of a hillock, a fine pointed and conical

fir-tree, whence ran, as from the peaked boss of a shield, four grand

alleys, and, ranged by twos in between the branchings of these, eight

small ones, so that, if the enclosure had been circular, the

geometrical plan of the alleys would have resembled a cross superposed

on a wheel. As the alleys all ended in the very irregular walls of the

garden, they were of unequal length. They were bordered with currant

bushes. At the bottom, an alley of tall poplars ran from the ruins of

the old convent, which was at the angle of the Rue Droit-Mur to the

house of the Little Convent, which was at the angle of the Aumarais

Lane. In front of the Little Convent was what was called the little

garden. To this whole, let the reader add a courtyard, all sorts of

varied angles formed by the interior buildings, prison walls, the long

black line of roofs which bordered the other side of the Rue Polonceau

for its sole perspective and neighborhood, and he will be able to form

for himself a complete image of what the house of the Bernardines of

the Petit-Picpus was forty years ago. This holy house had been built on

the precise site of a famous tennis-ground of the fourteenth to the

sixteenth century, which was called the “tennis-ground of the eleven

thousand devils.”

All these streets, moreover, were more ancient than Paris. These names,

Droit-Mur and Aumarais, are very ancient; the streets which bear them

are very much more ancient still. Aumarais Lane was called Maugout

Lane; the Rue Droit-Mur was called the Rue des Églantiers, for God

opened flowers before man cut stones.

CHAPTER IX—A CENTURY UNDER A GUIMPE

Since we are engaged in giving details as to what the convent of the

Petit-Picpus was in former times, and since we have ventured to open a

window on that discreet retreat, the reader will permit us one other

little digression, utterly foreign to this book, but characteristic and

useful, since it shows that the cloister even has its original figures.

In the Little Convent there was a centenarian who came from the Abbey

of Fontevrault. She had even been in society before the Revolution. She

talked a great deal of M. de Miromesnil, Keeper of the Seals under

Louis XVI. and of a Presidentess Duplat, with whom she had been very

intimate. It was her pleasure and her vanity to drag in these names on

every pretext. She told wonders of the Abbey of Fontevrault,—that it

was like a city, and that there were streets in the monastery.

She talked with a Picard accent which amused the pupils. Every year,

she solemnly renewed her vows, and at the moment of taking the oath,

she said to the priest, “Monseigneur Saint-François gave it to

Monseigneur Saint-Julien, Monseigneur Saint-Julien gave it to

Monseigneur Saint-Eusebius, Monseigneur Saint-Eusebius gave it to

Monseigneur Saint-Procopius, etc., etc.; and thus I give it to you,

father.” And the school-girls would begin to laugh, not in their

sleeves, but under their veils; charming little stifled laughs which

made the vocal mothers frown.

On another occasion, the centenarian was telling stories. She said that

\_in her youth the Bernardine monks were every whit as good as the

mousquetaires\_. It was a century which spoke through her, but it was

the eighteenth century. She told about the custom of the four wines,

which existed before the Revolution in Champagne and Bourgogne. When a

great personage, a marshal of France, a prince, a duke, and a peer,

traversed a town in Burgundy or Champagne, the city fathers came out to

harangue him and presented him with four silver gondolas into which

they had poured four different sorts of wine. On the first goblet this

inscription could be read, \_monkey wine\_; on the second, \_lion wine\_;

on the third, \_sheep wine\_; on the fourth, \_hog wine\_. These four

legends express the four stages descended by the drunkard; the first,

intoxication, which enlivens; the second, that which irritates; the

third, that which dulls; and the fourth, that which brutalizes.

In a cupboard, under lock and key, she kept a mysterious object of

which she thought a great deal. The rule of Fontevrault did not forbid

this. She would not show this object to anyone. She shut herself up,

which her rule allowed her to do, and hid herself, every time that she

desired to contemplate it. If she heard a footstep in the corridor, she

closed the cupboard again as hastily as it was possible with her aged

hands. As soon as it was mentioned to her, she became silent, she who

was so fond of talking. The most curious were baffled by her silence

and the most tenacious by her obstinacy. Thus it furnished a subject of

comment for all those who were unoccupied or bored in the convent. What

could that treasure of the centenarian be, which was so precious and so

secret? Some holy book, no doubt? Some unique chaplet? Some authentic

relic? They lost themselves in conjectures. When the poor old woman

died, they rushed to her cupboard more hastily than was fitting,

perhaps, and opened it. They found the object beneath a triple linen

cloth, like some consecrated paten. It was a Faenza platter

representing little Loves flitting away pursued by apothecary lads

armed with enormous syringes. The chase abounds in grimaces and in

comical postures. One of the charming little Loves is already fairly

spitted. He is resisting, fluttering his tiny wings, and still making

an effort to fly, but the dancer is laughing with a satanical air.

Moral: Love conquered by the colic. This platter, which is very

curious, and which had, possibly, the honor of furnishing Molière with

an idea, was still in existence in September, 1845; it was for sale by

a bric-à-brac merchant in the Boulevard Beaumarchais.

This good old woman would not receive any visits from outside

\_because\_, said she, the \_parlor is too gloomy\_.

CHAPTER X—ORIGIN OF THE PERPETUAL ADORATION

However, this almost sepulchral parlor, of which we have sought to

convey an idea, is a purely local trait which is not reproduced with

the same severity in other convents. At the convent of the Rue du

Temple, in particular, which belonged, in truth, to another order, the

black shutters were replaced by brown curtains, and the parlor itself

was a salon with a polished wood floor, whose windows were draped in

white muslin curtains and whose walls admitted all sorts of frames, a

portrait of a Benedictine nun with unveiled face, painted bouquets, and

even the head of a Turk.

It is in that garden of the Temple convent, that stood that famous

chestnut-tree which was renowned as the finest and the largest in

France, and which bore the reputation among the good people of the

eighteenth century of being \_the father of all the chestnut trees of

the realm\_.

As we have said, this convent of the Temple was occupied by

Benedictines of the Perpetual Adoration, Benedictines quite different

from those who depended on Cîteaux. This order of the Perpetual

Adoration is not very ancient and does not go back more than two

hundred years. In 1649 the holy sacrament was profaned on two occasions

a few days apart, in two churches in Paris, at Saint-Sulpice and at

Saint-Jean en Grève, a rare and frightful sacrilege which set the whole

town in an uproar. M. the Prior and Vicar-General of Saint-Germain des

Prés ordered a solemn procession of all his clergy, in which the Pope’s

Nuncio officiated. But this expiation did not satisfy two sainted

women, Madame Courtin, Marquise de Boucs, and the Comtesse de

Châteauvieux. This outrage committed on “the most holy sacrament of the

altar,” though but temporary, would not depart from these holy souls,

and it seemed to them that it could only be extenuated by a “Perpetual

Adoration” in some female monastery. Both of them, one in 1652, the

other in 1653, made donations of notable sums to Mother Catherine de

Bar, called of the Holy Sacrament, a Benedictine nun, for the purpose

of founding, to this pious end, a monastery of the order of

Saint-Benoît; the first permission for this foundation was given to

Mother Catherine de Bar by M. de Metz, Abbé of Saint-Germain, “on

condition that no woman could be received unless she contributed three

hundred livres income, which amounts to six thousand livres, to the

principal.” After the Abbé of Saint-Germain, the king accorded

letters-patent; and all the rest, abbatial charter, and royal letters,

was confirmed in 1654 by the Chamber of Accounts and the Parliament.

Such is the origin of the legal consecration of the establishment of

the Benedictines of the Perpetual Adoration of the Holy Sacrament at

Paris. Their first convent was “a new building” in the Rue Cassette,

out of the contributions of Mesdames de Boucs and de Châteauvieux.

This order, as it will be seen, was not to be confounded with the

Benedictine nuns of Cîteaux. It mounted back to the Abbé of

Saint-Germain des Prés, in the same manner that the ladies of the

Sacred Heart go back to the general of the Jesuits, and the sisters of

charity to the general of the Lazarists.

It was also totally different from the Bernardines of the Petit-Picpus,

whose interior we have just shown. In 1657, Pope Alexander VII. had

authorized, by a special brief, the Bernardines of the Rue

Petit-Picpus, to practise the Perpetual Adoration like the Benedictine

nuns of the Holy Sacrament. But the two orders remained distinct

nonetheless.

CHAPTER XI—END OF THE PETIT-PICPUS

At the beginning of the Restoration, the convent of the Petit-Picpus

was in its decay; this forms a part of the general death of the order,

which, after the eighteenth century, has been disappearing like all the

religious orders. Contemplation is, like prayer, one of humanity’s

needs; but, like everything which the Revolution touched, it will be

transformed, and from being hostile to social progress, it will become

favorable to it.

The house of the Petit-Picpus was becoming rapidly depopulated. In

1840, the Little Convent had disappeared, the school had disappeared.

There were no longer any old women, nor young girls; the first were

dead, the latter had taken their departure. \_Volaverunt\_.

The rule of the Perpetual Adoration is so rigid in its nature that it

alarms, vocations recoil before it, the order receives no recruits. In

1845, it still obtained lay-sisters here and there. But of professed

nuns, none at all. Forty years ago, the nuns numbered nearly a hundred;

fifteen years ago there were not more than twenty-eight of them. How

many are there to-day? In 1847, the prioress was young, a sign that the

circle of choice was restricted. She was not forty years old. In

proportion as the number diminishes, the fatigue increases, the service

of each becomes more painful; the moment could then be seen drawing

near when there would be but a dozen bent and aching shoulders to bear

the heavy rule of Saint-Benoît. The burden is implacable, and remains

the same for the few as for the many. It weighs down, it crushes. Thus

they die. At the period when the author of this book still lived in

Paris, two died. One was twenty-five years old, the other twenty-three.

This latter can say, like Julia Alpinula: \_“Hic jaceo. Vixi annos

viginti et tres.” \_ It is in consequence of this decay that the convent

gave up the education of girls.

We have not felt able to pass before this extraordinary house without

entering it, and without introducing the minds which accompany us, and

which are listening to our tale, to the profit of some, perchance, of

the melancholy history of Jean Valjean. We have penetrated into this

community, full of those old practices which seem so novel to-day. It

is the closed garden, \_hortus conclusus\_. We have spoken of this

singular place in detail, but with respect, in so far, at least, as

detail and respect are compatible. We do not understand all, but we

insult nothing. We are equally far removed from the hosanna of Joseph

de Maistre, who wound up by anointing the executioner, and from the

sneer of Voltaire, who even goes so far as to ridicule the cross.

An illogical act on Voltaire’s part, we may remark, by the way; for

Voltaire would have defended Jesus as he defended Calas; and even for

those who deny superhuman incarnations, what does the crucifix

represent? The assassinated sage.

In this nineteenth century, the religious idea is undergoing a crisis.

People are unlearning certain things, and they do well, provided that,

while unlearning them they learn this: There is no vacuum in the human

heart. Certain demolitions take place, and it is well that they do, but

on condition that they are followed by reconstructions.

In the meantime, let us study things which are no more. It is necessary

to know them, if only for the purpose of avoiding them. The

counterfeits of the past assume false names, and gladly call themselves

the future. This spectre, this past, is given to falsifying its own

passport. Let us inform ourselves of the trap. Let us be on our guard.

The past has a visage, superstition, and a mask, hypocrisy. Let us

denounce the visage and let us tear off the mask.

As for convents, they present a complex problem,—a question of

civilization, which condemns them; a question of liberty, which

protects them.

BOOK SEVENTH—PARENTHESIS

CHAPTER I—THE CONVENT AS AN ABSTRACT IDEA

This book is a drama, whose leading personage is the Infinite.

Man is the second.

Such being the case, and a convent having happened to be on our road,

it has been our duty to enter it. Why? Because the convent, which is

common to the Orient as well as to the Occident, to antiquity as well

as to modern times, to paganism, to Buddhism, to Mahometanism, as well

as to Christianity, is one of the optical apparatuses applied by man to

the Infinite.

This is not the place for enlarging disproportionately on certain

ideas; nevertheless, while absolutely maintaining our reserves, our

restrictions, and even our indignations, we must say that every time we

encounter man in the Infinite, either well or ill understood, we feel

ourselves overpowered with respect. There is, in the synagogue, in the

mosque, in the pagoda, in the wigwam, a hideous side which we execrate,

and a sublime side, which we adore. What a contemplation for the mind,

and what endless food for thought, is the reverberation of God upon the

human wall!

CHAPTER II—THE CONVENT AS AN HISTORICAL FACT

From the point of view of history, of reason, and of truth, monasticism

is condemned. Monasteries, when they abound in a nation, are clogs in

its circulation, cumbrous establishments, centres of idleness where

centres of labor should exist. Monastic communities are to the great

social community what the mistletoe is to the oak, what the wart is to

the human body. Their prosperity and their fatness mean the

impoverishment of the country. The monastic regime, good at the

beginning of civilization, useful in the reduction of the brutal by the

spiritual, is bad when peoples have reached their manhood. Moreover,

when it becomes relaxed, and when it enters into its period of

disorder, it becomes bad for the very reasons which rendered it

salutary in its period of purity, because it still continues to set the

example.

Claustration has had its day. Cloisters, useful in the early education

of modern civilization, have embarrassed its growth, and are injurious

to its development. So far as institution and formation with relation

to man are concerned, monasteries, which were good in the tenth

century, questionable in the fifteenth, are detestable in the

nineteenth. The leprosy of monasticism has gnawed nearly to a skeleton

two wonderful nations, Italy and Spain; the one the light, the other

the splendor of Europe for centuries; and, at the present day, these

two illustrious peoples are but just beginning to convalesce, thanks to

the healthy and vigorous hygiene of 1789 alone.

The convent—the ancient female convent in particular, such as it still

presents itself on the threshold of this century, in Italy, in Austria,

in Spain—is one of the most sombre concretions of the Middle Ages. The

cloister, that cloister, is the point of intersection of horrors. The

Catholic cloister, properly speaking, is wholly filled with the black

radiance of death.

The Spanish convent is the most funereal of all. There rise, in

obscurity, beneath vaults filled with gloom, beneath domes vague with

shadow, massive altars of Babel, as high as cathedrals; there immense

white crucifixes hang from chains in the dark; there are extended, all

nude on the ebony, great Christs of ivory; more than bleeding,—bloody;

hideous and magnificent, with their elbows displaying the bones, their

knee-pans showing their integuments, their wounds showing their flesh,

crowned with silver thorns, nailed with nails of gold, with blood drops

of rubies on their brows, and diamond tears in their eyes. The diamonds

and rubies seem wet, and make veiled beings in the shadow below weep,

their sides bruised with the hair shirt and their iron-tipped scourges,

their breasts crushed with wicker hurdles, their knees excoriated with

prayer; women who think themselves wives, spectres who think themselves

seraphim. Do these women think? No. Have they any will? No. Do they

love? No. Do they live? No. Their nerves have turned to bone; their

bones have turned to stone. Their veil is of woven night. Their breath

under their veil resembles the indescribably tragic respiration of

death. The abbess, a spectre, sanctifies them and terrifies them. The

immaculate one is there, and very fierce. Such are the ancient

monasteries of Spain. Liars of terrible devotion, caverns of virgins,

ferocious places.

Catholic Spain is more Roman than Rome herself. The Spanish convent

was, above all others, the Catholic convent. There was a flavor of the

Orient about it. The archbishop, the kislar-aga of heaven, locked up

and kept watch over this seraglio of souls reserved for God. The nun

was the odalisque, the priest was the eunuch. The fervent were chosen

in dreams and possessed Christ. At night, the beautiful, nude young man

descended from the cross and became the ecstasy of the cloistered one.

Lofty walls guarded the mystic sultana, who had the crucified for her

sultan, from all living distraction. A glance on the outer world was

infidelity. The \_in pace\_ replaced the leather sack. That which was

cast into the sea in the East was thrown into the ground in the West.

In both quarters, women wrung their hands; the waves for the first, the

grave for the last; here the drowned, there the buried. Monstrous

parallel.

To-day the upholders of the past, unable to deny these things, have

adopted the expedient of smiling at them. There has come into fashion a

strange and easy manner of suppressing the revelations of history, of

invalidating the commentaries of philosophy, of eliding all

embarrassing facts and all gloomy questions. \_A matter for

declamations\_, say the clever. Declamations, repeat the foolish.

Jean-Jacques a declaimer; Diderot a declaimer; Voltaire on Calas,

Labarre, and Sirven, declaimers. I know not who has recently discovered

that Tacitus was a declaimer, that Nero was a victim, and that pity is

decidedly due to “that poor Holofernes.”

Facts, however, are awkward things to disconcert, and they are

obstinate. The author of this book has seen, with his own eyes, eight

leagues distant from Brussels,—there are relics of the Middle Ages

there which are attainable for everybody,—at the Abbey of Villers, the

hole of the oubliettes, in the middle of the field which was formerly

the courtyard of the cloister, and on the banks of the Thil, four stone

dungeons, half under ground, half under the water. They were \_in pace\_.

Each of these dungeons has the remains of an iron door, a vault, and a

grated opening which, on the outside, is two feet above the level of

the river, and on the inside, six feet above the level of the ground.

Four feet of river flow past along the outside wall. The ground is

always soaked. The occupant of the \_in pace\_ had this wet soil for his

bed. In one of these dungeons, there is a fragment of an iron necklet

riveted to the wall; in another, there can be seen a square box made of

four slabs of granite, too short for a person to lie down in, too low

for him to stand upright in. A human being was put inside, with a

coverlid of stone on top. This exists. It can be seen. It can be

touched. These \_in pace\_, these dungeons, these iron hinges, these

necklets, that lofty peep-hole on a level with the river’s current,

that box of stone closed with a lid of granite like a tomb, with this

difference, that the dead man here was a living being, that soil which

is but mud, that vault hole, those oozing walls,—what declaimers!

CHAPTER III—ON WHAT CONDITIONS ONE CAN RESPECT THE PAST

Monasticism, such as it existed in Spain, and such as it still exists

in Thibet, is a sort of phthisis for civilization. It stops life short.

It simply depopulates. Claustration, castration. It has been the

scourge of Europe. Add to this the violence so often done to the

conscience, the forced vocations, feudalism bolstered up by the

cloister, the right of the first-born pouring the excess of the family

into monasticism, the ferocities of which we have just spoken, the \_in

pace\_, the closed mouths, the walled-up brains, so many unfortunate

minds placed in the dungeon of eternal vows, the taking of the habit,

the interment of living souls. Add individual tortures to national

degradations, and, whoever you may be, you will shudder before the

frock and the veil,—those two winding-sheets of human devising.

Nevertheless, at certain points and in certain places, in spite of

philosophy, in spite of progress, the spirit of the cloister persists

in the midst of the nineteenth century, and a singular ascetic

recrudescence is, at this moment, astonishing the civilized world. The

obstinacy of antiquated institutions in perpetuating themselves

resembles the stubbornness of the rancid perfume which should claim our

hair, the pretensions of the spoiled fish which should persist in being

eaten, the persecution of the child’s garment which should insist on

clothing the man, the tenderness of corpses which should return to

embrace the living.

“Ingrates!” says the garment, “I protected you in inclement weather.

Why will you have nothing to do with me?” “I have just come from the

deep sea,” says the fish. “I have been a rose,” says the perfume. “I

have loved you,” says the corpse. “I have civilized you,” says the

convent.

To this there is but one reply: “In former days.”

To dream of the indefinite prolongation of defunct things, and of the

government of men by embalming, to restore dogmas in a bad condition,

to regild shrines, to patch up cloisters, to rebless reliquaries, to

refurnish superstitions, to revictual fanaticisms, to put new handles

on holy water brushes and militarism, to reconstitute monasticism and

militarism, to believe in the salvation of society by the

multiplication of parasites, to force the past on the present,—this

seems strange. Still, there are theorists who hold such theories. These

theorists, who are in other respects people of intelligence, have a

very simple process; they apply to the past a glazing which they call

social order, divine right, morality, family, the respect of elders,

antique authority, sacred tradition, legitimacy, religion; and they go

about shouting, “Look! take this, honest people.” This logic was known

to the ancients. The soothsayers practise it. They rubbed a black

heifer over with chalk, and said, “She is white, \_Bos cretatus\_.”

As for us, we respect the past here and there, and we spare it, above

all, provided that it consents to be dead. If it insists on being

alive, we attack it, and we try to kill it.

Superstitions, bigotries, affected devotion, prejudices, those forms,

all forms as they are, are tenacious of life; they have teeth and nails

in their smoke, and they must be clasped close, body to body, and war

must be made on them, and that without truce; for it is one of the

fatalities of humanity to be condemned to eternal combat with phantoms.

It is difficult to seize darkness by the throat, and to hurl it to the

earth.

A convent in France, in the broad daylight of the nineteenth century,

is a college of owls facing the light. A cloister, caught in the very

act of asceticism, in the very heart of the city of ’89 and of 1830 and

of 1848, Rome blossoming out in Paris, is an anachronism. In ordinary

times, in order to dissolve an anachronism and to cause it to vanish,

one has only to make it spell out the date. But we are not in ordinary

times.

Let us fight.

Let us fight, but let us make a distinction. The peculiar property of

truth is never to commit excesses. What need has it of exaggeration?

There is that which it is necessary to destroy, and there is that which

it is simply necessary to elucidate and examine. What a force is kindly

and serious examination! Let us not apply a flame where only a light is

required.

So, given the nineteenth century, we are opposed, as a general

proposition, and among all peoples, in Asia as well as in Europe, in

India as well as in Turkey, to ascetic claustration. Whoever says

cloister, says marsh. Their putrescence is evident, their stagnation is

unhealthy, their fermentation infects people with fever, and etiolates

them; their multiplication becomes a plague of Egypt. We cannot think

without affright of those lands where fakirs, bonzes, santons, Greek

monks, marabouts, talapoins, and dervishes multiply even like swarms of

vermin.

This said, the religious question remains. This question has certain

mysterious, almost formidable sides; may we be permitted to look at it

fixedly.

CHAPTER IV—THE CONVENT FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF PRINCIPLES

Men unite themselves and dwell in communities. By virtue of what right?

By virtue of the right of association.

They shut themselves up at home. By virtue of what right? By virtue of

the right which every man has to open or shut his door.

They do not come forth. By virtue of what right? By virtue of the right

to go and come, which implies the right to remain at home.

There, at home, what do they do?

They speak in low tones; they drop their eyes; they toil. They renounce

the world, towns, sensualities, pleasures, vanities, pride, interests.

They are clothed in coarse woollen or coarse linen. Not one of them

possesses in his own right anything whatever. On entering there, each

one who was rich makes himself poor. What he has, he gives to all. He

who was what is called noble, a gentleman and a lord, is the equal of

him who was a peasant. The cell is identical for all. All undergo the

same tonsure, wear the same frock, eat the same black bread, sleep on

the same straw, die on the same ashes. The same sack on their backs,

the same rope around their loins. If the decision has been to go

barefoot, all go barefoot. There may be a prince among them; that

prince is the same shadow as the rest. No titles. Even family names

have disappeared. They bear only first names. All are bowed beneath the

equality of baptismal names. They have dissolved the carnal family, and

constituted in their community a spiritual family. They have no other

relatives than all men. They succor the poor, they care for the sick.

They elect those whom they obey. They call each other “my brother.”

You stop me and exclaim, “But that is the ideal convent!”

It is sufficient that it may be the possible convent, that I should

take notice of it.

Thence it results that, in the preceding book, I have spoken of a

convent with respectful accents. The Middle Ages cast aside, Asia cast

aside, the historical and political question held in reserve, from the

purely philosophical point of view, outside the requirements of

militant policy, on condition that the monastery shall be absolutely a

voluntary matter and shall contain only consenting parties, I shall

always consider a cloistered community with a certain attentive, and,

in some respects, a deferential gravity.

Wherever there is a community, there is a commune; where there is a

commune, there is right. The monastery is the product of the formula:

Equality, Fraternity. Oh! how grand is liberty! And what a splendid

transfiguration! Liberty suffices to transform the monastery into a

republic.

Let us continue.

But these men, or these women who are behind these four walls. They

dress themselves in coarse woollen, they are equals, they call each

other brothers, that is well; but they do something else?

Yes.

What?

They gaze on the darkness, they kneel, and they clasp their hands.

What does this signify?

CHAPTER V—PRAYER

They pray.

To whom?

To God.

To pray to God,—what is the meaning of these words?

Is there an infinite beyond us? Is that infinite there, inherent,

permanent; necessarily substantial, since it is infinite; and because,

if it lacked matter it would be bounded; necessarily intelligent, since

it is infinite, and because, if it lacked intelligence, it would end

there? Does this infinite awaken in us the idea of essence, while we

can attribute to ourselves only the idea of existence? In other terms,

is it not the absolute, of which we are only the relative?

At the same time that there is an infinite without us, is there not an

infinite within us? Are not these two infinites (what an alarming

plural!) superposed, the one upon the other? Is not this second

infinite, so to speak, subjacent to the first? Is it not the latter’s

mirror, reflection, echo, an abyss which is concentric with another

abyss? Is this second infinity intelligent also? Does it think? Does it

love? Does it will? If these two infinities are intelligent, each of

them has a will principle, and there is an \_I\_ in the upper infinity as

there is an \_I\_ in the lower infinity. The \_I\_ below is the soul; the

\_I\_ on high is God.

To place the infinity here below in contact, by the medium of thought,

with the infinity on high, is called praying.

Let us take nothing from the human mind; to suppress is bad. We must

reform and transform. Certain faculties in man are directed towards the

Unknown; thought, reverie, prayer. The Unknown is an ocean. What is

conscience? It is the compass of the Unknown. Thought, reverie,

prayer,—these are great and mysterious radiations. Let us respect them.

Whither go these majestic irradiations of the soul? Into the shadow;

that is to say, to the light.

The grandeur of democracy is to disown nothing and to deny nothing of

humanity. Close to the right of the man, beside it, at the least, there

exists the right of the soul.

To crush fanaticism and to venerate the infinite, such is the law. Let

us not confine ourselves to prostrating ourselves before the tree of

creation, and to the contemplation of its branches full of stars. We

have a duty to labor over the human soul, to defend the mystery against

the miracle, to adore the incomprehensible and reject the absurd, to

admit, as an inexplicable fact, only what is necessary, to purify

belief, to remove superstitions from above religion; to clear God of

caterpillars.

CHAPTER VI—THE ABSOLUTE GOODNESS OF PRAYER

With regard to the modes of prayer, all are good, provided that they

are sincere. Turn your book upside down and be in the infinite.

There is, as we know, a philosophy which denies the infinite. There is

also a philosophy, pathologically classified, which denies the sun;

this philosophy is called blindness.

To erect a sense which we lack into a source of truth, is a fine blind

man’s self-sufficiency.

The curious thing is the haughty, superior, and compassionate airs

which this groping philosophy assumes towards the philosophy which

beholds God. One fancies he hears a mole crying, “I pity them with

their sun!”

There are, as we know, powerful and illustrious atheists. At bottom,

led back to the truth by their very force, they are not absolutely sure

that they are atheists; it is with them only a question of definition,

and in any case, if they do not believe in God, being great minds, they

prove God.

We salute them as philosophers, while inexorably denouncing their

philosophy.

Let us go on.

The remarkable thing about it is, also, their facility in paying

themselves off with words. A metaphysical school of the North,

impregnated to some extent with fog, has fancied that it has worked a

revolution in human understanding by replacing the word Force with the

word Will.

To say: “the plant wills,” instead of: “the plant grows”: this would be

fecund in results, indeed, if we were to add: “the universe wills.”

Why? Because it would come to this: the plant wills, therefore it has

an \_I\_; the universe wills, therefore it has a God.

As for us, who, however, in contradistinction to this school, reject

nothing \_a priori\_, a will in the plant, accepted by this school,

appears to us more difficult to admit than a will in the universe

denied by it.

To deny the will of the infinite, that is to say, God, is impossible on

any other conditions than a denial of the infinite. We have

demonstrated this.

The negation of the infinite leads straight to nihilism. Everything

becomes “a mental conception.”

With nihilism, no discussion is possible; for the nihilist logic doubts

the existence of its interlocutor, and is not quite sure that it exists

itself.

From its point of view, it is possible that it may be for itself, only

“a mental conception.”

Only, it does not perceive that all which it has denied it admits in

the lump, simply by the utterance of the word, mind.

In short, no way is open to the thought by a philosophy which makes all

end in the monosyllable, No.

To No there is only one reply, Yes.

Nihilism has no point.

There is no such thing as nothingness. Zero does not exist. Everything

is something. Nothing is nothing.

Man lives by affirmation even more than by bread.

Even to see and to show does not suffice. Philosophy should be an

energy; it should have for effort and effect to ameliorate the

condition of man. Socrates should enter into Adam and produce Marcus

Aurelius; in other words, the man of wisdom should be made to emerge

from the man of felicity. Eden should be changed into a Lyceum. Science

should be a cordial. To enjoy,—what a sad aim, and what a paltry

ambition! The brute enjoys. To offer thought to the thirst of men, to

give them all as an elixir the notion of God, to make conscience and

science fraternize in them, to render them just by this mysterious

confrontation; such is the function of real philosophy. Morality is a

blossoming out of truths. Contemplation leads to action. The absolute

should be practicable. It is necessary that the ideal should be

breathable, drinkable, and eatable to the human mind. It is the ideal

which has the right to say: \_Take, this is my body, this is my blood\_.

Wisdom is holy communion. It is on this condition that it ceases to be

a sterile love of science and becomes the one and sovereign mode of

human rallying, and that philosophy herself is promoted to religion.

Philosophy should not be a corbel erected on mystery to gaze upon it at

its ease, without any other result than that of being convenient to

curiosity.

For our part, adjourning the development of our thought to another

occasion, we will confine ourselves to saying that we neither

understand man as a point of departure nor progress as an end, without

those two forces which are their two motors: faith and love.

Progress is the goal, the ideal is the type.

What is this ideal? It is God.

Ideal, absolute, perfection, infinity: identical words.

CHAPTER VII—PRECAUTIONS TO BE OBSERVED IN BLAME

History and philosophy have eternal duties, which are, at the same

time, simple duties; to combat Caiphas the High-priest, Draco the

Lawgiver, Trimalcion the Legislator, Tiberius the Emperor; this is

clear, direct, and limpid, and offers no obscurity.

But the right to live apart, even with its inconveniences and its

abuses, insists on being stated and taken into account. Cenobitism is a

human problem.

When one speaks of convents, those abodes of error, but of innocence,

of aberration but of good-will, of ignorance but of devotion, of

torture but of martyrdom, it always becomes necessary to say either yes

or no.

A convent is a contradiction. Its object, salvation; its means thereto,

sacrifice. The convent is supreme egoism having for its result supreme

abnegation.

To abdicate with the object of reigning seems to be the device of

monasticism.

In the cloister, one suffers in order to enjoy. One draws a bill of

exchange on death. One discounts in terrestrial gloom celestial light.

In the cloister, hell is accepted in advance as a post obit on

paradise.

The taking of the veil or the frock is a suicide paid for with

eternity.

It does not seem to us, that on such a subject mockery is permissible.

All about it is serious, the good as well as the bad.

The just man frowns, but never smiles with a malicious sneer. We

understand wrath, but not malice.

CHAPTER VIII—FAITH, LAW

A few words more.

We blame the church when she is saturated with intrigues, we despise

the spiritual which is harsh toward the temporal; but we everywhere

honor the thoughtful man.

We salute the man who kneels.

A faith; this is a necessity for man. Woe to him who believes nothing.

One is not unoccupied because one is absorbed. There is visible labor

and invisible labor.

To contemplate is to labor, to think is to act.

Folded arms toil, clasped hands work. A gaze fixed on heaven is a work.

Thales remained motionless for four years. He founded philosophy.

In our opinion, cenobites are not lazy men, and recluses are not

idlers.

To meditate on the Shadow is a serious thing.

Without invalidating anything that we have just said, we believe that a

perpetual memory of the tomb is proper for the living. On this point,

the priest and the philosopher agree. \_We must die\_. The Abbé de la

Trappe replies to Horace.

To mingle with one’s life a certain presence of the sepulchre,—this is

the law of the sage; and it is the law of the ascetic. In this respect,

the ascetic and the sage converge. There is a material growth; we admit

it. There is a moral grandeur; we hold to that. Thoughtless and

vivacious spirits say:—

“What is the good of those motionless figures on the side of mystery?

What purpose do they serve? What do they do?”

Alas! In the presence of the darkness which environs us, and which

awaits us, in our ignorance of what the immense dispersion will make of

us, we reply: “There is probably no work more divine than that

performed by these souls.” And we add: “There is probably no work which

is more useful.”

There certainly must be some who pray constantly for those who never

pray at all.

In our opinion the whole question lies in the amount of thought that is

mingled with prayer.

Leibnitz praying is grand, Voltaire adoring is fine. \_Deo erexit

Voltaire\_.

We are for religion as against religions.

We are of the number who believe in the wretchedness of orisons, and

the sublimity of prayer.

Moreover, at this minute which we are now traversing,—a minute which

will not, fortunately, leave its impress on the nineteenth century,—at

this hour, when so many men have low brows and souls but little

elevated, among so many mortals whose morality consists in enjoyment,

and who are busied with the brief and misshapen things of matter,

whoever exiles himself seems worthy of veneration to us.

The monastery is a renunciation. Sacrifice wrongly directed is still

sacrifice. To mistake a grave error for a duty has a grandeur of its

own.

Taken by itself, and ideally, and in order to examine the truth on all

sides until all aspects have been impartially exhausted, the monastery,

the female convent in particular,—for in our century it is woman who

suffers the most, and in this exile of the cloister there is something

of protestation,—the female convent has incontestably a certain

majesty.

This cloistered existence which is so austere, so depressing, a few of

whose features we have just traced, is not life, for it is not liberty;

it is not the tomb, for it is not plenitude; it is the strange place

whence one beholds, as from the crest of a lofty mountain, on one side

the abyss where we are, on the other, the abyss whither we shall go; it

is the narrow and misty frontier separating two worlds, illuminated and

obscured by both at the same time, where the ray of life which has

become enfeebled is mingled with the vague ray of death; it is the half

obscurity of the tomb.

We, who do not believe what these women believe, but who, like them,

live by faith,—we have never been able to think without a sort of

tender and religious terror, without a sort of pity, that is full of

envy, of those devoted, trembling and trusting creatures, of these

humble and august souls, who dare to dwell on the very brink of the

mystery, waiting between the world which is closed and heaven which is

not yet open, turned towards the light which one cannot see, possessing

the sole happiness of thinking that they know where it is, aspiring

towards the gulf, and the unknown, their eyes fixed motionless on the

darkness, kneeling, bewildered, stupefied, shuddering, half lifted, at

times, by the deep breaths of eternity.

BOOK EIGHTH—CEMETERIES TAKE THAT WHICH IS COMMITTED THEM

CHAPTER I—WHICH TREATS OF THE MANNER OF ENTERING A CONVENT

It was into this house that Jean Valjean had, as Fauchelevent expressed

it, “fallen from the sky.”

He had scaled the wall of the garden which formed the angle of the Rue

Polonceau. That hymn of the angels which he had heard in the middle of

the night, was the nuns chanting matins; that hall, of which he had

caught a glimpse in the gloom, was the chapel. That phantom which he

had seen stretched on the ground was the sister who was making

reparation; that bell, the sound of which had so strangely surprised

him, was the gardener’s bell attached to the knee of Father

Fauchelevent.

Cosette once put to bed, Jean Valjean and Fauchelevent had, as we have

already seen, supped on a glass of wine and a bit of cheese before a

good, crackling fire; then, the only bed in the hut being occupied by

Cosette, each threw himself on a truss of straw.

Before he shut his eyes, Jean Valjean said: “I must remain here

henceforth.” This remark trotted through Fauchelevent’s head all night

long.

To tell the truth, neither of them slept.

Jean Valjean, feeling that he was discovered and that Javert was on his

scent, understood that he and Cosette were lost if they returned to

Paris. Then the new storm which had just burst upon him had stranded

him in this cloister. Jean Valjean had, henceforth, but one thought,—to

remain there. Now, for an unfortunate man in his position, this convent

was both the safest and the most dangerous of places; the most

dangerous, because, as no men might enter there, if he were discovered,

it was a flagrant offence, and Jean Valjean would find but one step

intervening between the convent and prison; the safest, because, if he

could manage to get himself accepted there and remain there, who would

ever seek him in such a place? To dwell in an impossible place was

safety.

On his side, Fauchelevent was cudgelling his brains. He began by

declaring to himself that he understood nothing of the matter. How had

M. Madeleine got there, when the walls were what they were? Cloister

walls are not to be stepped over. How did he get there with a child?

One cannot scale a perpendicular wall with a child in one’s arms. Who

was that child? Where did they both come from? Since Fauchelevent had

lived in the convent, he had heard nothing of M. sur M., and he knew

nothing of what had taken place there. Father Madeleine had an air

which discouraged questions; and besides, Fauchelevent said to himself:

“One does not question a saint.” M. Madeleine had preserved all his

prestige in Fauchelevent’s eyes. Only, from some words which Jean

Valjean had let fall, the gardener thought he could draw the inference

that M. Madeleine had probably become bankrupt through the hard times,

and that he was pursued by his creditors; or that he had compromised

himself in some political affair, and was in hiding; which last did not

displease Fauchelevent, who, like many of our peasants of the North,

had an old fund of Bonapartism about him. While in hiding, M. Madeleine

had selected the convent as a refuge, and it was quite simple that he

should wish to remain there. But the inexplicable point, to which

Fauchelevent returned constantly and over which he wearied his brain,

was that M. Madeleine should be there, and that he should have that

little girl with him. Fauchelevent saw them, touched them, spoke to

them, and still did not believe it possible. The incomprehensible had

just made its entrance into Fauchelevent’s hut. Fauchelevent groped

about amid conjectures, and could see nothing clearly but this: “M.

Madeleine saved my life.” This certainty alone was sufficient and

decided his course. He said to himself: “It is my turn now.” He added

in his conscience: “M. Madeleine did not stop to deliberate when it was

a question of thrusting himself under the cart for the purpose of

dragging me out.” He made up his mind to save M. Madeleine.

Nevertheless, he put many questions to himself and made himself divers

replies: “After what he did for me, would I save him if he were a

thief? Just the same. If he were an assassin, would I save him? Just

the same. Since he is a saint, shall I save him? Just the same.”

But what a problem it was to manage to have him remain in the convent!

Fauchelevent did not recoil in the face of this almost chimerical

undertaking; this poor peasant of Picardy without any other ladder than

his self-devotion, his good will, and a little of that old rustic

cunning, on this occasion enlisted in the service of a generous

enterprise, undertook to scale the difficulties of the cloister, and

the steep escarpments of the rule of Saint-Benoît. Father Fauchelevent

was an old man who had been an egoist all his life, and who, towards

the end of his days, halt, infirm, with no interest left to him in the

world, found it sweet to be grateful, and perceiving a generous action

to be performed, flung himself upon it like a man, who at the moment

when he is dying, should find close to his hand a glass of good wine

which he had never tasted, and should swallow it with avidity. We may

add, that the air which he had breathed for many years in this convent

had destroyed all personality in him, and had ended by rendering a good

action of some kind absolutely necessary to him.

So he took his resolve: to devote himself to M. Madeleine.

We have just called him a \_poor peasant of Picardy\_. That description

is just, but incomplete. At the point of this story which we have now

reached, a little of Father Fauchelevent’s physiology becomes useful.

He was a peasant, but he had been a notary, which added trickery to his

cunning, and penetration to his ingenuousness. Having, through various

causes, failed in his business, he had descended to the calling of a

carter and a laborer. But, in spite of oaths and lashings, which horses

seem to require, something of the notary had lingered in him. He had

some natural wit; he talked good grammar; he conversed, which is a rare

thing in a village; and the other peasants said of him: “He talks

almost like a gentleman with a hat.” Fauchelevent belonged, in fact, to

that species, which the impertinent and flippant vocabulary of the last

century qualified as \_demi-bourgeois, demi-lout\_, and which the

metaphors showered by the château upon the thatched cottage ticketed in

the pigeon-hole of the plebeian: \_rather rustic, rather citified;

pepper and salt\_. Fauchelevent, though sorely tried and harshly used by

fate, worn out, a sort of poor, threadbare old soul, was, nevertheless,

an impulsive man, and extremely spontaneous in his actions; a precious

quality which prevents one from ever being wicked. His defects and his

vices, for he had some, were all superficial; in short, his physiognomy

was of the kind which succeeds with an observer. His aged face had none

of those disagreeable wrinkles at the top of the forehead, which

signify malice or stupidity.

At daybreak, Father Fauchelevent opened his eyes, after having done an

enormous deal of thinking, and beheld M. Madeleine seated on his truss

of straw, and watching Cosette’s slumbers. Fauchelevent sat up and

said:—

“Now that you are here, how are you going to contrive to enter?”

This remark summed up the situation and aroused Jean Valjean from his

reverie.

The two men took counsel together.

“In the first place,” said Fauchelevent, “you will begin by not setting

foot outside of this chamber, either you or the child. One step in the

garden and we are done for.”

“That is true.”

“Monsieur Madeleine,” resumed Fauchelevent, “you have arrived at a very

auspicious moment, I mean to say a very inauspicious moment; one of the

ladies is very ill. This will prevent them from looking much in our

direction. It seems that she is dying. The prayers of the forty hours

are being said. The whole community is in confusion. That occupies

them. The one who is on the point of departure is a saint. In fact, we

are all saints here; all the difference between them and me is that

they say ‘our cell,’ and that I say ‘my cabin.’ The prayers for the

dying are to be said, and then the prayers for the dead. We shall be at

peace here for to-day; but I will not answer for to-morrow.”

“Still,” observed Jean Valjean, “this cottage is in the niche of the

wall, it is hidden by a sort of ruin, there are trees, it is not

visible from the convent.”

“And I add that the nuns never come near it.”

“Well?” said Jean Valjean.

The interrogation mark which accentuated this “well” signified: “it

seems to me that one may remain concealed here?” It was to this

interrogation point that Fauchelevent responded:—

“There are the little girls.”

“What little girls?” asked Jean Valjean.

Just as Fauchelevent opened his mouth to explain the words which he had

uttered, a bell emitted one stroke.

“The nun is dead,” said he. “There is the knell.”

And he made a sign to Jean Valjean to listen.

The bell struck a second time.

“It is the knell, Monsieur Madeleine. The bell will continue to strike

once a minute for twenty-four hours, until the body is taken from the

church.—You see, they play. At recreation hours it suffices to have a

ball roll aside, to send them all hither, in spite of prohibitions, to

hunt and rummage for it all about here. Those cherubs are devils.”

“Who?” asked Jean Valjean.

“The little girls. You would be very quickly discovered. They would

shriek: ‘Oh! a man!’ There is no danger to-day. There will be no

recreation hour. The day will be entirely devoted to prayers. You hear

the bell. As I told you, a stroke each minute. It is the death knell.”

“I understand, Father Fauchelevent. There are pupils.”

And Jean Valjean thought to himself:—

“Here is Cosette’s education already provided.”

Fauchelevent exclaimed:—

“Pardine! There are little girls indeed! And they would bawl around

you! And they would rush off! To be a man here is to have the plague.

You see how they fasten a bell to my paw as though I were a wild

beast.”

Jean Valjean fell into more and more profound thought.—“This convent

would be our salvation,” he murmured.

Then he raised his voice:—

“Yes, the difficulty is to remain here.”

“No,” said Fauchelevent, “the difficulty is to get out.”

Jean Valjean felt the blood rush back to his heart.

“To get out!”

“Yes, Monsieur Madeleine. In order to return here it is first necessary

to get out.”

And after waiting until another stroke of the knell had sounded,

Fauchelevent went on:—

“You must not be found here in this fashion. Whence come you? For me,

you fall from heaven, because I know you; but the nuns require one to

enter by the door.”

All at once they heard a rather complicated pealing from another bell.

“Ah!” said Fauchelevent, “they are ringing up the vocal mothers. They

are going to the chapter. They always hold a chapter when any one dies.

She died at daybreak. People generally do die at daybreak. But cannot

you get out by the way in which you entered? Come, I do not ask for the

sake of questioning you, but how did you get in?”

Jean Valjean turned pale; the very thought of descending again into

that terrible street made him shudder. You make your way out of a

forest filled with tigers, and once out of it, imagine a friendly

counsel that shall advise you to return thither! Jean Valjean pictured

to himself the whole police force still engaged in swarming in that

quarter, agents on the watch, sentinels everywhere, frightful fists

extended towards his collar, Javert at the corner of the intersection

of the streets perhaps.

“Impossible!” said he. “Father Fauchelevent, say that I fell from the

sky.”

“But I believe it, I believe it,” retorted Fauchelevent. “You have no

need to tell me that. The good God must have taken you in his hand for

the purpose of getting a good look at you close to, and then dropped

you. Only, he meant to place you in a man’s convent; he made a mistake.

Come, there goes another peal, that is to order the porter to go and

inform the municipality that the dead-doctor is to come here and view a

corpse. All that is the ceremony of dying. These good ladies are not at

all fond of that visit. A doctor is a man who does not believe in

anything. He lifts the veil. Sometimes he lifts something else too. How

quickly they have had the doctor summoned this time! What is the

matter? Your little one is still asleep. What is her name?”

“Cosette.”

“She is your daughter? You are her grandfather, that is?”

“Yes.”

“It will be easy enough for her to get out of here. I have my service

door which opens on the courtyard. I knock. The porter opens; I have my

vintage basket on my back, the child is in it, I go out. Father

Fauchelevent goes out with his basket—that is perfectly natural. You

will tell the child to keep very quiet. She will be under the cover. I

will leave her for whatever time is required with a good old friend, a

fruit-seller whom I know in the Rue Chemin-Vert, who is deaf, and who

has a little bed. I will shout in the fruit-seller’s ear, that she is a

niece of mine, and that she is to keep her for me until to-morrow. Then

the little one will re-enter with you; for I will contrive to have you

re-enter. It must be done. But how will you manage to get out?”

Jean Valjean shook his head.

“No one must see me, the whole point lies there, Father Fauchelevent.

Find some means of getting me out in a basket, under cover, like

Cosette.”

Fauchelevent scratched the lobe of his ear with the middle finger of

his left hand, a sign of serious embarrassment.

A third peal created a diversion.

“That is the dead-doctor taking his departure,” said Fauchelevent. “He

has taken a look and said: ‘She is dead, that is well.’ When the doctor

has signed the passport for paradise, the undertaker’s company sends a

coffin. If it is a mother, the mothers lay her out; if she is a sister,

the sisters lay her out. After which, I nail her up. That forms a part

of my gardener’s duty. A gardener is a bit of a grave-digger. She is

placed in a lower hall of the church which communicates with the

street, and into which no man may enter save the doctor of the dead. I

don’t count the undertaker’s men and myself as men. It is in that hall

that I nail up the coffin. The undertaker’s men come and get it, and

whip up, coachman! that’s the way one goes to heaven. They fetch a box

with nothing in it, they take it away again with something in it.

That’s what a burial is like. \_De profundis\_.”

A horizontal ray of sunshine lightly touched the face of the sleeping

Cosette, who lay with her mouth vaguely open, and had the air of an

angel drinking in the light. Jean Valjean had fallen to gazing at her.

He was no longer listening to Fauchelevent.

That one is not listened to is no reason for preserving silence. The

good old gardener went on tranquilly with his babble:—

“The grave is dug in the Vaugirard cemetery. They declare that they are

going to suppress that Vaugirard cemetery. It is an ancient cemetery

which is outside the regulations, which has no uniform, and which is

going to retire. It is a shame, for it is convenient. I have a friend

there, Father Mestienne, the grave-digger. The nuns here possess one

privilege, it is to be taken to that cemetery at nightfall. There is a

special permission from the Prefecture on their behalf. But how many

events have happened since yesterday! Mother Crucifixion is dead, and

Father Madeleine—”

“Is buried,” said Jean Valjean, smiling sadly.

Fauchelevent caught the word.

“Goodness! if you were here for good, it would be a real burial.”

A fourth peal burst out. Fauchelevent hastily detached the belled

knee-cap from its nail and buckled it on his knee again.

“This time it is for me. The Mother Prioress wants me. Good, now I am

pricking myself on the tongue of my buckle. Monsieur Madeleine, don’t

stir from here, and wait for me. Something new has come up. If you are

hungry, there is wine, bread and cheese.”

And he hastened out of the hut, crying: “Coming! coming!”

Jean Valjean watched him hurrying across the garden as fast as his

crooked leg would permit, casting a sidelong glance by the way on his

melon patch.

Less than ten minutes later, Father Fauchelevent, whose bell put the

nuns in his road to flight, tapped gently at a door, and a gentle voice

replied: \_“Forever! Forever!” \_ that is to say: \_“Enter.” \_

The door was the one leading to the parlor reserved for seeing the

gardener on business. This parlor adjoined the chapter hall. The

prioress, seated on the only chair in the parlor, was waiting for

Fauchelevent.

CHAPTER II—FAUCHELEVENT IN THE PRESENCE OF A DIFFICULTY

It is the peculiarity of certain persons and certain professions,

notably priests and nuns, to wear a grave and agitated air on critical

occasions. At the moment when Fauchelevent entered, this double form of

preoccupation was imprinted on the countenance of the prioress, who was

that wise and charming Mademoiselle de Blemeur, Mother Innocente, who

was ordinarily cheerful.

The gardener made a timid bow, and remained at the door of the cell.

The prioress, who was telling her beads, raised her eyes and said:—

“Ah! it is you, Father Fauvent.”

This abbreviation had been adopted in the convent.

Fauchelevent bowed again.

“Father Fauvent, I have sent for you.”

“Here I am, reverend Mother.”

“I have something to say to you.”

“And so have I,” said Fauchelevent with a boldness which caused him

inward terror, “I have something to say to the very reverend Mother.”

The prioress stared at him.

“Ah! you have a communication to make to me.”

“A request.”

“Very well, speak.”

Goodman Fauchelevent, the ex-notary, belonged to the category of

peasants who have assurance. A certain clever ignorance constitutes a

force; you do not distrust it, and you are caught by it. Fauchelevent

had been a success during the something more than two years which he

had passed in the convent. Always solitary and busied about his

gardening, he had nothing else to do than to indulge his curiosity. As

he was at a distance from all those veiled women passing to and fro, he

saw before him only an agitation of shadows. By dint of attention and

sharpness he had succeeded in clothing all those phantoms with flesh,

and those corpses were alive for him. He was like a deaf man whose

sight grows keener, and like a blind man whose hearing becomes more

acute. He had applied himself to riddling out the significance of the

different peals, and he had succeeded, so that this taciturn and

enigmatical cloister possessed no secrets for him; the sphinx babbled

all her secrets in his ear. Fauchelevent knew all and concealed all;

that constituted his art. The whole convent thought him stupid. A great

merit in religion. The vocal mothers made much of Fauchelevent. He was

a curious mute. He inspired confidence. Moreover, he was regular, and

never went out except for well-demonstrated requirements of the orchard

and vegetable garden. This discretion of conduct had inured to his

credit. Nonetheless, he had set two men to chattering: the porter, in

the convent, and he knew the singularities of their parlor, and the

grave-digger, at the cemetery, and he was acquainted with the

peculiarities of their sepulture; in this way, he possessed a double

light on the subject of these nuns, one as to their life, the other as

to their death. But he did not abuse his knowledge. The congregation

thought a great deal of him. Old, lame, blind to everything, probably a

little deaf into the bargain,—what qualities! They would have found it

difficult to replace him.

The goodman, with the assurance of a person who feels that he is

appreciated, entered into a rather diffuse and very deep rustic

harangue to the reverend prioress. He talked a long time about his age,

his infirmities, the surcharge of years counting double for him

henceforth, of the increasing demands of his work, of the great size of

the garden, of nights which must be passed, like the last, for

instance, when he had been obliged to put straw mats over the melon

beds, because of the moon, and he wound up as follows: “That he had a

brother”—(the prioress made a movement),—“a brother no longer young”—(a

second movement on the part of the prioress, but one expressive of

reassurance),—“that, if he might be permitted, this brother would come

and live with him and help him, that he was an excellent gardener, that

the community would receive from him good service, better than his own;

that, otherwise, if his brother were not admitted, as he, the elder,

felt that his health was broken and that he was insufficient for the

work, he should be obliged, greatly to his regret, to go away; and that

his brother had a little daughter whom he would bring with him, who

might be reared for God in the house, and who might, who knows, become

a nun some day.”

When he had finished speaking, the prioress stayed the slipping of her

rosary between her fingers, and said to him:—

“Could you procure a stout iron bar between now and this evening?”

“For what purpose?”

“To serve as a lever.”

“Yes, reverend Mother,” replied Fauchelevent.

The prioress, without adding a word, rose and entered the adjoining

room, which was the hall of the chapter, and where the vocal mothers

were probably assembled. Fauchelevent was left alone.

CHAPTER III—MOTHER INNOCENTE

About a quarter of an hour elapsed. The prioress returned and seated

herself once more on her chair.

The two interlocutors seemed preoccupied. We will present a

stenographic report of the dialogue which then ensued, to the best of

our ability.

“Father Fauvent!”

“Reverend Mother!”

“Do you know the chapel?”

“I have a little cage there, where I hear the mass and the offices.”

“And you have been in the choir in pursuance of your duties?”

“Two or three times.”

“There is a stone to be raised.”

“Heavy?”

“The slab of the pavement which is at the side of the altar.”

“The slab which closes the vault?”

“Yes.”

“It would be a good thing to have two men for it.”

“Mother Ascension, who is as strong as a man, will help you.”

“A woman is never a man.”

“We have only a woman here to help you. Each one does what he can.

Because Dom Mabillon gives four hundred and seventeen epistles of Saint

Bernard, while Merlonus Horstius only gives three hundred and

sixty-seven, I do not despise Merlonus Horstius.”

“Neither do I.”

“Merit consists in working according to one’s strength. A cloister is

not a dock-yard.”

“And a woman is not a man. But my brother is the strong one, though!”

“And can you get a lever?”

“That is the only sort of key that fits that sort of door.”

“There is a ring in the stone.”

“I will put the lever through it.”

“And the stone is so arranged that it swings on a pivot.”

“That is good, reverend Mother. I will open the vault.”

“And the four Mother Precentors will help you.”

“And when the vault is open?”

“It must be closed again.”

“Will that be all?”

“No.”

“Give me your orders, very reverend Mother.”

“Fauvent, we have confidence in you.”

“I am here to do anything you wish.”

“And to hold your peace about everything!”

“Yes, reverend Mother.”

“When the vault is open—”

“I will close it again.”

“But before that—”

“What, reverend Mother?”

“Something must be lowered into it.”

A silence ensued. The prioress, after a pout of the under lip which

resembled hesitation, broke it.

“Father Fauvent!”

“Reverend Mother!”

“You know that a mother died this morning?”

“No.”

“Did you not hear the bell?”

“Nothing can be heard at the bottom of the garden.”

“Really?”

“I can hardly distinguish my own signal.”

“She died at daybreak.”

“And then, the wind did not blow in my direction this morning.”

“It was Mother Crucifixion. A blessed woman.”

The prioress paused, moved her lips, as though in mental prayer, and

resumed:—

“Three years ago, Madame de Béthune, a Jansenist, turned orthodox,

merely from having seen Mother Crucifixion at prayer.”

“Ah! yes, now I hear the knell, reverend Mother.”

“The mothers have taken her to the dead-room, which opens on the

church.”

“I know.”

“No other man than you can or must enter that chamber. See to that. A

fine sight it would be, to see a man enter the dead-room!”

“More often!”

“Hey?”

“More often!”

“What do you say?”

“I say more often.”

“More often than what?”

“Reverend Mother, I did not say more often than what, I said more

often.”

“I don’t understand you. Why do you say more often?”

“In order to speak like you, reverend Mother.”

“But I did not say ‘more often.’”

At that moment, nine o’clock struck.

“At nine o’clock in the morning and at all hours, praised and adored be

the most Holy Sacrament of the altar,” said the prioress.

“Amen,” said Fauchelevent.

The clock struck opportunely. It cut “more often” short. It is

probable, that had it not been for this, the prioress and Fauchelevent

would never have unravelled that skein.

Fauchelevent mopped his forehead.

The prioress indulged in another little inward murmur, probably sacred,

then raised her voice:—

“In her lifetime, Mother Crucifixion made converts; after her death,

she will perform miracles.”

“She will!” replied Father Fauchelevent, falling into step, and

striving not to flinch again.

“Father Fauvent, the community has been blessed in Mother Crucifixion.

No doubt, it is not granted to every one to die, like Cardinal de

Bérulle, while saying the holy mass, and to breathe forth their souls

to God, while pronouncing these words: \_Hanc igitur oblationem\_. But

without attaining to such happiness, Mother Crucifixion’s death was

very precious. She retained her consciousness to the very last moment.

She spoke to us, then she spoke to the angels. She gave us her last

commands. If you had a little more faith, and if you could have been in

her cell, she would have cured your leg merely by touching it. She

smiled. We felt that she was regaining her life in God. There was

something of paradise in that death.”

Fauchelevent thought that it was an orison which she was finishing.

“Amen,” said he.

“Father Fauvent, what the dead wish must be done.”

The prioress took off several beads of her chaplet. Fauchelevent held

his peace.

She went on:—

“I have consulted upon this point many ecclesiastics laboring in Our

Lord, who occupy themselves in the exercises of the clerical life, and

who bear wonderful fruit.”

“Reverend Mother, you can hear the knell much better here than in the

garden.”

“Besides, she is more than a dead woman, she is a saint.”

“Like yourself, reverend Mother.”

“She slept in her coffin for twenty years, by express permission of our

Holy Father, Pius VII.—”

“The one who crowned the Emp—Buonaparte.”

For a clever man like Fauchelevent, this allusion was an awkward one.

Fortunately, the prioress, completely absorbed in her own thoughts, did

not hear it. She continued:—

“Father Fauvent?”

“Reverend Mother?”

“Saint Didorus, Archbishop of Cappadocia, desired that this single word

might be inscribed on his tomb: \_Acarus\_, which signifies, a worm of

the earth; this was done. Is this true?”

“Yes, reverend Mother.”

“The blessed Mezzocane, Abbot of Aquila, wished to be buried beneath

the gallows; this was done.”

“That is true.”

“Saint Terentius, Bishop of Port, where the mouth of the Tiber empties

into the sea, requested that on his tomb might be engraved the sign

which was placed on the graves of parricides, in the hope that

passers-by would spit on his tomb. This was done. The dead must be

obeyed.”

“So be it.”

“The body of Bernard Guidonis, born in France near Roche-Abeille, was,

as he had ordered, and in spite of the king of Castile, borne to the

church of the Dominicans in Limoges, although Bernard Guidonis was

Bishop of Tuy in Spain. Can the contrary be affirmed?”

“For that matter, no, reverend Mother.”

“The fact is attested by Plantavit de la Fosse.”

Several beads of the chaplet were told off, still in silence. The

prioress resumed:—

“Father Fauvent, Mother Crucifixion will be interred in the coffin in

which she has slept for the last twenty years.”

“That is just.”

“It is a continuation of her slumber.”

“So I shall have to nail up that coffin?”

“Yes.”

“And we are to reject the undertaker’s coffin?”

“Precisely.”

“I am at the orders of the very reverend community.”

“The four Mother Precentors will assist you.”

“In nailing up the coffin? I do not need them.”

“No. In lowering the coffin.”

“Where?”

“Into the vault.”

“What vault?”

“Under the altar.”

Fauchelevent started.

“The vault under the altar?”

“Under the altar.”

“But—”

“You will have an iron bar.”

“Yes, but—”

“You will raise the stone with the bar by means of the ring.”

“But—”

“The dead must be obeyed. To be buried in the vault under the altar of

the chapel, not to go to profane earth; to remain there in death where

she prayed while living; such was the last wish of Mother Crucifixion.

She asked it of us; that is to say, commanded us.”

“But it is forbidden.”

“Forbidden by men, enjoined by God.”

“What if it became known?”

“We have confidence in you.”

“Oh! I am a stone in your walls.”

“The chapter assembled. The vocal mothers, whom I have just consulted

again, and who are now deliberating, have decided that Mother

Crucifixion shall be buried, according to her wish, in her own coffin,

under our altar. Think, Father Fauvent, if she were to work miracles

here! What a glory of God for the community! And miracles issue from

tombs.”

“But, reverend Mother, if the agent of the sanitary commission—”

“Saint Benoît II., in the matter of sepulture, resisted Constantine

Pogonatus.”

“But the commissary of police—”

“Chonodemaire, one of the seven German kings who entered among the

Gauls under the Empire of Constantius, expressly recognized the right

of nuns to be buried in religion, that is to say, beneath the altar.”

“But the inspector from the Prefecture—”

“The world is nothing in the presence of the cross. Martin, the

eleventh general of the Carthusians, gave to his order this device:

\_Stat crux dum volvitur orbis\_.”

“Amen,” said Fauchelevent, who imperturbably extricated himself in this

manner from the dilemma, whenever he heard Latin.

Any audience suffices for a person who has held his peace too long. On

the day when the rhetorician Gymnastoras left his prison, bearing in

his body many dilemmas and numerous syllogisms which had struck in, he

halted in front of the first tree which he came to, harangued it and

made very great efforts to convince it. The prioress, who was usually

subjected to the barrier of silence, and whose reservoir was overfull,

rose and exclaimed with the loquacity of a dam which has broken away:—

“I have on my right Benoît and on my left Bernard. Who was Bernard? The

first abbot of Clairvaux. Fontaines in Burgundy is a country that is

blest because it gave him birth. His father was named Técelin, and his

mother Alèthe. He began at Cîteaux, to end in Clairvaux; he was

ordained abbot by the bishop of Châlon-sur-Saône, Guillaume de

Champeaux; he had seven hundred novices, and founded a hundred and

sixty monasteries; he overthrew Abeilard at the council of Sens in

1140, and Pierre de Bruys and Henry his disciple, and another sort of

erring spirits who were called the Apostolics; he confounded Arnauld de

Brescia, darted lightning at the monk Raoul, the murderer of the Jews,

dominated the council of Reims in 1148, caused the condemnation of

Gilbert de Poréa, Bishop of Poitiers, caused the condemnation of Éon de

l’Étoile, arranged the disputes of princes, enlightened King Louis the

Young, advised Pope Eugene III., regulated the Temple, preached the

crusade, performed two hundred and fifty miracles during his lifetime,

and as many as thirty-nine in one day. Who was Benoît? He was the

patriarch of Mont-Cassin; he was the second founder of the Sainteté

Claustrale, he was the Basil of the West. His order has produced forty

popes, two hundred cardinals, fifty patriarchs, sixteen hundred

archbishops, four thousand six hundred bishops, four emperors, twelve

empresses, forty-six kings, forty-one queens, three thousand six

hundred canonized saints, and has been in existence for fourteen

hundred years. On one side Saint Bernard, on the other the agent of the

sanitary department! On one side Saint Benoît, on the other the

inspector of public ways! The state, the road commissioners, the public

undertaker, regulations, the administration, what do we know of all

that? There is not a chance passer-by who would not be indignant to see

how we are treated. We have not even the right to give our dust to

Jesus Christ! Your sanitary department is a revolutionary invention.

God subordinated to the commissary of police; such is the age. Silence,

Fauvent!”

Fauchelevent was but ill at ease under this shower bath. The prioress

continued:—

“No one doubts the right of the monastery to sepulture. Only fanatics

and those in error deny it. We live in times of terrible confusion. We

do not know that which it is necessary to know, and we know that which

we should ignore. We are ignorant and impious. In this age there exist

people who do not distinguish between the very great Saint Bernard and

the Saint Bernard denominated of the poor Catholics, a certain good

ecclesiastic who lived in the thirteenth century. Others are so

blasphemous as to compare the scaffold of Louis XVI. to the cross of

Jesus Christ. Louis XVI. was merely a king. Let us beware of God! There

is no longer just nor unjust. The name of Voltaire is known, but not

the name of César de Bus. Nevertheless, César de Bus is a man of

blessed memory, and Voltaire one of unblessed memory. The last

arch-bishop, the Cardinal de Périgord, did not even know that Charles

de Gondren succeeded to Berulle, and François Bourgoin to Gondren, and

Jean-François Senault to Bourgoin, and Father Sainte-Marthe to

Jean-François Senault. The name of Father Coton is known, not because

he was one of the three who urged the foundation of the Oratorie, but

because he furnished Henri IV., the Huguenot king, with the material

for an oath. That which pleases people of the world in Saint François

de Sales, is that he cheated at play. And then, religion is attacked.

Why? Because there have been bad priests, because Sagittaire, Bishop of

Gap, was the brother of Salone, Bishop of Embrun, and because both of

them followed Mommol. What has that to do with the question? Does that

prevent Martin de Tours from being a saint, and giving half of his

cloak to a beggar? They persecute the saints. They shut their eyes to

the truth. Darkness is the rule. The most ferocious beasts are beasts

which are blind. No one thinks of hell as a reality. Oh! how wicked

people are! By order of the king signifies to-day, by order of the

revolution. One no longer knows what is due to the living or to the

dead. A holy death is prohibited. Burial is a civil matter. This is

horrible. Saint Leo II. wrote two special letters, one to Pierre

Notaire, the other to the king of the Visigoths, for the purpose of

combating and rejecting, in questions touching the dead, the authority

of the exarch and the supremacy of the Emperor. Gauthier, Bishop of

Châlons, held his own in this matter against Otho, Duke of Burgundy.

The ancient magistracy agreed with him. In former times we had voices

in the chapter, even on matters of the day. The Abbot of Cîteaux, the

general of the order, was councillor by right of birth to the

parliament of Burgundy. We do what we please with our dead. Is not the

body of Saint Benoît himself in France, in the abbey of Fleury, called

Saint Benoît-sur-Loire, although he died in Italy at Mont-Cassin, on

Saturday, the 21st of the month of March, of the year 543? All this is

incontestable. I abhor psalm-singers, I hate priors, I execrate

heretics, but I should detest yet more any one who should maintain the

contrary. One has only to read Arnoul Wion, Gabriel Bucelin, Trithemus,

Maurolics, and Dom Luc d’Achery.”

The prioress took breath, then turned to Fauchelevent.

“Is it settled, Father Fauvent?”

“It is settled, reverend Mother.”

“We may depend on you?”

“I will obey.”

“That is well.”

“I am entirely devoted to the convent.”

“That is understood. You will close the coffin. The sisters will carry

it to the chapel. The office for the dead will then be said. Then we

shall return to the cloister. Between eleven o’clock and midnight, you

will come with your iron bar. All will be done in the most profound

secrecy. There will be in the chapel only the four Mother Precentors,

Mother Ascension and yourself.”

“And the sister at the post?”

“She will not turn round.”

“But she will hear.”

“She will not listen. Besides, what the cloister knows the world learns

not.”

A pause ensued. The prioress went on:—

“You will remove your bell. It is not necessary that the sister at the

post should perceive your presence.”

“Reverend Mother?”

“What, Father Fauvent?”

“Has the doctor for the dead paid his visit?”

“He will pay it at four o’clock to-day. The peal which orders the

doctor for the dead to be summoned has already been rung. But you do

not understand any of the peals?”

“I pay no attention to any but my own.”

“That is well, Father Fauvent.”

“Reverend Mother, a lever at least six feet long will be required.”

“Where will you obtain it?”

“Where gratings are not lacking, iron bars are not lacking. I have my

heap of old iron at the bottom of the garden.”

“About three-quarters of an hour before midnight; do not forget.”

“Reverend Mother?”

“What?”

“If you were ever to have any other jobs of this sort, my brother is

the strong man for you. A perfect Turk!”

“You will do it as speedily as possible.”

“I cannot work very fast. I am infirm; that is why I require an

assistant. I limp.”

“To limp is no sin, and perhaps it is a blessing. The Emperor Henry

II., who combated Antipope Gregory and re-established Benoît VIII., has

two surnames, the Saint and the Lame.”

“Two surtouts are a good thing,” murmured Fauchelevent, who really was

a little hard of hearing.

“Now that I think of it, Father Fauvent, let us give a whole hour to

it. That is not too much. Be near the principal altar, with your iron

bar, at eleven o’clock. The office begins at midnight. Everything must

have been completed a good quarter of an hour before that.”

“I will do anything to prove my zeal towards the community. These are

my orders. I am to nail up the coffin. At eleven o’clock exactly, I am

to be in the chapel. The Mother Precentors will be there. Mother

Ascension will be there. Two men would be better. However, never mind!

I shall have my lever. We will open the vault, we will lower the

coffin, and we will close the vault again. After which, there will be

no trace of anything. The government will have no suspicion. Thus all

has been arranged, reverend Mother?”

“No!”

“What else remains?”

“The empty coffin remains.”

This produced a pause. Fauchelevent meditated. The prioress meditated.

“What is to be done with that coffin, Father Fauvent?”

“It will be given to the earth.”

“Empty?”

Another silence. Fauchelevent made, with his left hand, that sort of a

gesture which dismisses a troublesome subject.

“Reverend Mother, I am the one who is to nail up the coffin in the

basement of the church, and no one can enter there but myself, and I

will cover the coffin with the pall.”

“Yes, but the bearers, when they place it in the hearse and lower it

into the grave, will be sure to feel that there is nothing in it.”

“Ah! the de—!” exclaimed Fauchelevent.

The prioress began to make the sign of the cross, and looked fixedly at

the gardener. The \_vil\_ stuck fast in his throat.

He made haste to improvise an expedient to make her forget the oath.

“I will put earth in the coffin, reverend Mother. That will produce the

effect of a corpse.”

“You are right. Earth, that is the same thing as man. So you will

manage the empty coffin?”

“I will make that my special business.”

The prioress’s face, up to that moment troubled and clouded, grew

serene once more. She made the sign of a superior dismissing an

inferior to him. Fauchelevent went towards the door. As he was on the

point of passing out, the prioress raised her voice gently:—

“I am pleased with you, Father Fauvent; bring your brother to me

to-morrow, after the burial, and tell him to fetch his daughter.”

CHAPTER IV—IN WHICH JEAN VALJEAN HAS QUITE THE AIR OF HAVING READ

AUSTIN CASTILLEJO

The strides of a lame man are like the ogling glances of a one-eyed

man; they do not reach their goal very promptly. Moreover, Fauchelevent

was in a dilemma. He took nearly a quarter of an hour to return to his

cottage in the garden. Cosette had waked up. Jean Valjean had placed

her near the fire. At the moment when Fauchelevent entered, Jean

Valjean was pointing out to her the vintner’s basket on the wall, and

saying to her, “Listen attentively to me, my little Cosette. We must go

away from this house, but we shall return to it, and we shall be very

happy here. The good man who lives here is going to carry you off on

his back in that. You will wait for me at a lady’s house. I shall come

to fetch you. Obey, and say nothing, above all things, unless you want

Madame Thénardier to get you again!”

Cosette nodded gravely.

Jean Valjean turned round at the noise made by Fauchelevent opening the

door.

“Well?”

“Everything is arranged, and nothing is,” said Fauchelevent. “I have

permission to bring you in; but before bringing you in you must be got

out. That’s where the difficulty lies. It is easy enough with the

child.”

“You will carry her out?”

“And she will hold her tongue?”

“I answer for that.”

“But you, Father Madeleine?”

And, after a silence, fraught with anxiety, Fauchelevent exclaimed:—

“Why, get out as you came in!”

Jean Valjean, as in the first instance, contented himself with saying,

“Impossible.”

Fauchelevent grumbled, more to himself than to Jean Valjean:—

“There is another thing which bothers me. I have said that I would put

earth in it. When I come to think it over, the earth instead of the

corpse will not seem like the real thing, it won’t do, it will get

displaced, it will move about. The men will bear it. You understand,

Father Madeleine, the government will notice it.”

Jean Valjean stared him straight in the eye and thought that he was

raving.

Fauchelevent went on:—

“How the de—uce are you going to get out? It must all be done by

to-morrow morning. It is to-morrow that I am to bring you in. The

prioress expects you.”

Then he explained to Jean Valjean that this was his recompense for a

service which he, Fauchelevent, was to render to the community. That it

fell among his duties to take part in their burials, that he nailed up

the coffins and helped the grave-digger at the cemetery. That the nun

who had died that morning had requested to be buried in the coffin

which had served her for a bed, and interred in the vault under the

altar of the chapel. That the police regulations forbade this, but that

she was one of those dead to whom nothing is refused. That the prioress

and the vocal mothers intended to fulfil the wish of the deceased. That

it was so much the worse for the government. That he, Fauchelevent, was

to nail up the coffin in the cell, raise the stone in the chapel, and

lower the corpse into the vault. And that, by way of thanks, the

prioress was to admit his brother to the house as a gardener, and his

niece as a pupil. That his brother was M. Madeleine, and that his niece

was Cosette. That the prioress had told him to bring his brother on the

following evening, after the counterfeit interment in the cemetery. But

that he could not bring M. Madeleine in from the outside if M.

Madeleine was not outside. That that was the first problem. And then,

that there was another: the empty coffin.

“What is that empty coffin?” asked Jean Valjean.

Fauchelevent replied:—

“The coffin of the administration.”

“What coffin? What administration?”

“A nun dies. The municipal doctor comes and says, ‘A nun has died.’ The

government sends a coffin. The next day it sends a hearse and

undertaker’s men to get the coffin and carry it to the cemetery. The

undertaker’s men will come and lift the coffin; there will be nothing

in it.”

“Put something in it.”

“A corpse? I have none.”

“No.”

“What then?”

“A living person.”

“What person?”

“Me!” said Jean Valjean.

Fauchelevent, who was seated, sprang up as though a bomb had burst

under his chair.

“You!”

“Why not?”

Jean Valjean gave way to one of those rare smiles which lighted up his

face like a flash from heaven in the winter.

“You know, Fauchelevent, what you have said: ‘Mother Crucifixion is

dead.’ and I add: ‘and Father Madeleine is buried.’”

“Ah! good, you can laugh, you are not speaking seriously.”

“Very seriously, I must get out of this place.”

“Certainly.”

“l have told you to find a basket, and a cover for me also.”

“Well?”

“The basket will be of pine, and the cover a black cloth.”

“In the first place, it will be a white cloth. Nuns are buried in

white.”

“Let it be a white cloth, then.”

“You are not like other men, Father Madeleine.”

To behold such devices, which are nothing else than the savage and

daring inventions of the galleys, spring forth from the peaceable

things which surrounded him, and mingle with what he called the “petty

course of life in the convent,” caused Fauchelevent as much amazement

as a gull fishing in the gutter of the Rue Saint-Denis would inspire in

a passer-by.

Jean Valjean went on:—

“The problem is to get out of here without being seen. This offers the

means. But give me some information, in the first place. How is it

managed? Where is this coffin?”

“The empty one?”

“Yes.”

“Downstairs, in what is called the dead-room. It stands on two

trestles, under the pall.”

“How long is the coffin?”

“Six feet.”

“What is this dead-room?”

“It is a chamber on the ground floor which has a grated window opening

on the garden, which is closed on the outside by a shutter, and two

doors; one leads into the convent, the other into the church.”

“What church?”

“The church in the street, the church which any one can enter.”

“Have you the keys to those two doors?”

“No; I have the key to the door which communicates with the convent;

the porter has the key to the door which communicates with the church.”

“When does the porter open that door?”

“Only to allow the undertaker’s men to enter, when they come to get the

coffin. When the coffin has been taken out, the door is closed again.”

“Who nails up the coffin?”

“I do.”

“Who spreads the pall over it?”

“I do.”

“Are you alone?”

“Not another man, except the police doctor, can enter the dead-room.

That is even written on the wall.”

“Could you hide me in that room to-night when every one is asleep?”

“No. But I could hide you in a small, dark nook which opens on the

dead-room, where I keep my tools to use for burials, and of which I

have the key.”

“At what time will the hearse come for the coffin to-morrow?”

“About three o’clock in the afternoon. The burial will take place at

the Vaugirard cemetery a little before nightfall. It is not very near.”

“I will remain concealed in your tool-closet all night and all the

morning. And how about food? I shall be hungry.”

“I will bring you something.”

“You can come and nail me up in the coffin at two o’clock.”

Fauchelevent recoiled and cracked his finger-joints.

“But that is impossible!”

“Bah! Impossible to take a hammer and drive some nails in a plank?”

What seemed unprecedented to Fauchelevent was, we repeat, a simple

matter to Jean Valjean. Jean Valjean had been in worse straits than

this. Any man who has been a prisoner understands how to contract

himself to fit the diameter of the escape. The prisoner is subject to

flight as the sick man is subject to a crisis which saves or kills him.

An escape is a cure. What does not a man undergo for the sake of a

cure? To have himself nailed up in a case and carried off like a bale

of goods, to live for a long time in a box, to find air where there is

none, to economize his breath for hours, to know how to stifle without

dying—this was one of Jean Valjean’s gloomy talents.

Moreover, a coffin containing a living being,—that convict’s

expedient,—is also an imperial expedient. If we are to credit the monk

Austin Castillejo, this was the means employed by Charles the Fifth,

desirous of seeing the Plombes for the last time after his abdication.

He had her brought into and carried out of the monastery of Saint-Yuste

in this manner.

Fauchelevent, who had recovered himself a little, exclaimed:—

“But how will you manage to breathe?”

“I will breathe.”

“In that box! The mere thought of it suffocates me.”

“You surely must have a gimlet, you will make a few holes here and

there, around my mouth, and you will nail the top plank on loosely.”

“Good! And what if you should happen to cough or to sneeze?”

“A man who is making his escape does not cough or sneeze.”

And Jean Valjean added:—

“Father Fauchelevent, we must come to a decision: I must either be

caught here, or accept this escape through the hearse.”

Every one has noticed the taste which cats have for pausing and

lounging between the two leaves of a half-shut door. Who is there who

has not said to a cat, “Do come in!” There are men who, when an

incident stands half-open before them, have the same tendency to halt

in indecision between two resolutions, at the risk of getting crushed

through the abrupt closing of the adventure by fate. The over-prudent,

cats as they are, and because they are cats, sometimes incur more

danger than the audacious. Fauchelevent was of this hesitating nature.

But Jean Valjean’s coolness prevailed over him in spite of himself. He

grumbled:—

“Well, since there is no other means.”

Jean Valjean resumed:—

“The only thing which troubles me is what will take place at the

cemetery.”

“That is the very point that is not troublesome,” exclaimed

Fauchelevent. “If you are sure of coming out of the coffin all right, I

am sure of getting you out of the grave. The grave-digger is a

drunkard, and a friend of mine. He is Father Mestienne. An old fellow

of the old school. The grave-digger puts the corpses in the grave, and

I put the grave-digger in my pocket. I will tell you what will take

place. They will arrive a little before dusk, three-quarters of an hour

before the gates of the cemetery are closed. The hearse will drive

directly up to the grave. I shall follow; that is my business. I shall

have a hammer, a chisel, and some pincers in my pocket. The hearse

halts, the undertaker’s men knot a rope around your coffin and lower

you down. The priest says the prayers, makes the sign of the cross,

sprinkles the holy water, and takes his departure. I am left alone with

Father Mestienne. He is my friend, I tell you. One of two things will

happen, he will either be sober, or he will not be sober. If he is not

drunk, I shall say to him: ‘Come and drink a bout while the \_Bon Coing\_

[the Good Quince] is open.’ I carry him off, I get him drunk,—it does

not take long to make Father Mestienne drunk, he always has the

beginning of it about him,—I lay him under the table, I take his card,

so that I can get into the cemetery again, and I return without him.

Then you have no longer any one but me to deal with. If he is drunk, I

shall say to him: ‘Be off; I will do your work for you.’ Off he goes,

and I drag you out of the hole.”

Jean Valjean held out his hand, and Fauchelevent precipitated himself

upon it with the touching effusion of a peasant.

“That is settled, Father Fauchelevent. All will go well.”

“Provided nothing goes wrong,” thought Fauchelevent. “In that case, it

would be terrible.”

CHAPTER V—IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO BE DRUNK IN ORDER TO BE IMMORTAL

On the following day, as the sun was declining, the very rare

passers-by on the Boulevard du Maine pulled off their hats to an

old-fashioned hearse, ornamented with skulls, cross-bones, and tears.

This hearse contained a coffin covered with a white cloth over which

spread a large black cross, like a huge corpse with drooping arms. A

mourning-coach, in which could be seen a priest in his surplice, and a

choir boy in his red cap, followed. Two undertaker’s men in gray

uniforms trimmed with black walked on the right and the left of the

hearse. Behind it came an old man in the garments of a laborer, who

limped along. The procession was going in the direction of the

Vaugirard cemetery.

The handle of a hammer, the blade of a cold chisel, and the antennæ of

a pair of pincers were visible, protruding from the man’s pocket.

The Vaugirard cemetery formed an exception among the cemeteries of

Paris. It had its peculiar usages, just as it had its carriage entrance

and its house door, which old people in the quarter, who clung

tenaciously to ancient words, still called the \_porte cavalière\_ and

the \_porte piétonne\_.16 The Bernardines-Benedictines of the Rue

Petit-Picpus had obtained permission, as we have already stated, to be

buried there in a corner apart, and at night, the plot of land having

formerly belonged to their community. The grave-diggers being thus

bound to service in the evening in summer and at night in winter, in

this cemetery, they were subjected to a special discipline. The gates

of the Paris cemeteries closed, at that epoch, at sundown, and this

being a municipal regulation, the Vaugirard cemetery was bound by it

like the rest. The carriage gate and the house door were two contiguous

grated gates, adjoining a pavilion built by the architect Perronet, and

inhabited by the door-keeper of the cemetery. These gates, therefore,

swung inexorably on their hinges at the instant when the sun

disappeared behind the dome of the Invalides. If any grave-digger were

delayed after that moment in the cemetery, there was but one way for

him to get out—his grave-digger’s card furnished by the department of

public funerals. A sort of letter-box was constructed in the porter’s

window. The grave-digger dropped his card into this box, the porter

heard it fall, pulled the rope, and the small door opened. If the man

had not his card, he mentioned his name, the porter, who was sometimes

in bed and asleep, rose, came out and identified the man, and opened

the gate with his key; the grave-digger stepped out, but had to pay a

fine of fifteen francs.

This cemetery, with its peculiarities outside the regulations,

embarrassed the symmetry of the administration. It was suppressed a

little later than 1830. The cemetery of Mont-Parnasse, called the

Eastern cemetery, succeeded to it, and inherited that famous dram-shop

next to the Vaugirard cemetery, which was surmounted by a quince

painted on a board, and which formed an angle, one side on the

drinkers’ tables, and the other on the tombs, with this sign: \_Au Bon

Coing\_.

The Vaugirard cemetery was what may be called a faded cemetery. It was

falling into disuse. Dampness was invading it, the flowers were

deserting it. The bourgeois did not care much about being buried in the

Vaugirard; it hinted at poverty. Père-Lachaise if you please! to be

buried in Père-Lachaise is equivalent to having furniture of mahogany.

It is recognized as elegant. The Vaugirard cemetery was a venerable

enclosure, planted like an old-fashioned French garden. Straight

alleys, box, thuya-trees, holly, ancient tombs beneath aged

cypress-trees, and very tall grass. In the evening it was tragic there.

There were very lugubrious lines about it.

The sun had not yet set when the hearse with the white pall and the

black cross entered the avenue of the Vaugirard cemetery. The lame man

who followed it was no other than Fauchelevent.

The interment of Mother Crucifixion in the vault under the altar, the

exit of Cosette, the introduction of Jean Valjean to the dead-room,—all

had been executed without difficulty, and there had been no hitch.

Let us remark in passing, that the burial of Mother Crucifixion under

the altar of the convent is a perfectly venial offence in our sight. It

is one of the faults which resemble a duty. The nuns had committed it,

not only without difficulty, but even with the applause of their own

consciences. In the cloister, what is called the “government” is only

an intermeddling with authority, an interference which is always

questionable. In the first place, the rule; as for the code, we shall

see. Make as many laws as you please, men; but keep them for

yourselves. The tribute to Cæsar is never anything but the remnants of

the tribute to God. A prince is nothing in the presence of a principle.

Fauchelevent limped along behind the hearse in a very contented frame

of mind. His twin plots, the one with the nuns, the one for the

convent, the other against it, the other with M. Madeleine, had

succeeded, to all appearance. Jean Valjean’s composure was one of those

powerful tranquillities which are contagious. Fauchelevent no longer

felt doubtful as to his success.

What remained to be done was a mere nothing. Within the last two years,

he had made good Father Mestienne, a chubby-cheeked person, drunk at

least ten times. He played with Father Mestienne. He did what he liked

with him. He made him dance according to his whim. Mestienne’s head

adjusted itself to the cap of Fauchelevent’s will. Fauchelevent’s

confidence was perfect.

At the moment when the convoy entered the avenue leading to the

cemetery, Fauchelevent glanced cheerfully at the hearse, and said half

aloud, as he rubbed his big hands:—

“Here’s a fine farce!”

All at once the hearse halted; it had reached the gate. The permission

for interment must be exhibited. The undertaker’s man addressed himself

to the porter of the cemetery. During this colloquy, which always is

productive of a delay of from one to two minutes, some one, a stranger,

came and placed himself behind the hearse, beside Fauchelevent. He was

a sort of laboring man, who wore a waistcoat with large pockets and

carried a mattock under his arm.

Fauchelevent surveyed this stranger.

“Who are you?” he demanded.

“The man replied:—

“The grave-digger.”

If a man could survive the blow of a cannon-ball full in the breast, he

would make the same face that Fauchelevent made.

“The grave-digger?”

“Yes.”

“You?”

“I.”

“Father Mestienne is the grave-digger.”

“He was.”

“What! He was?”

“He is dead.”

Fauchelevent had expected anything but this, that a grave-digger could

die. It is true, nevertheless, that grave-diggers do die themselves. By

dint of excavating graves for other people, one hollows out one’s own.

Fauchelevent stood there with his mouth wide open. He had hardly the

strength to stammer:—

“But it is not possible!”

“It is so.”

“But,” he persisted feebly, “Father Mestienne is the grave-digger.”

“After Napoleon, Louis XVIII. After Mestienne, Gribier. Peasant, my

name is Gribier.”

Fauchelevent, who was deadly pale, stared at this Gribier.

He was a tall, thin, livid, utterly funereal man. He had the air of an

unsuccessful doctor who had turned grave-digger.

Fauchelevent burst out laughing.

“Ah!” said he, “what queer things do happen! Father Mestienne is dead,

but long live little Father Lenoir! Do you know who little Father

Lenoir is? He is a jug of red wine. It is a jug of Surêne, morbigou! of

real Paris Surêne? Ah! So old Mestienne is dead! I am sorry for it; he

was a jolly fellow. But you are a jolly fellow, too. Are you not,

comrade? We’ll go and have a drink together presently.”

The man replied:—

“I have been a student. I passed my fourth examination. I never drink.”

The hearse had set out again, and was rolling up the grand alley of the

cemetery.

Fauchelevent had slackened his pace. He limped more out of anxiety than

from infirmity.

The grave-digger walked on in front of him.

Fauchelevent passed the unexpected Gribier once more in review.

He was one of those men who, though very young, have the air of age,

and who, though slender, are extremely strong.

“Comrade!” cried Fauchelevent.

The man turned round.

“I am the convent grave-digger.”

“My colleague,” said the man.

Fauchelevent, who was illiterate but very sharp, understood that he had

to deal with a formidable species of man, with a fine talker. He

muttered:

“So Father Mestienne is dead.”

The man replied:—

“Completely. The good God consulted his note-book which shows when the

time is up. It was Father Mestienne’s turn. Father Mestienne died.”

Fauchelevent repeated mechanically: “The good God—”

“The good God,” said the man authoritatively. “According to the

philosophers, the Eternal Father; according to the Jacobins, the

Supreme Being.”

“Shall we not make each other’s acquaintance?” stammered Fauchelevent.

“It is made. You are a peasant, I am a Parisian.”

“People do not know each other until they have drunk together. He who

empties his glass empties his heart. You must come and have a drink

with me. Such a thing cannot be refused.”

“Business first.”

Fauchelevent thought: “I am lost.”

They were only a few turns of the wheel distant from the small alley

leading to the nuns’ corner.

The grave-digger resumed:—

“Peasant, I have seven small children who must be fed. As they must

eat, I cannot drink.”

And he added, with the satisfaction of a serious man who is turning a

phrase well:—

“Their hunger is the enemy of my thirst.”

The hearse skirted a clump of cypress-trees, quitted the grand alley,

turned into a narrow one, entered the waste land, and plunged into a

thicket. This indicated the immediate proximity of the place of

sepulture. Fauchelevent slackened his pace, but he could not detain the

hearse. Fortunately, the soil, which was light and wet with the winter

rains, clogged the wheels and retarded its speed.

He approached the grave-digger.

“They have such a nice little Argenteuil wine,” murmured Fauchelevent.

“Villager,” retorted the man, “I ought not be a grave-digger. My father

was a porter at the Prytaneum [Town-Hall]. He destined me for

literature. But he had reverses. He had losses on ’change. I was

obliged to renounce the profession of author. But I am still a public

writer.”

“So you are not a grave-digger, then?” returned Fauchelevent, clutching

at this branch, feeble as it was.

“The one does not hinder the other. I cumulate.”

Fauchelevent did not understand this last word.

“Come have a drink,” said he.

Here a remark becomes necessary. Fauchelevent, whatever his anguish,

offered a drink, but he did not explain himself on one point; who was

to pay? Generally, Fauchelevent offered and Father Mestienne paid. An

offer of a drink was the evident result of the novel situation created

by the new grave-digger, and it was necessary to make this offer, but

the old gardener left the proverbial quarter of an hour named after

Rabelais in the dark, and that not unintentionally. As for himself,

Fauchelevent did not wish to pay, troubled as he was.

The grave-digger went on with a superior smile:—

“One must eat. I have accepted Father Mestienne’s reversion. One gets

to be a philosopher when one has nearly completed his classes. To the

labor of the hand I join the labor of the arm. I have my scrivener’s

stall in the market of the Rue de Sèvres. You know? the Umbrella

Market. All the cooks of the Red Cross apply to me. I scribble their

declarations of love to the raw soldiers. In the morning I write love

letters; in the evening I dig graves. Such is life, rustic.”

The hearse was still advancing. Fauchelevent, uneasy to the last

degree, was gazing about him on all sides. Great drops of perspiration

trickled down from his brow.

“But,” continued the grave-digger, “a man cannot serve two mistresses.

I must choose between the pen and the mattock. The mattock is ruining

my hand.”

The hearse halted.

The choir boy alighted from the mourning-coach, then the priest.

One of the small front wheels of the hearse had run up a little on a

pile of earth, beyond which an open grave was visible.

“What a farce this is!” repeated Fauchelevent in consternation.

CHAPTER VI—BETWEEN FOUR PLANKS

Who was in the coffin? The reader knows. Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean had arranged things so that he could exist there, and he

could almost breathe.

It is a strange thing to what a degree security of conscience confers

security of the rest. Every combination thought out by Jean Valjean had

been progressing, and progressing favorably, since the preceding day.

He, like Fauchelevent, counted on Father Mestienne. He had no doubt as

to the end. Never was there a more critical situation, never more

complete composure.

The four planks of the coffin breathe out a kind of terrible peace. It

seemed as though something of the repose of the dead entered into Jean

Valjean’s tranquillity.

From the depths of that coffin he had been able to follow, and he had

followed, all the phases of the terrible drama which he was playing

with death.

Shortly after Fauchelevent had finished nailing on the upper plank,

Jean Valjean had felt himself carried out, then driven off. He knew,

from the diminution in the jolting, when they left the pavements and

reached the earth road. He had divined, from a dull noise, that they

were crossing the bridge of Austerlitz. At the first halt, he had

understood that they were entering the cemetery; at the second halt, he

said to himself:—

“Here is the grave.”

Suddenly, he felt hands seize the coffin, then a harsh grating against

the planks; he explained it to himself as the rope which was being

fastened round the casket in order to lower it into the cavity.

Then he experienced a giddiness.

The undertaker’s man and the grave-digger had probably allowed the

coffin to lose its balance, and had lowered the head before the foot.

He recovered himself fully when he felt himself horizontal and

motionless. He had just touched the bottom.

He had a certain sensation of cold.

A voice rose above him, glacial and solemn. He heard Latin words, which

he did not understand, pass over him, so slowly that he was able to

catch them one by one:—

\_“Qui dormiunt in terræ pulvere, evigilabunt; alii in vitam æternam, et

alii in approbrium, ut videant semper.” \_

A child’s voice said:—

\_“De profundis.” \_

The grave voice began again:—

\_“Requiem æternam dona ei, Domine.” \_

The child’s voice responded:—

\_“Et lux perpetua luceat ei.” \_

He heard something like the gentle patter of several drops of rain on

the plank which covered him. It was probably the holy water.

He thought: “This will be over soon now. Patience for a little while

longer. The priest will take his departure. Fauchelevent will take

Mestienne off to drink. I shall be left. Then Fauchelevent will return

alone, and I shall get out. That will be the work of a good hour.”

The grave voice resumed

\_“Requiescat in pace.” \_

And the child’s voice said:—

\_“Amen.” \_

Jean Valjean strained his ears, and heard something like retreating

footsteps.

“There, they are going now,” thought he. “I am alone.”

All at once, he heard over his head a sound which seemed to him to be a

clap of thunder.

It was a shovelful of earth falling on the coffin.

A second shovelful fell.

One of the holes through which he breathed had just been stopped up.

A third shovelful of earth fell.

Then a fourth.

There are things which are too strong for the strongest man. Jean

Valjean lost consciousness.

CHAPTER VII—IN WHICH WILL BE FOUND THE ORIGIN OF THE SAYING: DON’T LOSE

THE CARD

This is what had taken place above the coffin in which lay Jean

Valjean.

When the hearse had driven off, when the priest and the choir boy had

entered the carriage again and taken their departure, Fauchelevent, who

had not taken his eyes from the grave-digger, saw the latter bend over

and grasp his shovel, which was sticking upright in the heap of dirt.

Then Fauchelevent took a supreme resolve.

He placed himself between the grave and the grave-digger, crossed his

arms and said:—

“I am the one to pay!”

The grave-digger stared at him in amazement, and replied:—

“What’s that, peasant?”

Fauchelevent repeated:—

“I am the one who pays!”

“What?”

“For the wine.”

“What wine?”

“That Argenteuil wine.”

“Where is the Argenteuil?”

“At the \_Bon Coing\_.”

“Go to the devil!” said the grave-digger.

And he flung a shovelful of earth on the coffin.

The coffin gave back a hollow sound. Fauchelevent felt himself stagger

and on the point of falling headlong into the grave himself. He shouted

in a voice in which the strangling sound of the death rattle began to

mingle:—

“Comrade! Before the \_Bon Coing\_ is shut!”

The grave-digger took some more earth on his shovel. Fauchelevent

continued.

“I will pay.”

And he seized the man’s arm.

“Listen to me, comrade. I am the convent grave-digger, I have come to

help you. It is a business which can be performed at night. Let us

begin, then, by going for a drink.”

And as he spoke, and clung to this desperate insistence, this

melancholy reflection occurred to him: “And if he drinks, will he get

drunk?”

“Provincial,” said the man, “if you positively insist upon it, I

consent. We will drink. After work, never before.”

And he flourished his shovel briskly. Fauchelevent held him back.

“It is Argenteuil wine, at six.”

“Oh, come,” said the grave-digger, “you are a bell-ringer. Ding dong,

ding dong, that’s all you know how to say. Go hang yourself.”

And he threw in a second shovelful.

Fauchelevent had reached a point where he no longer knew what he was

saying.

“Come along and drink,” he cried, “since it is I who pays the bill.”

“When we have put the child to bed,” said the grave-digger.

He flung in a third shovelful.

Then he thrust his shovel into the earth and added:—

“It’s cold to-night, you see, and the corpse would shriek out after us

if we were to plant her there without a coverlet.”

At that moment, as he loaded his shovel, the grave-digger bent over,

and the pocket of his waistcoat gaped. Fauchelevent’s wild gaze fell

mechanically into that pocket, and there it stopped.

The sun was not yet hidden behind the horizon; there was still light

enough to enable him to distinguish something white at the bottom of

that yawning pocket.

The sum total of lightning that the eye of a Picard peasant can

contain, traversed Fauchelevent’s pupils. An idea had just occurred to

him.

He thrust his hand into the pocket from behind, without the

grave-digger, who was wholly absorbed in his shovelful of earth,

observing it, and pulled out the white object which lay at the bottom

of it.

The man sent a fourth shovelful tumbling into the grave.

Just as he turned round to get the fifth, Fauchelevent looked calmly at

him and said:—

“By the way, you new man, have you your card?”

The grave-digger paused.

“What card?”

“The sun is on the point of setting.”

“That’s good, it is going to put on its nightcap.”

“The gate of the cemetery will close immediately.”

“Well, what then?”

“Have you your card?”

“Ah! my card?” said the grave-digger.

And he fumbled in his pocket.

Having searched one pocket, he proceeded to search the other. He passed

on to his fobs, explored the first, returned to the second.

“Why, no,” said he, “I have not my card. I must have forgotten it.”

“Fifteen francs fine,” said Fauchelevent.

The grave-digger turned green. Green is the pallor of livid people.

“Ah! Jésus-mon-Dieu-bancroche-à-bas-la-lune!”17 he exclaimed. “Fifteen

francs fine!”

“Three pieces of a hundred sous,” said Fauchelevent.

The grave-digger dropped his shovel.

Fauchelevent’s turn had come.

“Ah, come now, conscript,” said Fauchelevent, “none of this despair.

There is no question of committing suicide and benefiting the grave.

Fifteen francs is fifteen francs, and besides, you may not be able to

pay it. I am an old hand, you are a new one. I know all the ropes and

the devices. I will give you some friendly advice. One thing is clear,

the sun is on the point of setting, it is touching the dome now, the

cemetery will be closed in five minutes more.”

“That is true,” replied the man.

“Five minutes more and you will not have time to fill the grave, it is

as hollow as the devil, this grave, and to reach the gate in season to

pass it before it is shut.”

“That is true.”

“In that case, a fine of fifteen francs.”

“Fifteen francs.”

“But you have time. Where do you live?”

“A couple of steps from the barrier, a quarter of an hour from here.

No. 87 Rue de Vaugirard.”

“You have just time to get out by taking to your heels at your best

speed.”

“That is exactly so.”

“Once outside the gate, you gallop home, you get your card, you return,

the cemetery porter admits you. As you have your card, there will be

nothing to pay. And you will bury your corpse. I’ll watch it for you in

the meantime, so that it shall not run away.”

“I am indebted to you for my life, peasant.”

“Decamp!” said Fauchelevent.

The grave-digger, overwhelmed with gratitude, shook his hand and set

off on a run.

When the man had disappeared in the thicket, Fauchelevent listened

until he heard his footsteps die away in the distance, then he leaned

over the grave, and said in a low tone:—

“Father Madeleine!”

There was no reply.

Fauchelevent was seized with a shudder. He tumbled rather than climbed

into the grave, flung himself on the head of the coffin and cried:—

“Are you there?”

Silence in the coffin.

Fauchelevent, hardly able to draw his breath for trembling, seized his

cold chisel and his hammer, and pried up the coffin lid.

Jean Valjean’s face appeared in the twilight; it was pale and his eyes

were closed.

Fauchelevent’s hair rose upright on his head, he sprang to his feet,

then fell back against the side of the grave, ready to swoon on the

coffin. He stared at Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean lay there pallid and motionless.

Fauchelevent murmured in a voice as faint as a sigh:—

“He is dead!”

And, drawing himself up, and folding his arms with such violence that

his clenched fists came in contact with his shoulders, he cried:—

“And this is the way I save his life!”

Then the poor man fell to sobbing. He soliloquized the while, for it is

an error to suppose that the soliloquy is unnatural. Powerful emotion

often talks aloud.

“It is Father Mestienne’s fault. Why did that fool die? What need was

there for him to give up the ghost at the very moment when no one was

expecting it? It is he who has killed M. Madeleine. Father Madeleine!

He is in the coffin. It is quite handy. All is over. Now, is there any

sense in these things? Ah! my God! he is dead! Well! and his little

girl, what am I to do with her? What will the fruit-seller say? The

idea of its being possible for a man like that to die like this! When I

think how he put himself under that cart! Father Madeleine! Father

Madeleine! Pardine! He was suffocated, I said so. He wouldn’t believe

me. Well! Here’s a pretty trick to play! He is dead, that good man, the

very best man out of all the good God’s good folks! And his little

girl! Ah! In the first place, I won’t go back there myself. I shall

stay here. After having done such a thing as that! What’s the use of

being two old men, if we are two old fools! But, in the first place,

how did he manage to enter the convent? That was the beginning of it

all. One should not do such things. Father Madeleine! Father Madeleine!

Father Madeleine! Madeleine! Monsieur Madeleine! Monsieur le Maire! He

does not hear me. Now get out of this scrape if you can!”

And he tore his hair.

A grating sound became audible through the trees in the distance. It

was the cemetery gate closing.

Fauchelevent bent over Jean Valjean, and all at once he bounded back

and recoiled so far as the limits of a grave permit.

Jean Valjean’s eyes were open and gazing at him.

To see a corpse is alarming, to behold a resurrection is almost as much

so. Fauchelevent became like stone, pale, haggard, overwhelmed by all

these excesses of emotion, not knowing whether he had to do with a

living man or a dead one, and staring at Jean Valjean, who was gazing

at him.

[Illustration: The Resurrection]

“I fell asleep,” said Jean Valjean.

And he raised himself to a sitting posture.

Fauchelevent fell on his knees.

“Just, good Virgin! How you frightened me!”

Then he sprang to his feet and cried:—

“Thanks, Father Madeleine!”

Jean Valjean had merely fainted. The fresh air had revived him.

Joy is the ebb of terror. Fauchelevent found almost as much difficulty

in recovering himself as Jean Valjean had.

“So you are not dead! Oh! How wise you are! I called you so much that

you came back. When I saw your eyes shut, I said: ‘Good! there he is,

stifled,’ I should have gone raving mad, mad enough for a strait

jacket. They would have put me in Bicêtre. What do you suppose I should

have done if you had been dead? And your little girl? There’s that

fruit-seller,—she would never have understood it! The child is thrust

into your arms, and then—the grandfather is dead! What a story! good

saints of paradise, what a tale! Ah! you are alive, that’s the best of

it!”

“I am cold,” said Jean Valjean.

This remark recalled Fauchelevent thoroughly to reality, and there was

pressing need of it. The souls of these two men were troubled even when

they had recovered themselves, although they did not realize it, and

there was about them something uncanny, which was the sinister

bewilderment inspired by the place.

“Let us get out of here quickly,” exclaimed Fauchelevent.

He fumbled in his pocket, and pulled out a gourd with which he had

provided himself.

“But first, take a drop,” said he.

The flask finished what the fresh air had begun, Jean Valjean swallowed

a mouthful of brandy, and regained full possession of his faculties.

He got out of the coffin, and helped Fauchelevent to nail on the lid

again.

Three minutes later they were out of the grave.

Moreover, Fauchelevent was perfectly composed. He took his time. The

cemetery was closed. The arrival of the grave-digger Gribier was not to

be apprehended. That “conscript” was at home busily engaged in looking

for his card, and at some difficulty in finding it in his lodgings,

since it was in Fauchelevent’s pocket. Without a card, he could not get

back into the cemetery.

Fauchelevent took the shovel, and Jean Valjean the pick-axe, and

together they buried the empty coffin.

When the grave was full, Fauchelevent said to Jean Valjean:—

“Let us go. I will keep the shovel; do you carry off the mattock.”

Night was falling.

Jean Valjean experienced some difficulty in moving and in walking. He

had stiffened himself in that coffin, and had become a little like a

corpse. The rigidity of death had seized upon him between those four

planks. He had, in a manner, to thaw out, from the tomb.

“You are benumbed,” said Fauchelevent. “It is a pity that I have a game

leg, for otherwise we might step out briskly.”

“Bah!” replied Jean Valjean, “four paces will put life into my legs

once more.”

They set off by the alleys through which the hearse had passed. On

arriving before the closed gate and the porter’s pavilion Fauchelevent,

who held the grave-digger’s card in his hand, dropped it into the box,

the porter pulled the rope, the gate opened, and they went out.

“How well everything is going!” said Fauchelevent; “what a capital idea

that was of yours, Father Madeleine!”

They passed the Vaugirard barrier in the simplest manner in the world.

In the neighborhood of the cemetery, a shovel and pick are equal to two

passports.

The Rue Vaugirard was deserted.

“Father Madeleine,” said Fauchelevent as they went along, and raising

his eyes to the houses, “Your eyes are better than mine. Show me No.

87.”

“Here it is,” said Jean Valjean.

“There is no one in the street,” said Fauchelevent. “Give me your

mattock and wait a couple of minutes for me.”

Fauchelevent entered No. 87, ascended to the very top, guided by the

instinct which always leads the poor man to the garret, and knocked in

the dark, at the door of an attic.

A voice replied: “Come in.”

It was Gribier’s voice.

Fauchelevent opened the door. The grave-digger’s dwelling was, like all

such wretched habitations, an unfurnished and encumbered garret. A

packing-case—a coffin, perhaps—took the place of a commode, a

butter-pot served for a drinking-fountain, a straw mattress served for

a bed, the floor served instead of tables and chairs. In a corner, on a

tattered fragment which had been a piece of an old carpet, a thin woman

and a number of children were piled in a heap. The whole of this

poverty-stricken interior bore traces of having been overturned. One

would have said that there had been an earthquake “for one.” The covers

were displaced, the rags scattered about, the jug broken, the mother

had been crying, the children had probably been beaten; traces of a

vigorous and ill-tempered search. It was plain that the grave-digger

had made a desperate search for his card, and had made everybody in the

garret, from the jug to his wife, responsible for its loss. He wore an

air of desperation.

But Fauchelevent was in too great a hurry to terminate this adventure

to take any notice of this sad side of his success.

He entered and said:—

“I have brought you back your shovel and pick.”

Gribier gazed at him in stupefaction.

“Is it you, peasant?”

“And to-morrow morning you will find your card with the porter of the

cemetery.”

And he laid the shovel and mattock on the floor.

“What is the meaning of this?” demanded Gribier.

“The meaning of it is, that you dropped your card out of your pocket,

that I found it on the ground after you were gone, that I have buried

the corpse, that I have filled the grave, that I have done your work,

that the porter will return your card to you, and that you will not

have to pay fifteen francs. There you have it, conscript.”

“Thanks, villager!” exclaimed Gribier, radiant. “The next time I will

pay for the drinks.”

CHAPTER VIII—A SUCCESSFUL INTERROGATORY

An hour later, in the darkness of night, two men and a child presented

themselves at No. 62 Rue Petit-Picpus. The elder of the men lifted the

knocker and rapped.

They were Fauchelevent, Jean Valjean, and Cosette.

The two old men had gone to fetch Cosette from the fruiterer’s in the

Rue du Chemin-Vert, where Fauchelevent had deposited her on the

preceding day. Cosette had passed these twenty-four hours trembling

silently and understanding nothing. She trembled to such a degree that

she wept. She had neither eaten nor slept. The worthy fruit-seller had

plied her with a hundred questions, without obtaining any other reply

than a melancholy and unvarying gaze. Cosette had betrayed nothing of

what she had seen and heard during the last two days. She divined that

they were passing through a crisis. She was deeply conscious that it

was necessary to “be good.” Who has not experienced the sovereign power

of those two words, pronounced with a certain accent in the ear of a

terrified little being: \_Say nothing! \_ Fear is mute. Moreover, no one

guards a secret like a child.

But when, at the expiration of these lugubrious twenty-four hours, she

beheld Jean Valjean again, she gave vent to such a cry of joy, that any

thoughtful person who had chanced to hear that cry, would have guessed

that it issued from an abyss.

Fauchelevent belonged to the convent and knew the pass-words. All the

doors opened.

Thus was solved the double and alarming problem of how to get out and

how to get in.

The porter, who had received his instructions, opened the little

servant’s door which connected the courtyard with the garden, and which

could still be seen from the street twenty years ago, in the wall at

the bottom of the court, which faced the carriage entrance.

The porter admitted all three of them through this door, and from that

point they reached the inner, reserved parlor where Fauchelevent, on

the preceding day, had received his orders from the prioress.

The prioress, rosary in hand, was waiting for them. A vocal mother,

with her veil lowered, stood beside her.

A discreet candle lighted, one might almost say, made a show of

lighting the parlor.

The prioress passed Jean Valjean in review. There is nothing which

examines like a downcast eye.

Then she questioned him:—

“You are the brother?”

“Yes, reverend Mother,” replied Fauchelevent.

“What is your name?”

Fauchelevent replied:—

“Ultime Fauchelevent.”

He really had had a brother named Ultime, who was dead.

“Where do you come from?”

Fauchelevent replied:—

“From Picquigny, near Amiens.”

“What is your age?”

Fauchelevent replied:—

“Fifty.”

“What is your profession?”

Fauchelevent replied:—

“Gardener.”

“Are you a good Christian?”

Fauchelevent replied:—

“Every one is in the family.”

“Is this your little girl?”

Fauchelevent replied:—

“Yes, reverend Mother.”

“You are her father?”

Fauchelevent replied:—

“Her grandfather.”

The vocal mother said to the prioress in a low voice

“He answers well.”

Jean Valjean had not uttered a single word.

The prioress looked attentively at Cosette, and said half aloud to the

vocal mother:—

“She will grow up ugly.”

The two mothers consulted for a few moments in very low tones in the

corner of the parlor, then the prioress turned round and said:—

“Father Fauvent, you will get another knee-cap with a bell. Two will be

required now.”

On the following day, therefore, two bells were audible in the garden,

and the nuns could not resist the temptation to raise the corner of

their veils. At the extreme end of the garden, under the trees, two

men, Fauvent and another man, were visible as they dug side by side. An

enormous event. Their silence was broken to the extent of saying to

each other: “He is an assistant gardener.”

The vocal mothers added: “He is a brother of Father Fauvent.”

Jean Valjean was, in fact, regularly installed; he had his belled

knee-cap; henceforth he was official. His name was Ultime Fauchelevent.

The most powerful determining cause of his admission had been the

prioress’s observation upon Cosette: “She will grow up ugly.”

The prioress, that pronounced prognosticator, immediately took a fancy

to Cosette and gave her a place in the school as a charity pupil.

There is nothing that is not strictly logical about this.

It is in vain that mirrors are banished from the convent, women are

conscious of their faces; now, girls who are conscious of their beauty

do not easily become nuns; the vocation being voluntary in inverse

proportion to their good looks, more is to be hoped from the ugly than

from the pretty. Hence a lively taste for plain girls.

The whole of this adventure increased the importance of good, old

Fauchelevent; he won a triple success; in the eyes of Jean Valjean,

whom he had saved and sheltered; in those of grave-digger Gribier, who

said to himself: “He spared me that fine”; with the convent, which,

being enabled, thanks to him, to retain the coffin of Mother

Crucifixion under the altar, eluded Cæsar and satisfied God. There was

a coffin containing a body in the Petit-Picpus, and a coffin without a

body in the Vaugirard cemetery, public order had no doubt been deeply

disturbed thereby, but no one was aware of it.

As for the convent, its gratitude to Fauchelevent was very great.

Fauchelevent became the best of servitors and the most precious of

gardeners. Upon the occasion of the archbishop’s next visit, the

prioress recounted the affair to his Grace, making something of a

confession at the same time, and yet boasting of her deed. On leaving

the convent, the archbishop mentioned it with approval, and in a

whisper to M. de Latil, Monsieur’s confessor, afterwards Archbishop of

Reims and Cardinal. This admiration for Fauchelevent became widespread,

for it made its way to Rome. We have seen a note addressed by the then

reigning Pope, Leo XII., to one of his relatives, a Monsignor in the

Nuncio’s establishment in Paris, and bearing, like himself, the name of

Della Genga; it contained these lines: “It appears that there is in a

convent in Paris an excellent gardener, who is also a holy man, named

Fauvent.” Nothing of this triumph reached Fauchelevent in his hut; he

went on grafting, weeding, and covering up his melon beds, without in

the least suspecting his excellences and his sanctity. Neither did he

suspect his glory, any more than a Durham or Surrey bull whose portrait

is published in the \_London Illustrated News\_, with this inscription:

“Bull which carried off the prize at the Cattle Show.”

CHAPTER IX—CLOISTERED

Cosette continued to hold her tongue in the convent.

It was quite natural that Cosette should think herself Jean Valjean’s

daughter. Moreover, as she knew nothing, she could say nothing, and

then, she would not have said anything in any case. As we have just

observed, nothing trains children to silence like unhappiness. Cosette

had suffered so much, that she feared everything, even to speak or to

breathe. A single word had so often brought down an avalanche upon her.

She had hardly begun to regain her confidence since she had been with

Jean Valjean. She speedily became accustomed to the convent. Only she

regretted Catherine, but she dared not say so. Once, however, she did

say to Jean Valjean: “Father, if I had known, I would have brought her

away with me.”

Cosette had been obliged, on becoming a scholar in the convent, to don

the garb of the pupils of the house. Jean Valjean succeeded in getting

them to restore to him the garments which she laid aside. This was the

same mourning suit which he had made her put on when she had quitted

the Thénardiers’ inn. It was not very threadbare even now. Jean Valjean

locked up these garments, plus the stockings and the shoes, with a

quantity of camphor and all the aromatics in which convents abound, in

a little valise which he found means of procuring. He set this valise

on a chair near his bed, and he always carried the key about his

person. “Father,” Cosette asked him one day, “what is there in that box

which smells so good?”

Father Fauchelevent received other recompense for his good action, in

addition to the glory which we just mentioned, and of which he knew

nothing; in the first place it made him happy; next, he had much less

work, since it was shared. Lastly, as he was very fond of snuff, he

found the presence of M. Madeleine an advantage, in that he used three

times as much as he had done previously, and that in an infinitely more

luxurious manner, seeing that M. Madeleine paid for it.

The nuns did not adopt the name of Ultime; they called Jean Valjean

\_the other Fauvent\_.

If these holy women had possessed anything of Javert’s glance, they

would eventually have noticed that when there was any errand to be done

outside in the behalf of the garden, it was always the elder

Fauchelevent, the old, the infirm, the lame man, who went, and never

the other; but whether it is that eyes constantly fixed on God know not

how to spy, or whether they were, by preference, occupied in keeping

watch on each other, they paid no heed to this.

Moreover, it was well for Jean Valjean that he kept close and did not

stir out. Javert watched the quarter for more than a month.

This convent was for Jean Valjean like an island surrounded by gulfs.

Henceforth, those four walls constituted his world. He saw enough of

the sky there to enable him to preserve his serenity, and Cosette

enough to remain happy.

A very sweet life began for him.

He inhabited the old hut at the end of the garden, in company with

Fauchelevent. This hovel, built of old rubbish, which was still in

existence in 1845, was composed, as the reader already knows, of three

chambers, all of which were utterly bare and had nothing beyond the

walls. The principal one had been given up, by force, for Jean Valjean

had opposed it in vain, to M. Madeleine, by Father Fauchelevent. The

walls of this chamber had for ornament, in addition to the two nails

whereon to hang the knee-cap and the basket, a Royalist bank-note of

’93, applied to the wall over the chimney-piece, and of which the

following is an exact facsimile:—

[Illustration: Royalist Bank-note]

This specimen of Vendean paper money had been nailed to the wall by the

preceding gardener, an old Chouan, who had died in the convent, and

whose place Fauchelevent had taken.

Jean Valjean worked in the garden every day and made himself very

useful. He had formerly been a pruner of trees, and he gladly found

himself a gardener once more. It will be remembered that he knew all

sorts of secrets and receipts for agriculture. He turned these to

advantage. Almost all the trees in the orchard were ungrafted, and

wild. He budded them and made them produce excellent fruit.

Cosette had permission to pass an hour with him every day. As the

sisters were melancholy and he was kind, the child made comparisons and

adored him. At the appointed hour she flew to the hut. When she entered

the lowly cabin, she filled it with paradise. Jean Valjean blossomed

out and felt his happiness increase with the happiness which he

afforded Cosette. The joy which we inspire has this charming property,

that, far from growing meagre, like all reflections, it returns to us

more radiant than ever. At recreation hours, Jean Valjean watched her

running and playing in the distance, and he distinguished her laugh

from that of the rest.

For Cosette laughed now.

Cosette’s face had even undergone a change, to a certain extent. The

gloom had disappeared from it. A smile is the same as sunshine; it

banishes winter from the human countenance.

Recreation over, when Cosette went into the house again, Jean Valjean

gazed at the windows of her class-room, and at night he rose to look at

the windows of her dormitory.

God has his own ways, moreover; the convent contributed, like Cosette,

to uphold and complete the Bishop’s work in Jean Valjean. It is certain

that virtue adjoins pride on one side. A bridge built by the devil

exists there. Jean Valjean had been, unconsciously, perhaps, tolerably

near that side and that bridge, when Providence cast his lot in the

convent of the Petit-Picpus; so long as he had compared himself only to

the Bishop, he had regarded himself as unworthy and had remained

humble; but for some time past he had been comparing himself to men in

general, and pride was beginning to spring up. Who knows? He might have

ended by returning very gradually to hatred.

The convent stopped him on that downward path.

This was the second place of captivity which he had seen. In his youth,

in what had been for him the beginning of his life, and later on, quite

recently again, he had beheld another,—a frightful place, a terrible

place, whose severities had always appeared to him the iniquity of

justice, and the crime of the law. Now, after the galleys, he saw the

cloister; and when he meditated how he had formed a part of the

galleys, and that he now, so to speak, was a spectator of the cloister,

he confronted the two in his own mind with anxiety.

Sometimes he crossed his arms and leaned on his hoe, and slowly

descended the endless spirals of reverie.

He recalled his former companions: how wretched they were; they rose at

dawn, and toiled until night; hardly were they permitted to sleep; they

lay on camp beds, where nothing was tolerated but mattresses two inches

thick, in rooms which were heated only in the very harshest months of

the year; they were clothed in frightful red blouses; they were

allowed, as a great favor, linen trousers in the hottest weather, and a

woollen carter’s blouse on their backs when it was very cold; they

drank no wine, and ate no meat, except when they went on “fatigue

duty.” They lived nameless, designated only by numbers, and converted,

after a manner, into ciphers themselves, with downcast eyes, with

lowered voices, with shorn heads, beneath the cudgel and in disgrace.

Then his mind reverted to the beings whom he had under his eyes.

These beings also lived with shorn heads, with downcast eyes, with

lowered voices, not in disgrace, but amid the scoffs of the world, not

with their backs bruised with the cudgel, but with their shoulders

lacerated with their discipline. Their names, also, had vanished from

among men; they no longer existed except under austere appellations.

They never ate meat and they never drank wine; they often remained

until evening without food; they were attired, not in a red blouse, but

in a black shroud, of woollen, which was heavy in summer and thin in

winter, without the power to add or subtract anything from it; without

having even, according to the season, the resource of the linen garment

or the woollen cloak; and for six months in the year they wore serge

chemises which gave them fever. They dwelt, not in rooms warmed only

during rigorous cold, but in cells where no fire was ever lighted; they

slept, not on mattresses two inches thick, but on straw. And finally,

they were not even allowed their sleep; every night, after a day of

toil, they were obliged, in the weariness of their first slumber, at

the moment when they were falling sound asleep and beginning to get

warm, to rouse themselves, to rise and to go and pray in an ice-cold

and gloomy chapel, with their knees on the stones.

On certain days each of these beings in turn had to remain for twelve

successive hours in a kneeling posture, or prostrate, with face upon

the pavement, and arms outstretched in the form of a cross.

The others were men; these were women.

What had those men done? They had stolen, violated, pillaged, murdered,

assassinated. They were bandits, counterfeiters, poisoners,

incendiaries, murderers, parricides. What had these women done? They

had done nothing whatever.

On the one hand, highway robbery, fraud, deceit, violence, sensuality,

homicide, all sorts of sacrilege, every variety of crime; on the other,

one thing only, innocence.

Perfect innocence, almost caught up into heaven in a mysterious

assumption, attached to the earth by virtue, already possessing

something of heaven through holiness.

On the one hand, confidences over crimes, which are exchanged in

whispers; on the other, the confession of faults made aloud. And what

crimes! And what faults!

On the one hand, miasms; on the other, an ineffable perfume. On the one

hand, a moral pest, guarded from sight, penned up under the range of

cannon, and literally devouring its plague-stricken victims; on the

other, the chaste flame of all souls on the same hearth. There,

darkness; here, the shadow; but a shadow filled with gleams of light,

and of gleams full of radiance.

Two strongholds of slavery; but in the first, deliverance possible, a

legal limit always in sight, and then, escape. In the second,

perpetuity; the sole hope, at the distant extremity of the future, that

faint light of liberty which men call death.

In the first, men are bound only with chains; in the other, chained by

faith.

What flowed from the first? An immense curse, the gnashing of teeth,

hatred, desperate viciousness, a cry of rage against human society, a

sarcasm against heaven.

What results flowed from the second? Blessings and love.

And in these two places, so similar yet so unlike, these two species of

beings who were so very unlike, were undergoing the same work,

expiation.

Jean Valjean understood thoroughly the expiation of the former; that

personal expiation, the expiation for one’s self. But he did not

understand that of these last, that of creatures without reproach and

without stain, and he trembled as he asked himself: The expiation of

what? What expiation?

A voice within his conscience replied: “The most divine of human

generosities, the expiation for others.”

Here all personal theory is withheld; we are only the narrator; we

place ourselves at Jean Valjean’s point of view, and we translate his

impressions.

Before his eyes he had the sublime summit of abnegation, the highest

possible pitch of virtue; the innocence which pardons men their faults,

and which expiates in their stead; servitude submitted to, torture

accepted, punishment claimed by souls which have not sinned, for the

sake of sparing it to souls which have fallen; the love of humanity

swallowed up in the love of God, but even there preserving its distinct

and mediatorial character; sweet and feeble beings possessing the

misery of those who are punished and the smile of those who are

recompensed.

And he remembered that he had dared to murmur!

Often, in the middle of the night, he rose to listen to the grateful

song of those innocent creatures weighed down with severities, and the

blood ran cold in his veins at the thought that those who were justly

chastised raised their voices heavenward only in blasphemy, and that

he, wretch that he was, had shaken his fist at God.

There was one striking thing which caused him to meditate deeply, like

a warning whisper from Providence itself: the scaling of that wall, the

passing of those barriers, the adventure accepted even at the risk of

death, the painful and difficult ascent, all those efforts even, which

he had made to escape from that other place of expiation, he had made

in order to gain entrance into this one. Was this a symbol of his

destiny? This house was a prison likewise and bore a melancholy

resemblance to that other one whence he had fled, and yet he had never

conceived an idea of anything similar.

Again he beheld gratings, bolts, iron bars—to guard whom? Angels.

These lofty walls which he had seen around tigers, he now beheld once

more around lambs.

This was a place of expiation, and not of punishment; and yet, it was

still more austere, more gloomy, and more pitiless than the other.

These virgins were even more heavily burdened than the convicts. A

cold, harsh wind, that wind which had chilled his youth, traversed the

barred and padlocked grating of the vultures; a still harsher and more

biting breeze blew in the cage of these doves.

Why?

When he thought on these things, all that was within him was lost in

amazement before this mystery of sublimity.

In these meditations, his pride vanished. He scrutinized his own heart

in all manner of ways; he felt his pettiness, and many a time he wept.

All that had entered into his life for the last six months had led him

back towards the Bishop’s holy injunctions; Cosette through love, the

convent through humility.

Sometimes at eventide, in the twilight, at an hour when the garden was

deserted, he could be seen on his knees in the middle of the walk which

skirted the chapel, in front of the window through which he had gazed

on the night of his arrival, and turned towards the spot where, as he

knew, the sister was making reparation, prostrated in prayer. Thus he

prayed as he knelt before the sister.

It seemed as though he dared not kneel directly before God.

Everything that surrounded him, that peaceful garden, those fragrant

flowers, those children who uttered joyous cries, those grave and

simple women, that silent cloister, slowly permeated him, and little by

little, his soul became compounded of silence like the cloister, of

perfume like the flowers, of simplicity like the women, of joy like the

children. And then he reflected that these had been two houses of God

which had received him in succession at two critical moments in his

life: the first, when all doors were closed and when human society

rejected him; the second, at a moment when human society had again set

out in pursuit of him, and when the galleys were again yawning; and

that, had it not been for the first, he should have relapsed into

crime, and had it not been for the second, into torment.

His whole heart melted in gratitude, and he loved more and more.

Many years passed in this manner; Cosette was growing up.

[THE END OF VOLUME II “COSETTE”]

VOLUME III

MARIUS

[Illustration: Frontispiece Volume Three]

[Illustration: Titlepage Volume Three]

BOOK FIRST—PARIS STUDIED IN ITS ATOM

CHAPTER I—PARVULUS

Paris has a child, and the forest has a bird; the bird is called the

sparrow; the child is called the gamin.

Couple these two ideas which contain, the one all the furnace, the

other all the dawn; strike these two sparks together, Paris, childhood;

there leaps out from them a little being. \_Homuncio\_, Plautus would

say.

This little being is joyous. He has not food every day, and he goes to

the play every evening, if he sees good. He has no shirt on his body,

no shoes on his feet, no roof over his head; he is like the flies of

heaven, who have none of these things. He is from seven to thirteen

years of age, he lives in bands, roams the streets, lodges in the open

air, wears an old pair of trousers of his father’s, which descend below

his heels, an old hat of some other father, which descends below his

ears, a single suspender of yellow listing; he runs, lies in wait,

rummages about, wastes time, blackens pipes, swears like a convict,

haunts the wine-shop, knows thieves, calls gay women \_thou\_, talks

slang, sings obscene songs, and has no evil in his heart. This is

because he has in his heart a pearl, innocence; and pearls are not to

be dissolved in mud. So long as man is in his childhood, God wills that

he shall be innocent.

If one were to ask that enormous city: “What is this?” she would reply:

“It is my little one.”

CHAPTER II—SOME OF HIS PARTICULAR CHARACTERISTICS

The gamin—the street Arab—of Paris is the dwarf of the giant.

Let us not exaggerate, this cherub of the gutter sometimes has a shirt,

but, in that case, he owns but one; he sometimes has shoes, but then

they have no soles; he sometimes has a lodging, and he loves it, for he

finds his mother there; but he prefers the street, because there he

finds liberty. He has his own games, his own bits of mischief, whose

foundation consists of hatred for the bourgeois; his peculiar

metaphors: to be dead is \_to eat dandelions by the root\_; his own

occupations, calling hackney-coaches, letting down carriage-steps,

establishing means of transit between the two sides of a street in

heavy rains, which he calls \_making the bridge of arts\_, crying

discourses pronounced by the authorities in favor of the French people,

cleaning out the cracks in the pavement; he has his own coinage, which

is composed of all the little morsels of worked copper which are found

on the public streets. This curious money, which receives the name of

\_loques\_—rags—has an invariable and well-regulated currency in this

little Bohemia of children.

Lastly, he has his own fauna, which he observes attentively in the

corners; the lady-bird, the death’s-head plant-louse, the

daddy-long-legs, “the devil,” a black insect, which menaces by twisting

about its tail armed with two horns. He has his fabulous monster, which

has scales under its belly, but is not a lizard, which has pustules on

its back, but is not a toad, which inhabits the nooks of old lime-kilns

and wells that have run dry, which is black, hairy, sticky, which

crawls sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly, which has no cry, but which

has a look, and is so terrible that no one has ever beheld it; he calls

this monster “the deaf thing.” The search for these “deaf things” among

the stones is a joy of formidable nature. Another pleasure consists in

suddenly prying up a paving-stone, and taking a look at the wood-lice.

Each region of Paris is celebrated for the interesting treasures which

are to be found there. There are ear-wigs in the timber-yards of the

Ursulines, there are millepeds in the Pantheon, there are tadpoles in

the ditches of the Champs-de-Mars.

As far as sayings are concerned, this child has as many of them as

Talleyrand. He is no less cynical, but he is more honest. He is endowed

with a certain indescribable, unexpected joviality; he upsets the

composure of the shopkeeper with his wild laughter. He ranges boldly

from high comedy to farce.

A funeral passes by. Among those who accompany the dead there is a

doctor. “Hey there!” shouts some street Arab, “how long has it been

customary for doctors to carry home their own work?”

Another is in a crowd. A grave man, adorned with spectacles and

trinkets, turns round indignantly: “You good-for-nothing, you have

seized my wife’s waist!”—“I, sir? Search me!”

CHAPTER III—HE IS AGREEABLE

In the evening, thanks to a few sous, which he always finds means to

procure, the \_homuncio\_ enters a theatre. On crossing that magic

threshold, he becomes transfigured; he was the street Arab, he becomes

the titi.18 Theatres are a sort of ship turned upside down with the

keel in the air. It is in that keel that the titi huddle together. The

titi is to the gamin what the moth is to the larva; the same being

endowed with wings and soaring. It suffices for him to be there, with

his radiance of happiness, with his power of enthusiasm and joy, with

his hand-clapping, which resembles a clapping of wings, to confer on

that narrow, dark, fetid, sordid, unhealthy, hideous, abominable keel,

the name of Paradise.

Bestow on an individual the useless and deprive him of the necessary,

and you have the gamin.

The gamin is not devoid of literary intuition. His tendency, and we say

it with the proper amount of regret, would not constitute classic

taste. He is not very academic by nature. Thus, to give an example, the

popularity of Mademoiselle Mars among that little audience of stormy

children was seasoned with a touch of irony. The gamin called her

\_Mademoiselle Muche\_—“hide yourself.”

This being bawls and scoffs and ridicules and fights, has rags like a

baby and tatters like a philosopher, fishes in the sewer, hunts in the

cesspool, extracts mirth from foulness, whips up the squares with his

wit, grins and bites, whistles and sings, shouts, and shrieks, tempers

Alleluia with Matanturlurette, chants every rhythm from the De

Profundis to the Jack-pudding, finds without seeking, knows what he is

ignorant of, is a Spartan to the point of thieving, is mad to wisdom,

is lyrical to filth, would crouch down on Olympus, wallows in the

dunghill and emerges from it covered with stars. The gamin of Paris is

Rabelais in this youth.

He is not content with his trousers unless they have a watch-pocket.

He is not easily astonished, he is still less easily terrified, he

makes songs on superstitions, he takes the wind out of exaggerations,

he twits mysteries, he thrusts out his tongue at ghosts, he takes the

poetry out of stilted things, he introduces caricature into epic

extravaganzas. It is not that he is prosaic; far from that; but he

replaces the solemn vision by the farcical phantasmagoria. If Adamastor

were to appear to him, the street Arab would say: “Hi there! The

bugaboo!”

CHAPTER IV—HE MAY BE OF USE

Paris begins with the lounger and ends with the street Arab, two beings

of which no other city is capable; the passive acceptance, which

contents itself with gazing, and the inexhaustible initiative;

Prudhomme and Fouillou. Paris alone has this in its natural history.

The whole of the monarchy is contained in the lounger; the whole of

anarchy in the gamin.

This pale child of the Parisian faubourgs lives and develops, makes

connections, “grows supple” in suffering, in the presence of social

realities and of human things, a thoughtful witness. He thinks himself

heedless; and he is not. He looks and is on the verge of laughter; he

is on the verge of something else also. Whoever you may be, if your

name is Prejudice, Abuse, Ignorance, Oppression, Iniquity, Despotism,

Injustice, Fanaticism, Tyranny, beware of the gaping gamin.

The little fellow will grow up.

Of what clay is he made? Of the first mud that comes to hand. A handful

of dirt, a breath, and behold Adam. It suffices for a God to pass by. A

God has always passed over the street Arab. Fortune labors at this tiny

being. By the word “fortune” we mean chance, to some extent. That pigmy

kneaded out of common earth, ignorant, unlettered, giddy, vulgar, low.

Will that become an Ionian or a Bœotian? Wait, \_currit rota\_, the

Spirit of Paris, that demon which creates the children of chance and

the men of destiny, reversing the process of the Latin potter, makes of

a jug an amphora.

CHAPTER V—HIS FRONTIERS

The gamin loves the city, he also loves solitude, since he has

something of the sage in him. \_Urbis amator\_, like Fuscus; \_ruris

amator\_, like Flaccus.

To roam thoughtfully about, that is to say, to lounge, is a fine

employment of time in the eyes of the philosopher; particularly in that

rather illegitimate species of campaign, which is tolerably ugly but

odd and composed of two natures, which surrounds certain great cities,

notably Paris. To study the suburbs is to study the amphibious animal.

End of the trees, beginning of the roofs; end of the grass, beginning

of the pavements; end of the furrows, beginning of the shops, end of

the wheel-ruts, beginning of the passions; end of the divine murmur,

beginning of the human uproar; hence an extraordinary interest.

Hence, in these not very attractive places, indelibly stamped by the

passing stroller with the epithet: \_melancholy\_, the apparently

objectless promenades of the dreamer.

He who writes these lines has long been a prowler about the barriers of

Paris, and it is for him a source of profound souvenirs. That

close-shaven turf, those pebbly paths, that chalk, those pools, those

harsh monotonies of waste and fallow lands, the plants of early

market-garden suddenly springing into sight in a bottom, that mixture

of the savage and the citizen, those vast desert nooks where the

garrison drums practise noisily, and produce a sort of lisping of

battle, those hermits by day and cut-throats by night, that clumsy mill

which turns in the wind, the hoisting-wheels of the quarries, the

tea-gardens at the corners of the cemeteries; the mysterious charm of

great, sombre walls squarely intersecting immense, vague stretches of

land inundated with sunshine and full of butterflies,—all this

attracted him.

There is hardly any one on earth who is not acquainted with those

singular spots, the Glacière, the Cunette, the hideous wall of Grenelle

all speckled with balls, Mont-Parnasse, the Fosse-aux-Loups, Aubiers on

the bank of the Marne, Mont-Souris, the Tombe-Issoire, the Pierre-Plate

de Châtillon, where there is an old, exhausted quarry which no longer

serves any purpose except to raise mushrooms, and which is closed, on a

level with the ground, by a trap-door of rotten planks. The campagna of

Rome is one idea, the banlieue of Paris is another; to behold nothing

but fields, houses, or trees in what a stretch of country offers us, is

to remain on the surface; all aspects of things are thoughts of God.

The spot where a plain effects its junction with a city is always

stamped with a certain piercing melancholy. Nature and humanity both

appeal to you at the same time there. Local originalities there make

their appearance.

Any one who, like ourselves, has wandered about in these solitudes

contiguous to our faubourgs, which may be designated as the limbos of

Paris, has seen here and there, in the most desert spot, at the most

unexpected moment, behind a meagre hedge, or in the corner of a

lugubrious wall, children grouped tumultuously, fetid, muddy, dusty,

ragged, dishevelled, playing hide-and-seek, and crowned with

corn-flowers. All of them are little ones who have made their escape

from poor families. The outer boulevard is their breathing space; the

suburbs belong to them. There they are eternally playing truant. There

they innocently sing their repertory of dirty songs. There they are, or

rather, there they exist, far from every eye, in the sweet light of May

or June, kneeling round a hole in the ground, snapping marbles with

their thumbs, quarrelling over half-farthings, irresponsible, volatile,

free and happy; and, no sooner do they catch sight of you than they

recollect that they have an industry, and that they must earn their

living, and they offer to sell you an old woollen stocking filled with

cockchafers, or a bunch of lilacs. These encounters with strange

children are one of the charming and at the same time poignant graces

of the environs of Paris.

Sometimes there are little girls among the throng of boys,—are they

their sisters?—who are almost young maidens, thin, feverish, with

sunburnt hands, covered with freckles, crowned with poppies and ears of

rye, gay, haggard, barefooted. They can be seen devouring cherries

among the wheat. In the evening they can be heard laughing. These

groups, warmly illuminated by the full glow of midday, or indistinctly

seen in the twilight, occupy the thoughtful man for a very long time,

and these visions mingle with his dreams.

Paris, centre, banlieue, circumference; this constitutes all the earth

to those children. They never venture beyond this. They can no more

escape from the Parisian atmosphere than fish can escape from the

water. For them, nothing exists two leagues beyond the barriers: Ivry,

Gentilly, Arcueil, Belleville, Aubervilliers, Ménilmontant,

Choisy-le-Roi, Billancourt, Meudon, Issy, Vanvre, Sèvres, Puteaux,

Neuilly, Gennevilliers, Colombes, Romainville, Chatou, Asnières,

Bougival, Nanterre, Enghien, Noisy-le-Sec, Nogent, Gournay, Drancy,

Gonesse; the universe ends there.

CHAPTER VI—A BIT OF HISTORY

At the epoch, nearly contemporary by the way, when the action of this

book takes place, there was not, as there is to-day, a policeman at the

corner of every street (a benefit which there is no time to discuss

here); stray children abounded in Paris. The statistics give an average

of two hundred and sixty homeless children picked up annually at that

period, by the police patrols, in unenclosed lands, in houses in

process of construction, and under the arches of the bridges. One of

these nests, which has become famous, produced “the swallows of the

bridge of Arcola.” This is, moreover, the most disastrous of social

symptoms. All crimes of the man begin in the vagabondage of the child.

Let us make an exception in favor of Paris, nevertheless. In a relative

measure, and in spite of the souvenir which we have just recalled, the

exception is just. While in any other great city the vagabond child is

a lost man, while nearly everywhere the child left to itself is, in

some sort, sacrificed and abandoned to a kind of fatal immersion in the

public vices which devour in him honesty and conscience, the street boy

of Paris, we insist on this point, however defaced and injured on the

surface, is almost intact on the interior. It is a magnificent thing to

put on record, and one which shines forth in the splendid probity of

our popular revolutions, that a certain incorruptibility results from

the idea which exists in the air of Paris, as salt exists in the water

of the ocean. To breathe Paris preserves the soul.

What we have just said takes away nothing of the anguish of heart which

one experiences every time that one meets one of these children around

whom one fancies that he beholds floating the threads of a broken

family. In the civilization of the present day, incomplete as it still

is, it is not a very abnormal thing to behold these fractured families

pouring themselves out into the darkness, not knowing clearly what has

become of their children, and allowing their own entrails to fall on

the public highway. Hence these obscure destinies. This is called, for

this sad thing has given rise to an expression, “to be cast on the

pavements of Paris.”

Let it be said by the way, that this abandonment of children was not

discouraged by the ancient monarchy. A little of Egypt and Bohemia in

the lower regions suited the upper spheres, and compassed the aims of

the powerful. The hatred of instruction for the children of the people

was a dogma. What is the use of “half-lights”? Such was the

countersign. Now, the erring child is the corollary of the ignorant

child.

Besides this, the monarchy sometimes was in need of children, and in

that case it skimmed the streets.

Under Louis XIV., not to go any further back, the king rightly desired

to create a fleet. The idea was a good one. But let us consider the

means. There can be no fleet, if, beside the sailing ship, that

plaything of the winds, and for the purpose of towing it, in case of

necessity, there is not the vessel which goes where it pleases, either

by means of oars or of steam; the galleys were then to the marine what

steamers are to-day. Therefore, galleys were necessary; but the galley

is moved only by the galley-slave; hence, galley-slaves were required.

Colbert had the commissioners of provinces and the parliaments make as

many convicts as possible. The magistracy showed a great deal of

complaisance in the matter. A man kept his hat on in the presence of a

procession—it was a Huguenot attitude; he was sent to the galleys. A

child was encountered in the streets; provided that he was fifteen

years of age and did not know where he was to sleep, he was sent to the

galleys. Grand reign; grand century.

Under Louis XV. children disappeared in Paris; the police carried them

off, for what mysterious purpose no one knew. People whispered with

terror monstrous conjectures as to the king’s baths of purple. Barbier

speaks ingenuously of these things. It sometimes happened that the

exempts of the guard, when they ran short of children, took those who

had fathers. The fathers, in despair, attacked the exempts. In that

case, the parliament intervened and had some one hung. Who? The

exempts? No, the fathers.

CHAPTER VII—THE GAMIN SHOULD HAVE HIS PLACE IN THE CLASSIFICATIONS OF

INDIA

The body of street Arabs in Paris almost constitutes a caste. One might

almost say: Not every one who wishes to belong to it can do so.

This word \_gamin\_ was printed for the first time, and reached popular

speech through the literary tongue, in 1834. It is in a little work

entitled \_Claude Gueux\_ that this word made its appearance. The horror

was lively. The word passed into circulation.

The elements which constitute the consideration of the gamins for each

other are very various. We have known and associated with one who was

greatly respected and vastly admired because he had seen a man fall

from the top of the tower of Notre-Dame; another, because he had

succeeded in making his way into the rear courtyard where the statues

of the dome of the Invalides had been temporarily deposited, and had

“prigged” some lead from them; a third, because he had seen a diligence

tip over; still another, because he “knew” a soldier who came near

putting out the eye of a citizen.

This explains that famous exclamation of a Parisian gamin, a profound

epiphonema, which the vulgar herd laughs at without comprehending,—

\_Dieu de Dieu! What ill-luck I do have! to think that I have never yet

seen anybody tumble from a fifth-story window! \_ (\_I have\_ pronounced

\_I’ave\_ and \_fifth\_ pronounced \_fift’\_.)

Surely, this saying of a peasant is a fine one: “Father So-and-So, your

wife has died of her malady; why did you not send for the doctor?”

“What would you have, sir, we poor folks \_die of ourselves\_.” But if

the peasant’s whole passivity lies in this saying, the whole of the

free-thinking anarchy of the brat of the faubourgs is, assuredly,

contained in this other saying. A man condemned to death is listening

to his confessor in the tumbrel. The child of Paris exclaims: “He is

talking to his black cap! Oh, the sneak!”

A certain audacity on matters of religion sets off the gamin. To be

strong-minded is an important item.

To be present at executions constitutes a duty. He shows himself at the

guillotine, and he laughs. He calls it by all sorts of pet names: The

End of the Soup, The Growler, The Mother in the Blue (the sky), The

Last Mouthful, etc., etc. In order not to lose anything of the affair,

he scales the walls, he hoists himself to balconies, he ascends trees,

he suspends himself to gratings, he clings fast to chimneys. The gamin

is born a tiler as he is born a mariner. A roof inspires him with no

more fear than a mast. There is no festival which comes up to an

execution on the Place de Grève. Samson and the Abbé Montès are the

truly popular names. They hoot at the victim in order to encourage him.

They sometimes admire him. Lacenaire, when a gamin, on seeing the

hideous Dautin die bravely, uttered these words which contain a future:

“I was jealous of him.” In the brotherhood of gamins Voltaire is not

known, but Papavoine is. “Politicians” are confused with assassins in

the same legend. They have a tradition as to everybody’s last garment.

It is known that Tolleron had a fireman’s cap, Avril an otter cap,

Losvel a round hat, that old Delaporte was bald and bareheaded, that

Castaing was all ruddy and very handsome, that Bories had a romantic

small beard, that Jean Martin kept on his suspenders, that Lecouffé and

his mother quarrelled. “Don’t reproach each other for your basket,”

shouted a gamin to them. Another, in order to get a look at Debacker as

he passed, and being too small in the crowd, caught sight of the

lantern on the quay and climbed it. A gendarme stationed opposite

frowned. “Let me climb up, m’sieu le gendarme,” said the gamin. And, to

soften the heart of the authorities he added: “I will not fall.” “I

don’t care if you do,” retorted the gendarme.

In the brotherhood of gamins, a memorable accident counts for a great

deal. One reaches the height of consideration if one chances to cut

one’s self very deeply, “to the very bone.”

The fist is no mediocre element of respect. One of the things that the

gamin is fondest of saying is: “I am fine and strong, come now!” To be

left-handed renders you very enviable. A squint is highly esteemed.

CHAPTER VIII—IN WHICH THE READER WILL FIND A CHARMING SAYING OF THE

LAST KING

In summer, he metamorphoses himself into a frog; and in the evening,

when night is falling, in front of the bridges of Austerlitz and Jena,

from the tops of coal wagons, and the washerwomen’s boats, he hurls

himself headlong into the Seine, and into all possible infractions of

the laws of modesty and of the police. Nevertheless the police keep an

eye on him, and the result is a highly dramatic situation which once

gave rise to a fraternal and memorable cry; that cry which was

celebrated about 1830, is a strategic warning from gamin to gamin; it

scans like a verse from Homer, with a notation as inexpressible as the

eleusiac chant of the Panathenæa, and in it one encounters again the

ancient Evohe. Here it is: “Ohé, Titi, ohééé! Here comes the bobby,

here comes the p’lice, pick up your duds and be off, through the sewer

with you!”

Sometimes this gnat—that is what he calls himself—knows how to read;

sometimes he knows how to write; he always knows how to daub. He does

not hesitate to acquire, by no one knows what mysterious mutual

instruction, all the talents which can be of use to the public; from

1815 to 1830, he imitated the cry of the turkey; from 1830 to 1848, he

scrawled pears on the walls. One summer evening, when Louis Philippe

was returning home on foot, he saw a little fellow, no higher than his

knee, perspiring and climbing up to draw a gigantic pear in charcoal on

one of the pillars of the gate of Neuilly; the King, with that

good-nature which came to him from Henry IV., helped the gamin,

finished the pear, and gave the child a louis, saying: “The pear is on

that also.”19 The gamin loves uproar. A certain state of violence

pleases him. He execrates “the curés.” One day, in the Rue de

l’Université, one of these scamps was putting his thumb to his nose at

the carriage gate of No. 69. “Why are you doing that at the gate?” a

passer-by asked. The boy replied: “There is a curé there.” It was

there, in fact, that the Papal Nuncio lived.

Nevertheless, whatever may be the Voltairianism of the small gamin, if

the occasion to become a chorister presents itself, it is quite

possible that he will accept, and in that case he serves the mass

civilly. There are two things to which he plays Tantalus, and which he

always desires without ever attaining them: to overthrow the

government, and to get his trousers sewed up again.

The gamin in his perfect state possesses all the policemen of Paris,

and can always put the name to the face of any one which he chances to

meet. He can tell them off on the tips of his fingers. He studies their

habits, and he has special notes on each one of them. He reads the

souls of the police like an open book. He will tell you fluently and

without flinching: “Such an one is a \_traitor\_; such another is very

\_malicious\_; such another is \_great\_; such another is \_ridiculous\_.”

(All these words: traitor, malicious, great, ridiculous, have a

particular meaning in his mouth.) That one imagines that he owns the

Pont-Neuf, and he prevents \_people\_ from walking on the cornice outside

the parapet; that other has a mania for pulling \_person’s\_ ears; etc.,

etc.

CHAPTER IX—THE OLD SOUL OF GAUL

There was something of that boy in Poquelin, the son of the

fish-market; Beaumarchais had something of it. Gaminerie is a shade of

the Gallic spirit. Mingled with good sense, it sometimes adds force to

the latter, as alcohol does to wine. Sometimes it is a defect. Homer

repeats himself eternally, granted; one may say that Voltaire plays the

gamin. Camille Desmoulins was a native of the faubourgs. Championnet,

who treated miracles brutally, rose from the pavements of Paris; he

had, when a small lad, inundated the porticos of Saint-Jean de

Beauvais, and of Saint-Étienne du Mont; he had addressed the shrine of

Sainte-Geneviève familiarly to give orders to the phial of Saint

Januarius.

The gamin of Paris is respectful, ironical, and insolent. He has

villainous teeth, because he is badly fed and his stomach suffers, and

handsome eyes because he has wit. If Jehovah himself were present, he

would go hopping up the steps of paradise on one foot. He is strong on

boxing. All beliefs are possible to him. He plays in the gutter, and

straightens himself up with a revolt; his effrontery persists even in

the presence of grape-shot; he was a scapegrace, he is a hero; like the

little Theban, he shakes the skin from the lion; Barra the drummer-boy

was a gamin of Paris; he Shouts: “Forward!” as the horse of Scripture

says “Vah!” and in a moment he has passed from the small brat to the

giant.

This child of the puddle is also the child of the ideal. Measure that

spread of wings which reaches from Molière to Barra.

To sum up the whole, and in one word, the gamin is a being who amuses

himself, because he is unhappy.

CHAPTER X—ECCE PARIS, ECCE HOMO

To sum it all up once more, the Paris gamin of to-day, like the

\_græculus\_ of Rome in days gone by, is the infant populace with the

wrinkle of the old world on his brow.

The gamin is a grace to the nation, and at the same time a disease; a

disease which must be cured, how? By light.

Light renders healthy.

Light kindles.

All generous social irradiations spring from science, letters, arts,

education. Make men, make men. Give them light that they may warm you.

Sooner or later the splendid question of universal education will

present itself with the irresistible authority of the absolute truth;

and then, those who govern under the superintendence of the French idea

will have to make this choice; the children of France or the gamins of

Paris; flames in the light or will-o’-the-wisps in the gloom.

The gamin expresses Paris, and Paris expresses the world.

For Paris is a total. Paris is the ceiling of the human race. The whole

of this prodigious city is a foreshortening of dead manners and living

manners. He who sees Paris thinks he sees the bottom of all history

with heaven and constellations in the intervals. Paris has a capital,

the Town-Hall, a Parthenon, Notre-Dame, a Mount Aventine, the Faubourg

Saint-Antoine, an Asinarium, the Sorbonne, a Pantheon, the Pantheon, a

Via Sacra, the Boulevard des Italiens, a temple of the winds, opinion;

and it replaces the Gemoniæ by ridicule. Its \_majo\_ is called “faraud,”

its Transteverin is the man of the faubourgs, its \_hammal\_ is the

market-porter, its lazzarone is the pègre, its cockney is the native of

Ghent. Everything that exists elsewhere exists at Paris. The fishwoman

of Dumarsais can retort on the herb-seller of Euripides, the discobols

Vejanus lives again in the Forioso, the tight-rope dancer.

Therapontigonus Miles could walk arm in arm with Vadeboncœur the

grenadier, Damasippus the second-hand dealer would be happy among

bric-à-brac merchants, Vincennes could grasp Socrates in its fist as

just as Agora could imprison Diderot, Grimod de la Reynière discovered

larded roast beef, as Curtillus invented roast hedgehog, we see the

trapeze which figures in Plautus reappear under the vault of the Arc of

l’Etoile, the sword-eater of Pœcilus encountered by Apuleius is a

sword-swallower on the Pont-Neuf, the nephew of Rameau and Curculio the

parasite make a pair, Ergasilus could get himself presented to

Cambacères by d’Aigrefeuille; the four dandies of Rome: Alcesimarchus,

Phœdromus, Diabolus, and Argyrippus, descend from Courtille in

Labatut’s posting-chaise; Aulus Gellius would halt no longer in front

of Congrio than would Charles Nodier in front of Punchinello; Marto is

not a tigress, but Pardalisca was not a dragon; Pantolabus the wag

jeers in the Café Anglais at Nomentanus the fast liver, Hermogenus is a

tenor in the Champs-Élysées, and round him, Thracius the beggar, clad

like Bobèche, takes up a collection; the bore who stops you by the

button of your coat in the Tuileries makes you repeat after a lapse of

two thousand years Thesprion’s apostrophe: \_Quis properantem me

prehendit pallio? \_ The wine on Surêne is a parody of the wine of Alba,

the red border of Desaugiers forms a balance to the great cutting of

Balatro, Père-Lachaise exhales beneath nocturnal rains the same gleams

as the Esquiliæ, and the grave of the poor bought for five years, is

certainly the equivalent of the slave’s hived coffin.

Seek something that Paris has not. The vat of Trophonius contains

nothing that is not in Mesmer’s tub; Ergaphilas lives again in

Cagliostro; the Brahmin Vâsaphantâ become incarnate in the Comte de

Saint-Germain; the cemetery of Saint-Médard works quite as good

miracles as the Mosque of Oumoumié at Damascus.

Paris has an Æsop-Mayeux, and a Canidia, Mademoiselle Lenormand. It is

terrified, like Delphos at the fulgurating realities of the vision; it

makes tables turn as Dodona did tripods. It places the grisette on the

throne, as Rome placed the courtesan there; and, taking it altogether,

if Louis XV. is worse than Claudian, Madame Dubarry is better than

Messalina. Paris combines in an unprecedented type, which has existed

and which we have elbowed, Grecian nudity, the Hebraic ulcer, and the

Gascon pun. It mingles Diogenes, Job, and Jack-pudding, dresses up a

spectre in old numbers of the \_Constitutional\_, and makes Chodruc

Duclos.

Although Plutarch says: \_the tyrant never grows old\_, Rome, under Sylla

as under Domitian, resigned itself and willingly put water in its wine.

The Tiber was a Lethe, if the rather doctrinary eulogium made of it by

Varus Vibiscus is to be credited: \_Contra Gracchos Tiberim habemus,

Bibere Tiberim, id est seditionem oblivisci\_. Paris drinks a million

litres of water a day, but that does not prevent it from occasionally

beating the general alarm and ringing the tocsin.

With that exception, Paris is amiable. It accepts everything royally;

it is not too particular about its Venus; its Callipyge is Hottentot;

provided that it is made to laugh, it condones; ugliness cheers it,

deformity provokes it to laughter, vice diverts it; be eccentric and

you may be an eccentric; even hypocrisy, that supreme cynicism, does

not disgust it; it is so literary that it does not hold its nose before

Basile, and is no more scandalized by the prayer of Tartuffe than

Horace was repelled by the “hiccup” of Priapus. No trait of the

universal face is lacking in the profile of Paris. The bal Mabile is

not the polymnia dance of the Janiculum, but the dealer in ladies’

wearing apparel there devours the lorette with her eyes, exactly as the

procuress Staphyla lay in wait for the virgin Planesium. The Barrière

du Combat is not the Coliseum, but people are as ferocious there as

though Cæsar were looking on. The Syrian hostess has more grace than

Mother Saguet, but, if Virgil haunted the Roman wine-shop, David

d’Angers, Balzac and Charlet have sat at the tables of Parisian

taverns. Paris reigns. Geniuses flash forth there, the red tails

prosper there. Adonaï passes on his chariot with its twelve wheels of

thunder and lightning; Silenus makes his entry there on his ass. For

Silenus read Ramponneau.

Paris is the synonym of Cosmos, Paris is Athens, Sybaris, Jerusalem,

Pantin. All civilizations are there in an abridged form, all barbarisms

also. Paris would greatly regret it if it had not a guillotine.

A little of the Place de Grève is a good thing. What would all that

eternal festival be without this seasoning? Our laws are wisely

provided, and thanks to them, this blade drips on this Shrove Tuesday.

CHAPTER XI—TO SCOFF, TO REIGN

There is no limit to Paris. No city has had that domination which

sometimes derides those whom it subjugates. To please you, O Athenians!

exclaimed Alexander. Paris makes more than the law, it makes the

fashion; Paris sets more than the fashion, it sets the routine. Paris

may be stupid, if it sees fit; it sometimes allows itself this luxury;

then the universe is stupid in company with it; then Paris awakes, rubs

its eyes, says: “How stupid I am!” and bursts out laughing in the face

of the human race. What a marvel is such a city! it is a strange thing

that this grandioseness and this burlesque should be amicable

neighbors, that all this majesty should not be thrown into disorder by

all this parody, and that the same mouth can to-day blow into the trump

of the Judgment Day, and to-morrow into the reed-flute! Paris has a

sovereign joviality. Its gayety is of the thunder and its farce holds a

sceptre.

Its tempest sometimes proceeds from a grimace. Its explosions, its

days, its masterpieces, its prodigies, its epics, go forth to the

bounds of the universe, and so also do its cock-and-bull stories. Its

laugh is the mouth of a volcano which spatters the whole earth. Its

jests are sparks. It imposes its caricatures as well as its ideal on

people; the highest monuments of human civilization accept its ironies

and lend their eternity to its mischievous pranks. It is superb; it has

a prodigious 14th of July, which delivers the globe; it forces all

nations to take the oath of tennis; its night of the 4th of August

dissolves in three hours a thousand years of feudalism; it makes of its

logic the muscle of unanimous will; it multiplies itself under all

sorts of forms of the sublime; it fills with its light Washington,

Kosciusko, Bolivar, Bozzaris, Riego, Bem, Manin, Lopez, John Brown,

Garibaldi; it is everywhere where the future is being lighted up, at

Boston in 1779, at the Isle de Léon in 1820, at Pesth in 1848, at

Palermo in 1860, it whispers the mighty countersign: Liberty, in the

ear of the American abolitionists grouped about the boat at Harper’s

Ferry, and in the ear of the patriots of Ancona assembled in the

shadow, to the Archi before the Gozzi inn on the seashore; it creates

Canaris; it creates Quiroga; it creates Pisacane; it irradiates the

great on earth; it was while proceeding whither its breath urge them,

that Byron perished at Missolonghi, and that Mazet died at Barcelona;

it is the tribune under the feet of Mirabeau, and a crater under the

feet of Robespierre; its books, its theatre, its art, its science, its

literature, its philosophy, are the manuals of the human race; it has

Pascal, Régnier, Corneille, Descartes, Jean-Jacques: Voltaire for all

moments, Molière for all centuries; it makes its language to be talked

by the universal mouth, and that language becomes the word; it

constructs in all minds the idea of progress, the liberating dogmas

which it forges are for the generations trusty friends, and it is with

the soul of its thinkers and its poets that all heroes of all nations

have been made since 1789; this does not prevent vagabondism, and that

enormous genius which is called Paris, while transfiguring the world by

its light, sketches in charcoal Bouginier’s nose on the wall of the

temple of Theseus and writes \_Credeville the thief\_ on the Pyramids.

Paris is always showing its teeth; when it is not scolding it is

laughing.

Such is Paris. The smoke of its roofs forms the ideas of the universe.

A heap of mud and stone, if you will, but, above all, a moral being. It

is more than great, it is immense. Why? Because it is daring.

To dare; that is the price of progress.

All sublime conquests are, more or less, the prizes of daring. In order

that the Revolution should take place, it does not suffice that

Montesquieu should foresee it, that Diderot should preach it, that

Beaumarchais should announce it, that Condorcet should calculate it,

that Arouet should prepare it, that Rousseau should premeditate it; it

is necessary that Danton should dare it.

The cry: \_Audacity! \_ is a \_Fiat lux\_. It is necessary, for the sake of

the forward march of the human race, that there should be proud lessons

of courage permanently on the heights. Daring deeds dazzle history and

are one of man’s great sources of light. The dawn dares when it rises.

To attempt, to brave, to persist, to persevere, to be faithful to one’s

self, to grasp fate bodily, to astound catastrophe by the small amount

of fear that it occasions us, now to affront unjust power, again to

insult drunken victory, to hold one’s position, to stand one’s ground;

that is the example which nations need, that is the light which

electrifies them. The same formidable lightning proceeds from the torch

of Prometheus to Cambronne’s short pipe.

CHAPTER XII—THE FUTURE LATENT IN THE PEOPLE

As for the Parisian populace, even when a man grown, it is always the

street Arab; to paint the child is to paint the city; and it is for

that reason that we have studied this eagle in this arrant sparrow. It

is in the faubourgs, above all, we maintain, that the Parisian race

appears; there is the pure blood; there is the true physiognomy; there

this people toils and suffers, and suffering and toil are the two faces

of man. There exist there immense numbers of unknown beings, among whom

swarm types of the strangest, from the porter of la Râpée to the

knacker of Montfaucon. \_Fex urbis\_, exclaims Cicero; \_mob\_, adds Burke,

indignantly; rabble, multitude, populace. These are words and quickly

uttered. But so be it. What does it matter? What is it to me if they do

go barefoot! They do not know how to read; so much the worse. Would you

abandon them for that? Would you turn their distress into a

malediction? Cannot the light penetrate these masses? Let us return to

that cry: Light! and let us obstinately persist therein! Light! Light!

Who knows whether these opacities will not become transparent? Are not

revolutions transfigurations? Come, philosophers, teach, enlighten,

light up, think aloud, speak aloud, hasten joyously to the great sun,

fraternize with the public place, announce the good news, spend your

alphabets lavishly, proclaim rights, sing the Marseillaises, sow

enthusiasms, tear green boughs from the oaks. Make a whirlwind of the

idea. This crowd may be rendered sublime. Let us learn how to make use

of that vast conflagration of principles and virtues, which sparkles,

bursts forth and quivers at certain hours. These bare feet, these bare

arms, these rags, these ignorances, these abjectnesses, these

darknesses, may be employed in the conquest of the ideal. Gaze past the

people, and you will perceive truth. Let that vile sand which you

trample under foot be cast into the furnace, let it melt and seethe

there, it will become a splendid crystal, and it is thanks to it that

Galileo and Newton will discover stars.

CHAPTER XIII—LITTLE GAVROCHE

[Illustration: Little Gavroche]

Eight or nine years after the events narrated in the second part of

this story, people noticed on the Boulevard du Temple, and in the

regions of the Château-d’Eau, a little boy eleven or twelve years of

age, who would have realized with tolerable accuracy that ideal of the

gamin sketched out above, if, with the laugh of his age on his lips, he

had not had a heart absolutely sombre and empty. This child was well

muffled up in a pair of man’s trousers, but he did not get them from

his father, and a woman’s chemise, but he did not get it from his

mother. Some people or other had clothed him in rags out of charity.

Still, he had a father and a mother. But his father did not think of

him, and his mother did not love him.

He was one of those children most deserving of pity, among all, one of

those who have father and mother, and who are orphans nevertheless.

This child never felt so well as when he was in the street. The

pavements were less hard to him than his mother’s heart.

His parents had despatched him into life with a kick.

He simply took flight.

He was a boisterous, pallid, nimble, wide-awake, jeering, lad, with a

vivacious but sickly air. He went and came, sang, played at hopscotch,

scraped the gutters, stole a little, but, like cats and sparrows, gayly

laughed when he was called a rogue, and got angry when called a thief.

He had no shelter, no bread, no fire, no love; but he was merry because

he was free.

When these poor creatures grow to be men, the millstones of the social

order meet them and crush them, but so long as they are children, they

escape because of their smallness. The tiniest hole saves them.

Nevertheless, abandoned as this child was, it sometimes happened, every

two or three months, that he said, “Come, I’ll go and see mamma!” Then

he quitted the boulevard, the Cirque, the Porte Saint-Martin, descended

to the quays, crossed the bridges, reached the suburbs, arrived at the

Salpêtrière, and came to a halt, where? Precisely at that double number

50-52 with which the reader is acquainted—at the Gorbeau hovel.

At that epoch, the hovel 50-52 generally deserted and eternally

decorated with the placard: “Chambers to let,” chanced to be, a rare

thing, inhabited by numerous individuals who, however, as is always the

case in Paris, had no connection with each other. All belonged to that

indigent class which begins to separate from the lowest of petty

bourgeoisie in straitened circumstances, and which extends from misery

to misery into the lowest depths of society down to those two beings in

whom all the material things of civilization end, the sewer-man who

sweeps up the mud, and the rag-picker who collects scraps.

The “principal lodger” of Jean Valjean’s day was dead and had been

replaced by another exactly like her. I know not what philosopher has

said: “Old women are never lacking.”

This new old woman was named Madame Bourgon, and had nothing remarkable

about her life except a dynasty of three paroquets, who had reigned in

succession over her soul.

The most miserable of those who inhabited the hovel were a family of

four persons, consisting of father, mother, and two daughters, already

well grown, all four of whom were lodged in the same attic, one of the

cells which we have already mentioned.

At first sight, this family presented no very special feature except

its extreme destitution; the father, when he hired the chamber, had

stated that his name was Jondrette. Some time after his moving in,

which had borne a singular resemblance to \_the entrance of nothing at

all\_, to borrow the memorable expression of the principal tenant, this

Jondrette had said to the woman, who, like her predecessor, was at the

same time portress and stair-sweeper: “Mother So-and-So, if any one

should chance to come and inquire for a Pole or an Italian, or even a

Spaniard, perchance, it is I.”

This family was that of the merry barefoot boy. He arrived there and

found distress, and, what is still sadder, no smile; a cold hearth and

cold hearts. When he entered, he was asked: “Whence come you?” He

replied: “From the street.” When he went away, they asked him: “Whither

are you going?” He replied: “Into the streets.” His mother said to him:

“What did you come here for?”

This child lived, in this absence of affection, like the pale plants

which spring up in cellars. It did not cause him suffering, and he

blamed no one. He did not know exactly how a father and mother should

be.

Nevertheless, his mother loved his sisters.

We have forgotten to mention, that on the Boulevard du Temple this

child was called Little Gavroche. Why was he called Little Gavroche?

Probably because his father’s name was Jondrette.

It seems to be the instinct of certain wretched families to break the

thread.

The chamber which the Jondrettes inhabited in the Gorbeau hovel was the

last at the end of the corridor. The cell next to it was occupied by a

very poor young man who was called M. Marius.

Let us explain who this M. Marius was.

BOOK SECOND—THE GREAT BOURGEOIS

CHAPTER I—NINETY YEARS AND THIRTY-TWO TEETH

In the Rue Boucherat, Rue de Normandie and the Rue de Saintonge there

still exist a few ancient inhabitants who have preserved the memory of

a worthy man named M. Gillenormand, and who mention him with

complaisance. This good man was old when they were young. This

silhouette has not yet entirely disappeared—for those who regard with

melancholy that vague swarm of shadows which is called the past—from

the labyrinth of streets in the vicinity of the Temple to which, under

Louis XIV., the names of all the provinces of France were appended

exactly as in our day, the streets of the new Tivoli quarter have

received the names of all the capitals of Europe; a progression, by the

way, in which progress is visible.

M. Gillenormand, who was as much alive as possible in 1831, was one of

those men who had become curiosities to be viewed, simply because they

have lived a long time, and who are strange because they formerly

resembled everybody, and now resemble nobody. He was a peculiar old

man, and in very truth, a man of another age, the real, complete and

rather haughty bourgeois of the eighteenth century, who wore his good,

old bourgeoisie with the air with which marquises wear their

marquisates. He was over ninety years of age, his walk was erect, he

talked loudly, saw clearly, drank neat, ate, slept, and snored. He had

all thirty-two of his teeth. He only wore spectacles when he read. He

was of an amorous disposition, but declared that, for the last ten

years, he had wholly and decidedly renounced women. He could no longer

please, he said; he did not add: “I am too old,” but: “I am too poor.”

He said: “If I were not ruined—Héée!” All he had left, in fact, was an

income of about fifteen thousand francs. His dream was to come into an

inheritance and to have a hundred thousand livres income for

mistresses. He did not belong, as the reader will perceive, to that

puny variety of octogenaries who, like M. de Voltaire, have been dying

all their life; his was no longevity of a cracked pot; this jovial old

man had always had good health. He was superficial, rapid, easily

angered. He flew into a passion at everything, generally quite contrary

to all reason. When contradicted, he raised his cane; he beat people as

he had done in the great century. He had a daughter over fifty years of

age, and unmarried, whom he chastised severely with his tongue, when in

a rage, and whom he would have liked to whip. She seemed to him to be

eight years old. He boxed his servants’ ears soundly, and said: “Ah!

carogne!” One of his oaths was: “By the pantoufloche of the

pantouflochade!” He had singular freaks of tranquillity; he had himself

shaved every day by a barber who had been mad and who detested him,

being jealous of M. Gillenormand on account of his wife, a pretty and

coquettish barberess. M. Gillenormand admired his own discernment in

all things, and declared that he was extremely sagacious; here is one

of his sayings: “I have, in truth, some penetration; I am able to say

when a flea bites me, from what woman it came.”

The words which he uttered the most frequently were: \_the sensible

man\_, and \_nature\_. He did not give to this last word the grand

acceptation which our epoch has accorded to it, but he made it enter,

after his own fashion, into his little chimney-corner satires:

“Nature,” he said, “in order that civilization may have a little of

everything, gives it even specimens of its amusing barbarism. Europe

possesses specimens of Asia and Africa on a small scale. The cat is a

drawing-room tiger, the lizard is a pocket crocodile. The dancers at

the opera are pink female savages. They do not eat men, they crunch

them; or, magicians that they are, they transform them into oysters and

swallow them. The Caribbeans leave only the bones, they leave only the

shell. Such are our morals. We do not devour, we gnaw; we do not

exterminate, we claw.”

CHAPTER II—LIKE MASTER, LIKE HOUSE

He lived in the Marais, Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, No. 6. He owned the

house. This house has since been demolished and rebuilt, and the number

has probably been changed in those revolutions of numeration which the

streets of Paris undergo. He occupied an ancient and vast apartment on

the first floor, between street and gardens, furnished to the very

ceilings with great Gobelins and Beauvais tapestries representing

pastoral scenes; the subjects of the ceilings and the panels were

repeated in miniature on the armchairs. He enveloped his bed in a vast,

nine-leaved screen of Coromandel lacquer. Long, full curtains hung from

the windows, and formed great, broken folds that were very magnificent.

The garden situated immediately under his windows was attached to that

one of them which formed the angle, by means of a staircase twelve or

fifteen steps long, which the old gentleman ascended and descended with

great agility. In addition to a library adjoining his chamber, he had a

boudoir of which he thought a great deal, a gallant and elegant

retreat, with magnificent hangings of straw, with a pattern of flowers

and fleurs-de-lys made on the galleys of Louis XIV. and ordered of his

convicts by M. de Vivonne for his mistress. M. Gillenormand had

inherited it from a grim maternal great-aunt, who had died a

centenarian. He had had two wives. His manners were something between

those of the courtier, which he had never been, and the lawyer, which

he might have been. He was gay, and caressing when he had a mind. In

his youth he had been one of those men who are always deceived by their

wives and never by their mistresses, because they are, at the same

time, the most sullen of husbands and the most charming of lovers in

existence. He was a connoisseur of painting. He had in his chamber a

marvellous portrait of no one knows whom, painted by Jordaens, executed

with great dashes of the brush, with millions of details, in a confused

and hap-hazard manner. M. Gillenormand’s attire was not the habit of

Louis XIV. nor yet that of Louis XVI.; it was that of the Incroyables

of the Directory. He had thought himself young up to that period and

had followed the fashions. His coat was of light-weight cloth with

voluminous revers, a long swallow-tail and large steel buttons. With

this he wore knee-breeches and buckle shoes. He always thrust his hands

into his fobs. He said authoritatively: “The French Revolution is a

heap of blackguards.”

CHAPTER III—LUC-ESPRIT

At the age of sixteen, one evening at the opera, he had had the honor

to be stared at through opera-glasses by two beauties at the same

time—ripe and celebrated beauties then, and sung by Voltaire, the

Camargo and the Sallé. Caught between two fires, he had beaten a heroic

retreat towards a little dancer, a young girl named Nahenry, who was

sixteen like himself, obscure as a cat, and with whom he was in love.

He abounded in memories. He was accustomed to exclaim: “How pretty she

was—that Guimard-Guimardini-Guimardinette, the last time I saw her at

Longchamps, her hair curled in sustained sentiments, with her

come-and-see of turquoises, her gown of the color of persons newly

arrived, and her little agitation muff!” He had worn in his young

manhood a waistcoat of Nain-Londrin, which he was fond of talking about

effusively. “I was dressed like a Turk of the Levant Levantin,” said

he. Madame de Boufflers, having seen him by chance when he was twenty,

had described him as “a charming fool.” He was horrified by all the

names which he saw in politics and in power, regarding them as vulgar

and bourgeois. He read the journals, the \_newspapers, the gazettes\_ as

he said, stifling outbursts of laughter the while. “Oh!” he said, “what

people these are! Corbière! Humann! Casimir Périer! There’s a minister

for you! I can imagine this in a journal: ‘M. Gillenorman, minister!’

that would be a farce. Well! They are so stupid that it would pass”; he

merrily called everything by its name, whether decent or indecent, and

did not restrain himself in the least before ladies. He uttered coarse

speeches, obscenities, and filth with a certain tranquillity and lack

of astonishment which was elegant. It was in keeping with the

unceremoniousness of his century. It is to be noted that the age of

periphrase in verse was the age of crudities in prose. His god-father

had predicted that he would turn out a man of genius, and had bestowed

on him these two significant names: Luc-Esprit.

CHAPTER IV—A CENTENARIAN ASPIRANT

He had taken prizes in his boyhood at the College of Moulins, where he

was born, and he had been crowned by the hand of the Duc de Nivernais,

whom he called the Duc de Nevers. Neither the Convention, nor the death

of Louis XVI., nor the Napoleon, nor the return of the Bourbons, nor

anything else had been able to efface the memory of this crowning. \_The

Duc de Nevers\_ was, in his eyes, the great figure of the century. “What

a charming grand seigneur,” he said, “and what a fine air he had with

his blue ribbon!”

In the eyes of M. Gillenormand, Catherine the Second had made

reparation for the crime of the partition of Poland by purchasing, for

three thousand roubles, the secret of the elixir of gold, from

Bestucheff. He grew animated on this subject: “The elixir of gold,” he

exclaimed, “the yellow dye of Bestucheff, General Lamotte’s drops, in

the eighteenth century,—this was the great remedy for the catastrophes

of love, the panacea against Venus, at one louis the half-ounce phial.

Louis XV. sent two hundred phials of it to the Pope.” He would have

been greatly irritated and thrown off his balance, had any one told him

that the elixir of gold is nothing but the perchloride of iron. M.

Gillenormand adored the Bourbons, and had a horror of 1789; he was

forever narrating in what manner he had saved himself during the

Terror, and how he had been obliged to display a vast deal of gayety

and cleverness in order to escape having his head cut off. If any young

man ventured to pronounce an eulogium on the Republic in his presence,

he turned purple and grew so angry that he was on the point of

swooning. He sometimes alluded to his ninety years, and said, “I hope

that I shall not see ninety-three twice.” On these occasions, he hinted

to people that he meant to live to be a hundred.

CHAPTER V—BASQUE AND NICOLETTE

He had theories. Here is one of them: “When a man is passionately fond

of women, and when he has himself a wife for whom he cares but little,

who is homely, cross, legitimate, with plenty of rights, perched on the

code, and jealous at need, there is but one way of extricating himself

from the quandry and of procuring peace, and that is to let his wife

control the purse-strings. This abdication sets him free. Then his wife

busies herself, grows passionately fond of handling coin, gets her

fingers covered with verdigris in the process, undertakes the education

of half-share tenants and the training of farmers, convokes lawyers,

presides over notaries, harangues scriveners, visits limbs of the law,

follows lawsuits, draws up leases, dictates contracts, feels herself

the sovereign, sells, buys, regulates, promises and compromises, binds

fast and annuls, yields, concedes and retrocedes, arranges,

disarranges, hoards, lavishes; she commits follies, a supreme and

personal delight, and that consoles her. While her husband disdains

her, she has the satisfaction of ruining her husband.” This theory M.

Gillenormand had himself applied, and it had become his history. His

wife—the second one—had administered his fortune in such a manner that,

one fine day, when M. Gillenormand found himself a widower, there

remained to him just sufficient to live on, by sinking nearly the whole

of it in an annuity of fifteen thousand francs, three-quarters of which

would expire with him. He had not hesitated on this point, not being

anxious to leave a property behind him. Besides, he had noticed that

patrimonies are subject to adventures, and, for instance, become

\_national property\_; he had been present at the avatars of consolidated

three per cents, and he had no great faith in the Great Book of the

Public Debt. “All that’s the Rue Quincampois!” he said. His house in

the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire belonged to him, as we have already

stated. He had two servants, “a male and a female.” When a servant

entered his establishment, M. Gillenormand re-baptized him. He bestowed

on the men the name of their province: Nîmois, Comtois, Poitevin,

Picard. His last valet was a big, foundered, short-winded fellow of

fifty-five, who was incapable of running twenty paces; but, as he had

been born at Bayonne, M. Gillenormand called him \_Basque\_. All the

female servants in his house were called Nicolette (even the Magnon, of

whom we shall hear more farther on). One day, a haughty cook, a cordon

bleu, of the lofty race of porters, presented herself. “How much wages

do you want a month?” asked M. Gillenormand. “Thirty francs.” “What is

your name?” “Olympie.” “You shall have fifty francs, and you shall be

called Nicolette.”

CHAPTER VI—IN WHICH MAGNON AND HER TWO CHILDREN ARE SEEN

With M. Gillenormand, sorrow was converted into wrath; he was furious

at being in despair. He had all sorts of prejudices and took all sorts

of liberties. One of the facts of which his exterior relief and his

internal satisfaction was composed, was, as we have just hinted, that

he had remained a brisk spark, and that he passed energetically for

such. This he called having “royal renown.” This royal renown sometimes

drew down upon him singular windfalls. One day, there was brought to

him in a basket, as though it had been a basket of oysters, a stout,

newly born boy, who was yelling like the deuce, and duly wrapped in

swaddling-clothes, which a servant-maid, dismissed six months

previously, attributed to him. M. Gillenormand had, at that time, fully

completed his eighty-fourth year. Indignation and uproar in the

establishment. And whom did that bold hussy think she could persuade to

believe that? What audacity! What an abominable calumny! M.

Gillenormand himself was not at all enraged. He gazed at the brat with

the amiable smile of a good man who is flattered by the calumny, and

said in an aside: “Well, what now? What’s the matter? You are finely

taken aback, and really, you are excessively ignorant. M. le Duc

d’Angoulême, the bastard of his Majesty Charles IX., married a silly

jade of fifteen when he was eighty-five; M. Virginal, Marquis d’Alluye,

brother to the Cardinal de Sourdis, Archbishop of Bordeaux, had, at the

age of eighty-three, by the maid of Madame la Présidente Jacquin, a

son, a real child of love, who became a Chevalier of Malta and a

counsellor of state; one of the great men of this century, the Abbé

Tabaraud, is the son of a man of eighty-seven. There is nothing out of

the ordinary in these things. And then, the Bible! Upon that I declare

that this little gentleman is none of mine. Let him be taken care of.

It is not his fault.” This manner of procedure was good-tempered. The

woman, whose name was Magnon, sent him another parcel in the following

year. It was a boy again. Thereupon, M. Gillenormand capitulated. He

sent the two brats back to their mother, promising to pay eighty francs

a month for their maintenance, on the condition that the said mother

would not do so any more. He added: “I insist upon it that the mother

shall treat them well. I shall go to see them from time to time.” And

this he did. He had had a brother who was a priest, and who had been

rector of the Academy of Poitiers for three and thirty years, and had

died at seventy-nine. “I lost him young,” said he. This brother, of

whom but little memory remains, was a peaceable miser, who, being a

priest, thought himself bound to bestow alms on the poor whom he met,

but he never gave them anything except bad or demonetized sous, thereby

discovering a means of going to hell by way of paradise. As for M.

Gillenormand the elder, he never haggled over his alms-giving, but gave

gladly and nobly. He was kindly, abrupt, charitable, and if he had been

rich, his turn of mind would have been magnificent. He desired that all

which concerned him should be done in a grand manner, even his

rogueries. One day, having been cheated by a business man in a matter

of inheritance, in a gross and apparent manner, he uttered this solemn

exclamation: “That was indecently done! I am really ashamed of this

pilfering. Everything has degenerated in this century, even the

rascals. Morbleu! this is not the way to rob a man of my standing. I am

robbed as though in a forest, but badly robbed. \_Silvæ sint consule

dignæ! \_” He had had two wives, as we have already mentioned; by the

first he had had a daughter, who had remained unmarried, and by the

second another daughter, who had died at about the age of thirty, who

had wedded, through love, or chance, or otherwise, a soldier of fortune

who had served in the armies of the Republic and of the Empire, who had

won the cross at Austerlitz and had been made colonel at Waterloo. \_“He

is the disgrace of my family,” \_ said the old bourgeois. He took an

immense amount of snuff, and had a particularly graceful manner of

plucking at his lace ruffle with the back of one hand. He believed very

little in God.

CHAPTER VII—RULE: RECEIVE NO ONE EXCEPT IN THE EVENING

Such was M. Luc-Esprit Gillenormand, who had not lost his hair,—which

was gray rather than white,—and which was always dressed in “dog’s

ears.” To sum up, he was venerable in spite of all this.

He had something of the eighteenth century about him; frivolous and

great.

In 1814 and during the early years of the Restoration, M. Gillenormand,

who was still young,—he was only seventy-four,—lived in the Faubourg

Saint Germain, Rue Servandoni, near Saint-Sulpice. He had only retired

to the Marais when he quitted society, long after attaining the age of

eighty.

And, on abandoning society, he had immured himself in his habits. The

principal one, and that which was invariable, was to keep his door

absolutely closed during the day, and never to receive any one whatever

except in the evening. He dined at five o’clock, and after that his

door was open. That had been the fashion of his century, and he would

not swerve from it. “The day is vulgar,” said he, “and deserves only a

closed shutter. Fashionable people only light up their minds when the

zenith lights up its stars.” And he barricaded himself against every

one, even had it been the king himself. This was the antiquated

elegance of his day.

CHAPTER VIII—TWO DO NOT MAKE A PAIR

We have just spoken of M. Gillenormand’s two daughters. They had come

into the world ten years apart. In their youth they had borne very

little resemblance to each other, either in character or countenance,

and had also been as little like sisters to each other as possible. The

youngest had a charming soul, which turned towards all that belongs to

the light, was occupied with flowers, with verses, with music, which

fluttered away into glorious space, enthusiastic, ethereal, and was

wedded from her very youth, in ideal, to a vague and heroic figure. The

elder had also her chimera; she espied in the azure some very wealthy

purveyor, a contractor, a splendidly stupid husband, a million made

man, or even a prefect; the receptions of the Prefecture, an usher in

the antechamber with a chain on his neck, official balls, the harangues

of the town-hall, to be “Madame la Préfète,”—all this had created a

whirlwind in her imagination. Thus the two sisters strayed, each in her

own dream, at the epoch when they were young girls. Both had wings, the

one like an angel, the other like a goose.

No ambition is ever fully realized, here below at least. No paradise

becomes terrestrial in our day. The younger wedded the man of her

dreams, but she died. The elder did not marry at all.

At the moment when she makes her entrance into this history which we

are relating, she was an antique virtue, an incombustible prude, with

one of the sharpest noses, and one of the most obtuse minds that it is

possible to see. A characteristic detail; outside of her immediate

family, no one had ever known her first name. She was called

\_Mademoiselle Gillenormand, the elder\_.

In the matter of \_cant\_, Mademoiselle Gillenormand could have given

points to a miss. Her modesty was carried to the other extreme of

blackness. She cherished a frightful memory of her life; one day, a man

had beheld her garter.

Age had only served to accentuate this pitiless modesty. Her guimpe was

never sufficiently opaque, and never ascended sufficiently high. She

multiplied clasps and pins where no one would have dreamed of looking.

The peculiarity of prudery is to place all the more sentinels in

proportion as the fortress is the less menaced.

Nevertheless, let him who can explain these antique mysteries of

innocence, she allowed an officer of the Lancers, her grand nephew,

named Théodule, to embrace her without displeasure.

In spite of this favored Lancer, the label: \_Prude\_, under which we

have classed her, suited her to absolute perfection. Mademoiselle

Gillenormand was a sort of twilight soul. Prudery is a demi-virtue and

a demi-vice.

To prudery she added bigotry, a well-assorted lining. She belonged to

the society of the Virgin, wore a white veil on certain festivals,

mumbled special orisons, revered “the holy blood,” venerated “the

sacred heart,” remained for hours in contemplation before a

rococo-jesuit altar in a chapel which was inaccessible to the rank and

file of the faithful, and there allowed her soul to soar among little

clouds of marble, and through great rays of gilded wood.

She had a chapel friend, an ancient virgin like herself, named

Mademoiselle Vaubois, who was a positive blockhead, and beside whom

Mademoiselle Gillenormand had the pleasure of being an eagle. Beyond

the Agnus Dei and Ave Maria, Mademoiselle Vaubois had no knowledge of

anything except of the different ways of making preserves. Mademoiselle

Vaubois, perfect in her style, was the ermine of stupidity without a

single spot of intelligence.

Let us say it plainly, Mademoiselle Gillenormand had gained rather than

lost as she grew older. This is the case with passive natures. She had

never been malicious, which is relative kindness; and then, years wear

away the angles, and the softening which comes with time had come to

her. She was melancholy with an obscure sadness of which she did not

herself know the secret. There breathed from her whole person the

stupor of a life that was finished, and which had never had a

beginning.

She kept house for her father. M. Gillenormand had his daughter near

him, as we have seen that Monseigneur Bienvenu had his sister with him.

These households comprised of an old man and an old spinster are not

rare, and always have the touching aspect of two weaknesses leaning on

each other for support.

There was also in this house, between this elderly spinster and this

old man, a child, a little boy, who was always trembling and mute in

the presence of M. Gillenormand. M. Gillenormand never addressed this

child except in a severe voice, and sometimes, with uplifted cane:

“Here, sir! rascal, scoundrel, come here!—Answer me, you scamp! Just

let me see you, you good-for-nothing!” etc., etc. He idolized him.

This was his grandson. We shall meet with this child again later on.

BOOK THIRD—THE GRANDFATHER AND THE GRANDSON

CHAPTER I—AN ANCIENT SALON

When M. Gillenormand lived in the Rue Servandoni, he had frequented

many very good and very aristocratic salons. Although a bourgeois, M.

Gillenormand was received in society. As he had a double measure of

wit, in the first place, that which was born with him, and secondly,

that which was attributed to him, he was even sought out and made much

of. He never went anywhere except on condition of being the chief

person there. There are people who will have influence at any price,

and who will have other people busy themselves over them; when they

cannot be oracles, they turn wags. M. Gillenormand was not of this

nature; his domination in the Royalist salons which he frequented cost

his self-respect nothing. He was an oracle everywhere. It had happened

to him to hold his own against M. de Bonald, and even against M.

Bengy-Puy-Vallée.

About 1817, he invariably passed two afternoons a week in a house in

his own neighborhood, in the Rue Férou, with Madame la Baronne de T., a

worthy and respectable person, whose husband had been Ambassador of

France to Berlin under Louis XVI. Baron de T., who, during his

lifetime, had gone very passionately into ecstasies and magnetic

visions, had died bankrupt, during the emigration, leaving, as his

entire fortune, some very curious Memoirs about Mesmer and his tub, in

ten manuscript volumes, bound in red morocco and gilded on the edges.

Madame de T. had not published the memoirs, out of pride, and

maintained herself on a meagre income which had survived no one knew

how.

Madame de T. lived far from the Court; “a very mixed society,” as she

said, in a noble isolation, proud and poor. A few friends assembled

twice a week about her widowed hearth, and these constituted a purely

Royalist salon. They sipped tea there, and uttered groans or cries of

horror at the century, the charter, the Bonapartists, the prostitution

of the blue ribbon, or the Jacobinism of Louis XVIII., according as the

wind veered towards elegy or dithyrambs; and they spoke in low tones of

the hopes which were presented by Monsieur, afterwards Charles X.

The songs of the fishwomen, in which Napoleon was called \_Nicolas\_,

were received there with transports of joy. Duchesses, the most

delicate and charming women in the world, went into ecstasies over

couplets like the following, addressed to “the federates”:—

Refoncez dans vos culottes

Le bout d’ chemis’ qui vous pend.

Qu’on n’ dis’ pas qu’ les patriotes

Ont arboré l’ drapeau blanc?20

There they amused themselves with puns which were considered terrible,

with innocent plays upon words which they supposed to be venomous, with

quatrains, with distiches even; thus, upon the Dessolles ministry, a

moderate cabinet, of which MM. Decazes and Deserre were members:—

Pour raffermir le trône ébranlé sur sa base,

Il faut changer de sol, et de serre et de case.21

Or they drew up a list of the chamber of peers, “an abominably Jacobin

chamber,” and from this list they combined alliances of names, in such

a manner as to form, for example, phrases like the following: \_Damas.

Sabran. Gouvion-Saint-Cyr\_.—All this was done merrily. In that society,

they parodied the Revolution. They used I know not what desires to give

point to the same wrath in inverse sense. They sang their little \_Ça

ira: \_—

Ah! ça ira ça ira ça ira!

Les Bonapartistes à la lanterne!

Songs are like the guillotine; they chop away indifferently, to-day

this head, to-morrow that. It is only a variation.

In the Fualdès affair, which belongs to this epoch, 1816, they took

part for Bastide and Jausion, because Fualdès was “a Buonapartist.”

They designated the liberals as f\_riends and brothers\_; this

constituted the most deadly insult.

Like certain church towers, Madame de T.’s salon had two cocks. One of

them was M. Gillenormand, the other was Comte de Lamothe-Valois, of

whom it was whispered about, with a sort of respect: “Do you know? That

is the Lamothe of the affair of the necklace.” These singular amnesties

do occur in parties.

Let us add the following: in the bourgeoisie, honored situations decay

through too easy relations; one must beware whom one admits; in the

same way that there is a loss of caloric in the vicinity of those who

are cold, there is a diminution of consideration in the approach of

despised persons. The ancient society of the upper classes held

themselves above this law, as above every other. Marigny, the brother

of the Pompadour, had his entry with M. le Prince de Soubise. In spite

of? No, because. Du Barry, the god-father of the Vaubernier, was very

welcome at the house of M. le Maréchal de Richelieu. This society is

Olympus. Mercury and the Prince de Guémenée are at home there. A thief

is admitted there, provided he be a god.

The Comte de Lamothe, who, in 1815, was an old man seventy-five years

of age, had nothing remarkable about him except his silent and

sententious air, his cold and angular face, his perfectly polished

manners, his coat buttoned up to his cravat, and his long legs always

crossed in long, flabby trousers of the hue of burnt sienna. His face

was the same color as his trousers.

This M. de Lamothe was “held in consideration” in this salon on account

of his “celebrity” and, strange to say, though true, because of his

name of Valois.

As for M. Gillenormand, his consideration was of absolutely first-rate

quality. He had, in spite of his levity, and without its interfering in

any way with his dignity, a certain manner about him which was

imposing, dignified, honest, and lofty, in a bourgeois fashion; and his

great age added to it. One is not a century with impunity. The years

finally produce around a head a venerable dishevelment.

In addition to this, he said things which had the genuine sparkle of

the old rock. Thus, when the King of Prussia, after having restored

Louis XVIII., came to pay the latter a visit under the name of the

Count de Ruppin, he was received by the descendant of Louis XIV.

somewhat as though he had been the Marquis de Brandebourg, and with the

most delicate impertinence. M. Gillenormand approved: “All kings who

are not the King of France,” said he, “are provincial kings.” One day,

the following question was put and the following answer returned in his

presence: “To what was the editor of the \_Courrier Français\_

condemned?” “To be suspended.” “\_Sus\_ is superfluous,” observed M.

Gillenormand.22 Remarks of this nature found a situation.

At the Te Deum on the anniversary of the return of the Bourbons, he

said, on seeing M. de Talleyrand pass by: “There goes his Excellency

the Evil One.”

M. Gillenormand was always accompanied by his daughter, that tall

mademoiselle, who was over forty and looked fifty, and by a handsome

little boy of seven years, white, rosy, fresh, with happy and trusting

eyes, who never appeared in that salon without hearing voices murmur

around him: “How handsome he is! What a pity! Poor child!” This child

was the one of whom we dropped a word a while ago. He was called “poor

child,” because he had for a father “a brigand of the Loire.”

This brigand of the Loire was M. Gillenormand’s son-in-law, who has

already been mentioned, and whom M. Gillenormand called “the disgrace

of his family.”

CHAPTER II—ONE OF THE RED SPECTRES OF THAT EPOCH

Any one who had chanced to pass through the little town of Vernon at

this epoch, and who had happened to walk across that fine monumental

bridge, which will soon be succeeded, let us hope, by some hideous iron

cable bridge, might have observed, had he dropped his eyes over the

parapet, a man about fifty years of age wearing a leather cap, and

trousers and a waistcoat of coarse gray cloth, to which something

yellow which had been a red ribbon, was sewn, shod with wooden sabots,

tanned by the sun, his face nearly black and his hair nearly white, a

large scar on his forehead which ran down upon his cheek, bowed, bent,

prematurely aged, who walked nearly every day, hoe and sickle in hand,

in one of those compartments surrounded by walls which abut on the

bridge, and border the left bank of the Seine like a chain of terraces,

charming enclosures full of flowers of which one could say, were they

much larger: “these are gardens,” and were they a little smaller:

“these are bouquets.” All these enclosures abut upon the river at one

end, and on a house at the other. The man in the waistcoat and the

wooden shoes of whom we have just spoken, inhabited the smallest of

these enclosures and the most humble of these houses about 1817. He

lived there alone and solitary, silently and poorly, with a woman who

was neither young nor old, neither homely nor pretty, neither a peasant

nor a bourgeoise, who served him. The plot of earth which he called his

garden was celebrated in the town for the beauty of the flowers which

he cultivated there. These flowers were his occupation.

By dint of labor, of perseverance, of attention, and of buckets of

water, he had succeeded in creating after the Creator, and he had

invented certain tulips and certain dahlias which seemed to have been

forgotten by nature. He was ingenious; he had forestalled Soulange

Bodin in the formation of little clumps of earth of heath mould, for

the cultivation of rare and precious shrubs from America and China. He

was in his alleys from the break of day, in summer, planting, cutting,

hoeing, watering, walking amid his flowers with an air of kindness,

sadness, and sweetness, sometimes standing motionless and thoughtful

for hours, listening to the song of a bird in the trees, the babble of

a child in a house, or with his eyes fixed on a drop of dew at the tip

of a spear of grass, of which the sun made a carbuncle. His table was

very plain, and he drank more milk than wine. A child could make him

give way, and his servant scolded him. He was so timid that he seemed

shy, he rarely went out, and he saw no one but the poor people who

tapped at his pane and his curé, the Abbé Mabeuf, a good old man.

Nevertheless, if the inhabitants of the town, or strangers, or any

chance comers, curious to see his tulips, rang at his little cottage,

he opened his door with a smile. He was the “brigand of the Loire.”

Any one who had, at the same time, read military memoirs, biographies,

the \_Moniteur\_, and the bulletins of the grand army, would have been

struck by a name which occurs there with tolerable frequency, the name

of Georges Pontmercy. When very young, this Georges Pontmercy had been

a soldier in Saintonge’s regiment. The revolution broke out.

Saintonge’s regiment formed a part of the army of the Rhine; for the

old regiments of the monarchy preserved their names of provinces even

after the fall of the monarchy, and were only divided into brigades in

1794. Pontmercy fought at Spire, at Worms, at Neustadt, at Turkheim, at

Alzey, at Mayence, where he was one of the two hundred who formed

Houchard’s rearguard. It was the twelfth to hold its ground against the

corps of the Prince of Hesse, behind the old rampart of Andernach, and

only rejoined the main body of the army when the enemy’s cannon had

opened a breach from the cord of the parapet to the foot of the glacis.

He was under Kléber at Marchiennes and at the battle of Mont-Palissel,

where a ball from a biscaïen broke his arm. Then he passed to the

frontier of Italy, and was one of the thirty grenadiers who defended

the Col de Tende with Joubert. Joubert was appointed its

adjutant-general, and Pontmercy sub-lieutenant. Pontmercy was by

Berthier’s side in the midst of the grape-shot of that day at Lodi

which caused Bonaparte to say: “Berthier has been cannoneer, cavalier,

and grenadier.” He beheld his old general, Joubert, fall at Novi, at

the moment when, with uplifted sabre, he was shouting: “Forward!”

Having been embarked with his company in the exigencies of the

campaign, on board a pinnace which was proceeding from Genoa to some

obscure port on the coast, he fell into a wasps’-nest of seven or eight

English vessels. The Genoese commander wanted to throw his cannon into

the sea, to hide the soldiers between decks, and to slip along in the

dark as a merchant vessel. Pontmercy had the colors hoisted to the

peak, and sailed proudly past under the guns of the British frigates.

Twenty leagues further on, his audacity having increased, he attacked

with his pinnace, and captured a large English transport which was

carrying troops to Sicily, and which was so loaded down with men and

horses that the vessel was sunk to the level of the sea. In 1805 he was

in that Malher division which took Günzberg from the Archduke

Ferdinand. At Weltingen he received into his arms, beneath a storm of

bullets, Colonel Maupetit, mortally wounded at the head of the 9th

Dragoons. He distinguished himself at Austerlitz in that admirable

march in echelons effected under the enemy’s fire. When the cavalry of

the Imperial Russian Guard crushed a battalion of the 4th of the line,

Pontmercy was one of those who took their revenge and overthrew the

Guard. The Emperor gave him the cross. Pontmercy saw Wurmser at Mantua,

Mélas, and Alexandria, Mack at Ulm, made prisoners in succession. He

formed a part of the eighth corps of the grand army which Mortier

commanded, and which captured Hamburg. Then he was transferred to the

55th of the line, which was the old regiment of Flanders. At Eylau he

was in the cemetery where, for the space of two hours, the heroic

Captain Louis Hugo, the uncle of the author of this book, sustained

alone with his company of eighty-three men every effort of the hostile

army. Pontmercy was one of the three who emerged alive from that

cemetery. He was at Friedland. Then he saw Moscow. Then La Bérésina,

then Lutzen, Bautzen, Dresden, Wachau, Leipzig, and the defiles of

Gelenhausen; then Montmirail, Château-Thierry, Craon, the banks of the

Marne, the banks of the Aisne, and the redoubtable position of Laon. At

Arnay-Le-Duc, being then a captain, he put ten Cossacks to the sword,

and saved, not his general, but his corporal. He was well slashed up on

this occasion, and twenty-seven splinters were extracted from his left

arm alone. Eight days before the capitulation of Paris he had just

exchanged with a comrade and entered the cavalry. He had what was

called under the old regime, \_the double hand\_, that is to say, an

equal aptitude for handling the sabre or the musket as a soldier, or a

squadron or a battalion as an officer. It is from this aptitude,

perfected by a military education, which certain special branches of

the service arise, the dragoons, for example, who are both cavalry-men

and infantry at one and the same time. He accompanied Napoleon to the

Island of Elba. At Waterloo, he was chief of a squadron of cuirassiers,

in Dubois’ brigade. It was he who captured the standard of the

Lunenburg battalion. He came and cast the flag at the Emperor’s feet.

He was covered with blood. While tearing down the banner he had

received a sword-cut across his face. The Emperor, greatly pleased,

shouted to him: “You are a colonel, you are a baron, you are an officer

of the Legion of Honor!” Pontmercy replied: “Sire, I thank you for my

widow.” An hour later, he fell in the ravine of Ohain. Now, who was

this Georges Pontmercy? He was this same “brigand of the Loire.”

We have already seen something of his history. After Waterloo,

Pontmercy, who had been pulled out of the hollow road of Ohain, as it

will be remembered, had succeeded in joining the army, and had dragged

himself from ambulance to ambulance as far as the cantonments of the

Loire.

The Restoration had placed him on half-pay, then had sent him into

residence, that is to say, under surveillance, at Vernon. King Louis

XVIII., regarding all that which had taken place during the Hundred

Days as not having occurred at all, did not recognize his quality as an

officer of the Legion of Honor, nor his grade of colonel, nor his title

of baron. He, on his side, neglected no occasion of signing himself

“Colonel Baron Pontmercy.” He had only an old blue coat, and he never

went out without fastening to it his rosette as an officer of the

Legion of Honor. The Attorney for the Crown had him warned that the

authorities would prosecute him for “illegal” wearing of this

decoration. When this notice was conveyed to him through an officious

intermediary, Pontmercy retorted with a bitter smile: “I do not know

whether I no longer understand French, or whether you no longer speak

it; but the fact is that I do not understand.” Then he went out for

eight successive days with his rosette. They dared not interfere with

him. Two or three times the Minister of War and the general in command

of the department wrote to him with the following address: \_“A Monsieur

le Commandant Pontmercy.” \_ He sent back the letters with the seals

unbroken. At the same moment, Napoleon at Saint Helena was treating in

the same fashion the missives of Sir Hudson Lowe addressed to \_General

Bonaparte\_. Pontmercy had ended, may we be pardoned the expression, by

having in his mouth the same saliva as his Emperor.

In the same way, there were at Rome Carthaginian prisoners who refused

to salute Flaminius, and who had a little of Hannibal’s spirit.

One day he encountered the district-attorney in one of the streets of

Vernon, stepped up to him, and said: “Mr. Crown Attorney, am I

permitted to wear my scar?”

He had nothing save his meagre half-pay as chief of squadron. He had

hired the smallest house which he could find at Vernon. He lived there

alone, we have just seen how. Under the Empire, between two wars, he

had found time to marry Mademoiselle Gillenormand. The old bourgeois,

thoroughly indignant at bottom, had given his consent with a sigh,

saying: “The greatest families are forced into it.” In 1815, Madame

Pontmercy, an admirable woman in every sense, by the way, lofty in

sentiment and rare, and worthy of her husband, died, leaving a child.

This child had been the colonel’s joy in his solitude; but the

grandfather had imperatively claimed his grandson, declaring that if

the child were not given to him he would disinherit him. The father had

yielded in the little one’s interest, and had transferred his love to

flowers.

Moreover, he had renounced everything, and neither stirred up mischief

nor conspired. He shared his thoughts between the innocent things which

he was then doing and the great things which he had done. He passed his

time in expecting a pink or in recalling Austerlitz.

M. Gillenormand kept up no relations with his son-in-law. The colonel

was “a bandit” to him. M. Gillenormand never mentioned the colonel,

except when he occasionally made mocking allusions to “his Baronship.”

It had been expressly agreed that Pontmercy should never attempt to see

his son nor to speak to him, under penalty of having the latter handed

over to him disowned and disinherited. For the Gillenormands, Pontmercy

was a man afflicted with the plague. They intended to bring up the

child in their own way. Perhaps the colonel was wrong to accept these

conditions, but he submitted to them, thinking that he was doing right

and sacrificing no one but himself.

The inheritance of Father Gillenormand did not amount to much; but the

inheritance of Mademoiselle Gillenormand the elder was considerable.

This aunt, who had remained unmarried, was very rich on the maternal

side, and her sister’s son was her natural heir. The boy, whose name

was Marius, knew that he had a father, but nothing more. No one opened

his mouth to him about it. Nevertheless, in the society into which his

grandfather took him, whispers, innuendoes, and winks, had eventually

enlightened the little boy’s mind; he had finally understood something

of the case, and as he naturally took in the ideas and opinions which

were, so to speak, the air he breathed, by a sort of infiltration and

slow penetration, he gradually came to think of his father only with

shame and with a pain at his heart.

While he was growing up in this fashion, the colonel slipped away every

two or three months, came to Paris on the sly, like a criminal breaking

his ban, and went and posted himself at Saint-Sulpice, at the hour when

Aunt Gillenormand led Marius to the mass. There, trembling lest the

aunt should turn round, concealed behind a pillar, motionless, not

daring to breathe, he gazed at his child. The scarred veteran was

afraid of that old spinster.

From this had arisen his connection with the curé of Vernon, M. l’Abbé

Mabeuf.

That worthy priest was the brother of a warden of Saint-Sulpice, who

had often observed this man gazing at his child, and the scar on his

cheek, and the large tears in his eyes. That man, who had so manly an

air, yet who was weeping like a woman, had struck the warden. That face

had clung to his mind. One day, having gone to Vernon to see his

brother, he had encountered Colonel Pontmercy on the bridge, and had

recognized the man of Saint-Sulpice. The warden had mentioned the

circumstance to the curé, and both had paid the colonel a visit, on

some pretext or other. This visit led to others. The colonel, who had

been extremely reserved at first, ended by opening his heart, and the

curé and the warden finally came to know the whole history, and how

Pontmercy was sacrificing his happiness to his child’s future. This

caused the curé to regard him with veneration and tenderness, and the

colonel, on his side, became fond of the curé. And moreover, when both

are sincere and good, no men so penetrate each other, and so amalgamate

with each other, as an old priest and an old soldier. At bottom, the

man is the same. The one has devoted his life to his country here

below, the other to his country on high; that is the only difference.

Twice a year, on the first of January and on St. George’s day, Marius

wrote duty letters to his father, which were dictated by his aunt, and

which one would have pronounced to be copied from some formula; this

was all that M. Gillenormand tolerated; and the father answered them

with very tender letters which the grandfather thrust into his pocket

unread.

CHAPTER III—REQUIESCANT

Madame de T.’s salon was all that Marius Pontmercy knew of the world.

It was the only opening through which he could get a glimpse of life.

This opening was sombre, and more cold than warmth, more night than

day, came to him through this skylight. This child, who had been all

joy and light on entering this strange world, soon became melancholy,

and, what is still more contrary to his age, grave. Surrounded by all

those singular and imposing personages, he gazed about him with serious

amazement. Everything conspired to increase this astonishment in him.

There were in Madame de T.’s salon some very noble ladies named Mathan,

Noé, Lévis,—which was pronounced Lévi,—Cambis, pronounced Cambyse.

These antique visages and these Biblical names mingled in the child’s

mind with the Old Testament which he was learning by heart, and when

they were all there, seated in a circle around a dying fire, sparely

lighted by a lamp shaded with green, with their severe profiles, their

gray or white hair, their long gowns of another age, whose lugubrious

colors could not be distinguished, dropping, at rare intervals, words

which were both majestic and severe, little Marius stared at them with

frightened eyes, in the conviction that he beheld not women, but

patriarchs and magi, not real beings, but phantoms.

With these phantoms, priests were sometimes mingled, frequenters of

this ancient salon, and some gentlemen; the Marquis de Sass\*\*\*\*,

private secretary to Madame de Berry, the Vicomte de Val\*\*\*, who

published, under the pseudonym of \_Charles-Antoine\_, monorhymed odes,

the Prince de Beauff\*\*\*\*\*\*\*, who, though very young, had a gray head

and a pretty and witty wife, whose very low-necked toilettes of scarlet

velvet with gold torsades alarmed these shadows, the Marquis de C\*\*\*\*\*

d’E\*\*\*\*\*\*, the man in all France who best understood “proportioned

politeness,” the Comte d’Am\*\*\*\*\*, the kindly man with the amiable chin,

and the Chévalier de Port-de-Guy, a pillar of the library of the

Louvre, called the King’s cabinet, M. de Port-de-Guy, bald, and rather

aged than old, was wont to relate that in 1793, at the age of sixteen,

he had been put in the galleys as refractory and chained with an

octogenarian, the Bishop of Mirepoix, also refractory, but as a priest,

while he was so in the capacity of a soldier. This was at Toulon. Their

business was to go at night and gather up on the scaffold the heads and

bodies of the persons who had been guillotined during the day; they

bore away on their backs these dripping corpses, and their red

galley-slave blouses had a clot of blood at the back of the neck, which

was dry in the morning and wet at night. These tragic tales abounded in

Madame de T.’s salon, and by dint of cursing Marat, they applauded

Trestaillon. Some deputies of the undiscoverable variety played their

whist there; M. Thibord du Chalard, M. Lemarchant de Gomicourt, and the

celebrated scoffer of the right, M. Cornet-Dincourt. The bailiff de

Ferrette, with his short breeches and his thin legs, sometimes

traversed this salon on his way to M. de Talleyrand. He had been M. le

Comte d’Artois’ companion in pleasures and unlike Aristotle crouching

under Campaspe, he had made the Guimard crawl on all fours, and in that

way he had exhibited to the ages a philosopher avenged by a bailiff. As

for the priests, there was the Abbé Halma, the same to whom M. Larose,

his collaborator on \_la Foudre\_, said: “Bah! Who is there who is not

fifty years old? a few greenhorns perhaps?” The Abbé Letourneur,

preacher to the King, the Abbé Frayssinous, who was not, as yet, either

count, or bishop, or minister, or peer, and who wore an old cassock

whose buttons were missing, and the Abbé Keravenant, Curé of

Saint-Germain-des-Prés; also the Pope’s Nuncio, then Monsignor Macchi,

Archbishop of Nisibi, later on Cardinal, remarkable for his long,

pensive nose, and another Monsignor, entitled thus: Abbate Palmieri,

domestic prelate, one of the seven participant prothonotaries of the

Holy See, Canon of the illustrious Liberian basilica, Advocate of the

saints, \_Postulatore dei Santi\_, which refers to matters of

canonization, and signifies very nearly: Master of Requests of the

section of Paradise. Lastly, two cardinals, M. de la Luzerne, and M. de

Cl\*\*\*\*\*\* T\*\*\*\*\*\*\*. The Cardinal of Luzerne was a writer and was

destined to have, a few years later, the honor of signing in the

\_Conservateur\_ articles side by side with Chateaubriand; M. de Cl\*\*\*\*\*\*

T\*\*\*\*\*\*\* was Archbishop of Toul\*\*\*\*, and often made trips to Paris, to

his nephew, the Marquis de T\*\*\*\*\*\*\*, who was Minister of Marine and

War. The Cardinal of Cl\*\*\*\*\*\* T\*\*\*\*\*\*\* was a merry little man, who

displayed his red stockings beneath his tucked-up cassock; his

specialty was a hatred of the Encyclopædia, and his desperate play at

billiards, and persons who, at that epoch, passed through the Rue

M\*\*\*\*\* on summer evenings, where the hotel de Cl\*\*\*\*\*\* T\*\*\*\*\*\*\* then

stood, halted to listen to the shock of the balls and the piercing

voice of the Cardinal shouting to his conclavist, Monseigneur Cotiret,

Bishop \_in partibus\_ of Caryste: “Mark, Abbé, I make a cannon.” The

Cardinal de Cl\*\*\*\*\*\* T\*\*\*\*\*\*\* had been brought to Madame de T.’s by his

most intimate friend, M. de Roquelaure, former Bishop of Senlis, and

one of the Forty. M. de Roquelaure was notable for his lofty figure and

his assiduity at the Academy; through the glass door of the neighboring

hall of the library where the French Academy then held its meetings,

the curious could, on every Tuesday, contemplate the Ex-Bishop of

Senlis, usually standing erect, freshly powdered, in violet hose, with

his back turned to the door, apparently for the purpose of allowing a

better view of his little collar. All these ecclesiastics, though for

the most part as much courtiers as churchmen, added to the gravity of

the T. salon, whose seigniorial aspect was accentuated by five peers of

France, the Marquis de Vib\*\*\*\*, the Marquis de Tal\*\*\*, the Marquis de

Herb\*\*\*\*\*\*\*, the Vicomte Damb\*\*\*, and the Duc de Val\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*. This Duc

de Val\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*, although Prince de Mon\*\*\*, that is to say a reigning

prince abroad, had so high an idea of France and its peerage, that he

viewed everything through their medium. It was he who said: “The

Cardinals are the peers of France of Rome; the lords are the peers of

France of England.” Moreover, as it is indispensable that the

Revolution should be everywhere in this century, this feudal salon was,

as we have said, dominated by a bourgeois. M. Gillenormand reigned

there.

There lay the essence and quintessence of the Parisian white society.

There reputations, even Royalist reputations, were held in quarantine.

There is always a trace of anarchy in renown. Chateaubriand, had he

entered there, would have produced the effect of Père Duchêne. Some of

the scoffed-at did, nevertheless, penetrate thither on sufferance.

Comte Beug\*\*\* was received there, subject to correction.

The “noble” salons of the present day no longer resemble those salons.

The Faubourg Saint-Germain reeks of the fagot even now. The Royalists

of to-day are demagogues, let us record it to their credit.

At Madame de T.’s the society was superior, taste was exquisite and

haughty, under the cover of a great show of politeness. Manners there

admitted of all sorts of involuntary refinements which were the old

régime itself, buried but still alive. Some of these habits, especially

in the matter of language, seem eccentric. Persons but superficially

acquainted with them would have taken for provincial that which was

only antique. A woman was called \_Madame la Générale. Madame la

Colonelle\_ was not entirely disused. The charming Madame de Léon, in

memory, no doubt, of the Duchesses de Longueville and de Chevreuse,

preferred this appellation to her title of Princesse. The Marquise de

Créquy was also called \_Madame la Colonelle\_.

It was this little high society which invented at the Tuileries the

refinement of speaking to the King in private as \_the King\_, in the

third person, and never as \_Your Majesty\_, the designation of \_Your

Majesty\_ having been “soiled by the usurper.”

Men and deeds were brought to judgment there. They jeered at the age,

which released them from the necessity of understanding it. They

abetted each other in amazement. They communicated to each other that

modicum of light which they possessed. Methuselah bestowed information

on Epimenides. The deaf man made the blind man acquainted with the

course of things. They declared that the time which had elapsed since

Coblentz had not existed. In the same manner that Louis XVIII. was by

the grace of God, in the five and twentieth year of his reign, the

emigrants were, by rights, in the five and twentieth year of their

adolescence.

All was harmonious; nothing was too much alive; speech hardly amounted

to a breath; the newspapers, agreeing with the salons, seemed a

papyrus. There were some young people, but they were rather dead. The

liveries in the antechamber were antiquated. These utterly obsolete

personages were served by domestics of the same stamp.

They all had the air of having lived a long time ago, and of

obstinately resisting the sepulchre. Nearly the whole dictionary

consisted of \_Conserver, Conservation, Conservateur; to be in good

odor\_,—that was the point. There are, in fact, aromatics in the

opinions of these venerable groups, and their ideas smelled of it. It

was a mummified society. The masters were embalmed, the servants were

stuffed with straw.

A worthy old marquise, an \_emigrée\_ and ruined, who had but a solitary

maid, continued to say: “My people.”

What did they do in Madame de T.’s salon? They were ultra.

To be ultra; this word, although what it represents may not have

disappeared, has no longer any meaning at the present day. Let us

explain it.

To be ultra is to go beyond. It is to attack the sceptre in the name of

the throne, and the mitre in the name of the altar; it is to ill-treat

the thing which one is dragging, it is to kick over the traces; it is

to cavil at the fagot on the score of the amount of cooking received by

heretics; it is to reproach the idol with its small amount of idolatry;

it is to insult through excess of respect; it is to discover that the

Pope is not sufficiently papish, that the King is not sufficiently

royal, and that the night has too much light; it is to be discontented

with alabaster, with snow, with the swan and the lily in the name of

whiteness; it is to be a partisan of things to the point of becoming

their enemy; it is to be so strongly for, as to be against.

The ultra spirit especially characterizes the first phase of the

Restoration.

Nothing in history resembles that quarter of an hour which begins in

1814 and terminates about 1820, with the advent of M. de Villèle, the

practical man of the Right. These six years were an extraordinary

moment; at one and the same time brilliant and gloomy, smiling and

sombre, illuminated as by the radiance of dawn and entirely covered, at

the same time, with the shadows of the great catastrophes which still

filled the horizon and were slowly sinking into the past. There existed

in that light and that shadow, a complete little new and old world,

comic and sad, juvenile and senile, which was rubbing its eyes; nothing

resembles an awakening like a return; a group which regarded France

with ill-temper, and which France regarded with irony; good old owls of

marquises by the streetful, who had returned, and of ghosts, the

“former” subjects of amazement at everything, brave and noble gentlemen

who smiled at being in France but wept also, delighted to behold their

country once more, in despair at not finding their monarchy; the

nobility of the Crusades treating the nobility of the Empire, that is

to say, the nobility of the sword, with scorn; historic races who had

lost the sense of history; the sons of the companions of Charlemagne

disdaining the companions of Napoleon. The swords, as we have just

remarked, returned the insult; the sword of Fontenoy was laughable and

nothing but a scrap of rusty iron; the sword of Marengo was odious and

was only a sabre. Former days did not recognize Yesterday. People no

longer had the feeling for what was grand. There was some one who

called Bonaparte Scapin. This Society no longer exists. Nothing of it,

we repeat, exists to-day. When we select from it some one figure at

random, and attempt to make it live again in thought, it seems as

strange to us as the world before the Deluge. It is because it, too, as

a matter of fact, has been engulfed in a deluge. It has disappeared

beneath two Revolutions. What billows are ideas! How quickly they cover

all that it is their mission to destroy and to bury, and how promptly

they create frightful gulfs!

Such was the physiognomy of the salons of those distant and candid

times when M. Martainville had more wit than Voltaire.

These salons had a literature and politics of their own. They believed

in Fiévée. M. Agier laid down the law in them. They commentated M.

Colnet, the old bookseller and publicist of the Quay Malaquais.

Napoleon was to them thoroughly the Corsican Ogre. Later on the

introduction into history of M. le Marquis de Bonaparte,

Lieutenant-General of the King’s armies, was a concession to the spirit

of the age.

These salons did not long preserve their purity. Beginning with 1818,

doctrinarians began to spring up in them, a disturbing shade. Their way

was to be Royalists and to excuse themselves for being so. Where the

ultras were very proud, the doctrinarians were rather ashamed. They had

wit; they had silence; their political dogma was suitably impregnated

with arrogance; they should have succeeded. They indulged, and usefully

too, in excesses in the matter of white neckties and tightly buttoned

coats. The mistake or the misfortune of the doctrinarian party was to

create aged youth. They assumed the poses of wise men. They dreamed of

engrafting a temperate power on the absolute and excessive principle.

They opposed, and sometimes with rare intelligence, conservative

liberalism to the liberalism which demolishes. They were heard to say:

“Thanks for Royalism! It has rendered more than one service. It has

brought back tradition, worship, religion, respect. It is faithful,

brave, chivalric, loving, devoted. It has mingled, though with regret,

the secular grandeurs of the monarchy with the new grandeurs of the

nation. Its mistake is not to understand the Revolution, the Empire,

glory, liberty, young ideas, young generations, the age. But this

mistake which it makes with regard to us,—have we not sometimes been

guilty of it towards them? The Revolution, whose heirs we are, ought to

be intelligent on all points. To attack Royalism is a misconstruction

of liberalism. What an error! And what blindness! Revolutionary France

is wanting in respect towards historic France, that is to say, towards

its mother, that is to say, towards itself. After the 5th of September,

the nobility of the monarchy is treated as the nobility of the Empire

was treated after the 5th of July. They were unjust to the eagle, we

are unjust to the fleur-de-lys. It seems that we must always have

something to proscribe! Does it serve any purpose to ungild the crown

of Louis XIV., to scrape the coat of arms of Henry IV.? We scoff at M.

de Vaublanc for erasing the N’s from the bridge of Jena! What was it

that he did? What are we doing? Bouvines belongs to us as well as

Marengo. The fleurs-de-lys are ours as well as the N’s. That is our

patrimony. To what purpose shall we diminish it? We must not deny our

country in the past any more than in the present. Why not accept the

whole of history? Why not love the whole of France?”

It is thus that doctrinarians criticised and protected Royalism, which

was displeased at criticism and furious at protection.

The ultras marked the first epoch of Royalism, congregation

characterized the second. Skill follows ardor. Let us confine ourselves

here to this sketch.

In the course of this narrative, the author of this book has

encountered in his path this curious moment of contemporary history; he

has been forced to cast a passing glance upon it, and to trace once

more some of the singular features of this society which is unknown

to-day. But he does it rapidly and without any bitter or derisive idea.

Souvenirs both respectful and affectionate, for they touch his mother,

attach him to this past. Moreover, let us remark, this same petty world

had a grandeur of its own. One may smile at it, but one can neither

despise nor hate it. It was the France of former days.

Marius Pontmercy pursued some studies, as all children do. When he

emerged from the hands of Aunt Gillenormand, his grandfather confided

him to a worthy professor of the most purely classic innocence. This

young soul which was expanding passed from a prude to a vulgar pedant.

Marius went through his years of college, then he entered the law

school. He was a Royalist, fanatical and severe. He did not love his

grandfather much, as the latter’s gayety and cynicism repelled him, and

his feelings towards his father were gloomy.

He was, on the whole, a cold and ardent, noble, generous, proud,

religious, enthusiastic lad; dignified to harshness, pure to shyness.

CHAPTER IV—END OF THE BRIGAND

The conclusion of Marius’ classical studies coincided with M.

Gillenormand’s departure from society. The old man bade farewell to the

Faubourg Saint-Germain and to Madame de T.’s salon, and established

himself in the Marais, in his house of the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire.

There he had for servants, in addition to the porter, that chambermaid,

Nicolette, who had succeeded to Magnon, and that short-breathed and

pursy Basque, who have been mentioned above.

In 1827, Marius had just attained his seventeenth year. One evening, on

his return home, he saw his grandfather holding a letter in his hand.

“Marius,” said M. Gillenormand, “you will set out for Vernon

to-morrow.”

“Why?” said Marius.

“To see your father.”

Marius was seized with a trembling fit. He had thought of everything

except this—that he should one day be called upon to see his father.

Nothing could be more unexpected, more surprising, and, let us admit

it, more disagreeable to him. It was forcing estrangement into

reconciliation. It was not an affliction, but it was an unpleasant

duty.

Marius, in addition to his motives of political antipathy, was

convinced that his father, \_the slasher\_, as M. Gillenormand called him

on his amiable days, did not love him; this was evident, since he had

abandoned him to others. Feeling that he was not beloved, he did not

love. “Nothing is more simple,” he said to himself.

He was so astounded that he did not question M. Gillenormand. The

grandfather resumed:—

“It appears that he is ill. He demands your presence.”

And after a pause, he added:—

“Set out to-morrow morning. I think there is a coach which leaves the

Cour des Fontaines at six o’clock, and which arrives in the evening.

Take it. He says that here is haste.”

Then he crushed the letter in his hand and thrust it into his pocket.

Marius might have set out that very evening and have been with his

father on the following morning. A diligence from the Rue du Bouloi

took the trip to Rouen by night at that date, and passed through

Vernon. Neither Marius nor M. Gillenormand thought of making inquiries

about it.

The next day, at twilight, Marius reached Vernon. People were just

beginning to light their candles. He asked the first person whom he met

for “M. Pontmercy’s house.” For in his own mind, he agreed with the

Restoration, and like it, did not recognize his father’s claim to the

title of either colonel or baron.

The house was pointed out to him. He rang; a woman with a little lamp

in her hand opened the door.

“M. Pontmercy?” said Marius.

The woman remained motionless.

“Is this his house?” demanded Marius.

The woman nodded affirmatively.

“Can I speak with him?”

The woman shook her head.

“But I am his son!” persisted Marius. “He is expecting me.”

“He no longer expects you,” said the woman.

Then he perceived that she was weeping.

She pointed to the door of a room on the ground floor; he entered.

In that room, which was lighted by a tallow candle standing on the

chimney-piece, there were three men, one standing erect, another

kneeling, and one lying at full length, on the floor in his shirt. The

one on the floor was the colonel.

The other two were the doctor, and the priest, who was engaged in

prayer.

The colonel had been attacked by brain fever three days previously. As

he had a foreboding of evil at the very beginning of his illness, he

had written to M. Gillenormand to demand his son. The malady had grown

worse. On the very evening of Marius’ arrival at Vernon, the colonel

had had an attack of delirium; he had risen from his bed, in spite of

the servant’s efforts to prevent him, crying: “My son is not coming! I

shall go to meet him!” Then he ran out of his room and fell prostrate

on the floor of the antechamber. He had just expired.

The doctor had been summoned, and the curé. The doctor had arrived too

late. The son had also arrived too late.

By the dim light of the candle, a large tear could be distinguished on

the pale and prostrate colonel’s cheek, where it had trickled from his

dead eye. The eye was extinguished, but the tear was not yet dry. That

tear was his son’s delay.

Marius gazed upon that man whom he beheld for the first time, on that

venerable and manly face, on those open eyes which saw not, on those

white locks, those robust limbs, on which, here and there, brown lines,

marking sword-thrusts, and a sort of red stars, which indicated

bullet-holes, were visible. He contemplated that gigantic sear which

stamped heroism on that countenance upon which God had imprinted

goodness. He reflected that this man was his father, and that this man

was dead, and a chill ran over him.

The sorrow which he felt was the sorrow which he would have felt in the

presence of any other man whom he had chanced to behold stretched out

in death.

Anguish, poignant anguish, was in that chamber. The servant-woman was

lamenting in a corner, the curé was praying, and his sobs were audible,

the doctor was wiping his eyes; the corpse itself was weeping.

The doctor, the priest, and the woman gazed at Marius in the midst of

their affliction without uttering a word; he was the stranger there.

Marius, who was far too little affected, felt ashamed and embarrassed

at his own attitude; he held his hat in his hand; and he dropped it on

the floor, in order to produce the impression that grief had deprived

him of the strength to hold it.

At the same time, he experienced remorse, and he despised himself for

behaving in this manner. But was it his fault? He did not love his

father? Why should he!

The colonel had left nothing. The sale of big furniture barely paid the

expenses of his burial.

The servant found a scrap of paper, which she handed to Marius. It

contained the following, in the colonel’s handwriting:—

“\_For my son\_.—The Emperor made me a Baron on the battle-field of

Waterloo. Since the Restoration disputes my right to this title which I

purchased with my blood, my son shall take it and bear it. That he will

be worthy of it is a matter of course.” Below, the colonel had added:

“At that same battle of Waterloo, a sergeant saved my life. The man’s

name was Thénardier. I think that he has recently been keeping a little

inn, in a village in the neighborhood of Paris, at Chelles or

Montfermeil. If my son meets him, he will do all the good he can to

Thénardier.”

Marius took this paper and preserved it, not out of duty to his father,

but because of that vague respect for death which is always imperious

in the heart of man.

Nothing remained of the colonel. M. Gillenormand had his sword and

uniform sold to an old-clothes dealer. The neighbors devastated the

garden and pillaged the rare flowers. The other plants turned to

nettles and weeds, and died.

Marius remained only forty-eight hours at Vernon. After the interment

he returned to Paris, and applied himself again to his law studies,

with no more thought of his father than if the latter had never lived.

In two days the colonel was buried, and in three forgotten.

Marius wore crape on his hat. That was all.

CHAPTER V—THE UTILITY OF GOING TO MASS, IN ORDER TO BECOME A

REVOLUTIONIST

Marius had preserved the religious habits of his childhood. One Sunday,

when he went to hear mass at Saint-Sulpice, at that same chapel of the

Virgin whither his aunt had led him when a small lad, he placed himself

behind a pillar, being more absent-minded and thoughtful than usual on

that occasion, and knelt down, without paying any special heed, upon a

chair of Utrecht velvet, on the back of which was inscribed this name:

\_Monsieur Mabeuf, warden\_. Mass had hardly begun when an old man

presented himself and said to Marius:—

“This is my place, sir.”

Marius stepped aside promptly, and the old man took possession of his

chair.

The mass concluded, Marius still stood thoughtfully a few paces

distant; the old man approached him again and said:—

“I beg your pardon, sir, for having disturbed you a while ago, and for

again disturbing you at this moment; you must have thought me

intrusive, and I will explain myself.”

“There is no need of that, Sir,” said Marius.

“Yes!” went on the old man, “I do not wish you to have a bad opinion of

me. You see, I am attached to this place. It seems to me that the mass

is better from here. Why? I will tell you. It is from this place, that

I have watched a poor, brave father come regularly, every two or three

months, for the last ten years, since he had no other opportunity and

no other way of seeing his child, because he was prevented by family

arrangements. He came at the hour when he knew that his son would be

brought to mass. The little one never suspected that his father was

there. Perhaps he did not even know that he had a father, poor

innocent! The father kept behind a pillar, so that he might not be

seen. He gazed at his child and he wept. He adored that little fellow,

poor man! I could see that. This spot has become sanctified in my

sight, and I have contracted a habit of coming hither to listen to the

mass. I prefer it to the stall to which I have a right, in my capacity

of warden. I knew that unhappy gentleman a little, too. He had a

father-in-law, a wealthy aunt, relatives, I don’t know exactly what

all, who threatened to disinherit the child if he, the father, saw him.

He sacrificed himself in order that his son might be rich and happy

some day. He was separated from him because of political opinions.

Certainly, I approve of political opinions, but there are people who do

not know where to stop. Mon Dieu! a man is not a monster because he was

at Waterloo; a father is not separated from his child for such a reason

as that. He was one of Bonaparte’s colonels. He is dead, I believe. He

lived at Vernon, where I have a brother who is a curé, and his name was

something like Pontmarie or Montpercy. He had a fine sword-cut, on my

honor.”

“Pontmercy,” suggested Marius, turning pale.

“Precisely, Pontmercy. Did you know him?”

“Sir,” said Marius, “he was my father.”

The old warden clasped his hands and exclaimed:—

“Ah! you are the child! Yes, that’s true, he must be a man by this

time. Well! poor child, you may say that you had a father who loved you

dearly!”

Marius offered his arm to the old man and conducted him to his

lodgings.

On the following day, he said to M. Gillenormand:—

“I have arranged a hunting-party with some friends. Will you permit me

to be absent for three days?”

“Four!” replied his grandfather. “Go and amuse yourself.”

And he said to his daughter in a low tone, and with a wink, “Some love

affair!”

CHAPTER VI—THE CONSEQUENCES OF HAVING MET A WARDEN

Where it was that Marius went will be disclosed a little further on.

Marius was absent for three days, then he returned to Paris, went

straight to the library of the law-school and asked for the files of

the \_Moniteur\_.

He read the \_Moniteur\_, he read all the histories of the Republic and

the Empire, the \_Memorial de Sainte-Hélène\_, all the memoirs, all the

newspapers, the bulletins, the proclamations; he devoured everything.

The first time that he came across his father’s name in the bulletins

of the grand army, he had a fever for a week. He went to see the

generals under whom Georges Pontmercy had served, among others, Comte

H. Church-warden Mabeuf, whom he went to see again, told him about the

life at Vernon, the colonel’s retreat, his flowers, his solitude.

Marius came to a full knowledge of that rare, sweet, and sublime man,

that species of lion-lamb who had been his father.

In the meanwhile, occupied as he was with this study which absorbed all

his moments as well as his thoughts, he hardly saw the Gillenormands at

all. He made his appearance at meals; then they searched for him, and

he was not to be found. Father Gillenormand smiled. “Bah! bah! He is

just of the age for the girls!” Sometimes the old man added: “The

deuce! I thought it was only an affair of gallantry. It seems that it

is an affair of passion!”

It was a passion, in fact. Marius was on the high road to adoring his

father.

At the same time, his ideas underwent an extraordinary change. The

phases of this change were numerous and successive. As this is the

history of many minds of our day, we think it will prove useful to

follow these phases step by step and to indicate them all.

That history upon which he had just cast his eyes appalled him.

The first effect was to dazzle him.

Up to that time, the Republic, the Empire, had been to him only

monstrous words. The Republic, a guillotine in the twilight; the

Empire, a sword in the night. He had just taken a look at it, and where

he had expected to find only a chaos of shadows, he had beheld, with a

sort of unprecedented surprise, mingled with fear and joy, stars

sparkling, Mirabeau, Vergniaud, Saint-Just, Robespierre, Camille,

Desmoulins, Danton, and a sun arise, Napoleon. He did not know where he

stood. He recoiled, blinded by the brilliant lights. Little by little,

when his astonishment had passed off, he grew accustomed to this

radiance, he contemplated these deeds without dizziness, he examined

these personages without terror; the Revolution and the Empire

presented themselves luminously, in perspective, before his mind’s eye;

he beheld each of these groups of events and of men summed up in two

tremendous facts: the Republic in the sovereignty of civil right

restored to the masses, the Empire in the sovereignty of the French

idea imposed on Europe; he beheld the grand figure of the people emerge

from the Revolution, and the grand figure of France spring forth from

the Empire. He asserted in his conscience, that all this had been good.

What his dazzled state neglected in this, his first far too synthetic

estimation, we do not think it necessary to point out here. It is the

state of a mind on the march that we are recording. Progress is not

accomplished in one stage. That stated, once for all, in connection

with what precedes as well as with what is to follow, we continue.

He then perceived that, up to that moment, he had comprehended his

country no more than he had comprehended his father. He had not known

either the one or the other, and a sort of voluntary night had obscured

his eyes. Now he saw, and on the one hand he admired, while on the

other he adored.

He was filled with regret and remorse, and he reflected in despair that

all he had in his soul could now be said only to the tomb. Oh! if his

father had still been in existence, if he had still had him, if God, in

his compassion and his goodness, had permitted his father to be still

among the living, how he would have run, how he would have precipitated

himself, how he would have cried to his father: “Father! Here I am! It

is I! I have the same heart as thou! I am thy son!” How he would have

embraced that white head, bathed his hair in tears, gazed upon his

scar, pressed his hands, adored his garment, kissed his feet! Oh! Why

had his father died so early, before his time, before the justice, the

love of his son had come to him? Marius had a continual sob in his

heart, which said to him every moment: “Alas!” At the same time, he

became more truly serious, more truly grave, more sure of his thought

and his faith. At each instant, gleams of the true came to complete his

reason. An inward growth seemed to be in progress within him. He was

conscious of a sort of natural enlargement, which gave him two things

that were new to him—his father and his country.

As everything opens when one has a key, so he explained to himself that

which he had hated, he penetrated that which he had abhorred;

henceforth he plainly perceived the providential, divine and human

sense of the great things which he had been taught to detest, and of

the great men whom he had been instructed to curse. When he reflected

on his former opinions, which were but those of yesterday, and which,

nevertheless, seemed to him already so very ancient, he grew indignant,

yet he smiled.

From the rehabilitation of his father, he naturally passed to the

rehabilitation of Napoleon.

But the latter, we will confess, was not effected without labor.

From his infancy, he had been imbued with the judgments of the party of

1814, on Bonaparte. Now, all the prejudices of the Restoration, all its

interests, all its instincts tended to disfigure Napoleon. It execrated

him even more than it did Robespierre. It had very cleverly turned to

sufficiently good account the fatigue of the nation, and the hatred of

mothers. Bonaparte had become an almost fabulous monster, and in order

to paint him to the imagination of the people, which, as we lately

pointed out, resembles the imagination of children, the party of 1814

made him appear under all sorts of terrifying masks in succession, from

that which is terrible though it remains grandiose to that which is

terrible and becomes grotesque, from Tiberius to the bugaboo. Thus, in

speaking of Bonaparte, one was free to sob or to puff up with laughter,

provided that hatred lay at the bottom. Marius had never

entertained—about \_that man\_, as he was called—any other ideas in his

mind. They had combined with the tenacity which existed in his nature.

There was in him a headstrong little man who hated Napoleon.

On reading history, on studying him, especially in the documents and

materials for history, the veil which concealed Napoleon from the eyes

of Marius was gradually rent. He caught a glimpse of something immense,

and he suspected that he had been deceived up to that moment, on the

score of Bonaparte as about all the rest; each day he saw more

distinctly; and he set about mounting, slowly, step by step, almost

regretfully in the beginning, then with intoxication and as though

attracted by an irresistible fascination, first the sombre steps, then

the vaguely illuminated steps, at last the luminous and splendid steps

of enthusiasm.

One night, he was alone in his little chamber near the roof. His candle

was burning; he was reading, with his elbows resting on his table close

to the open window. All sorts of reveries reached him from space, and

mingled with his thoughts. What a spectacle is the night! One hears

dull sounds, without knowing whence they proceed; one beholds Jupiter,

which is twelve hundred times larger than the earth, glowing like a

firebrand, the azure is black, the stars shine; it is formidable.

He was perusing the bulletins of the grand army, those heroic strophes

penned on the field of battle; there, at intervals, he beheld his

father’s name, always the name of the Emperor; the whole of that great

Empire presented itself to him; he felt a flood swelling and rising

within him; it seemed to him at moments that his father passed close to

him like a breath, and whispered in his ear; he gradually got into a

singular state; he thought that he heard drums, cannon, trumpets, the

measured tread of battalions, the dull and distant gallop of the

cavalry; from time to time, his eyes were raised heavenward, and gazed

upon the colossal constellations as they gleamed in the measureless

depths of space, then they fell upon his book once more, and there they

beheld other colossal things moving confusedly. His heart contracted

within him. He was in a transport, trembling, panting. All at once,

without himself knowing what was in him, and what impulse he was

obeying, he sprang to his feet, stretched both arms out of the window,

gazed intently into the gloom, the silence, the infinite darkness, the

eternal immensity, and exclaimed: “Long live the Emperor!”

From that moment forth, all was over; the Ogre of Corsica,—the

usurper,—the tyrant,—the monster who was the lover of his own

sisters,—the actor who took lessons of Talma,—the poisoner of

Jaffa,—the tiger,—Buonaparte,—all this vanished, and gave place in his

mind to a vague and brilliant radiance in which shone, at an

inaccessible height, the pale marble phantom of Cæsar. The Emperor had

been for his father only the well-beloved captain whom one admires, for

whom one sacrifices one’s self; he was something more to Marius. He was

the predestined constructor of the French group, succeeding the Roman

group in the domination of the universe. He was a prodigious architect,

of a destruction, the continuer of Charlemagne, of Louis XI., of Henry

IV., of Richelieu, of Louis XIV., and of the Committee of Public

Safety, having his spots, no doubt, his faults, his crimes even, being

a man, that is to say; but august in his faults, brilliant in his

spots, powerful in his crime.

He was the predestined man, who had forced all nations to say: “The

great nation!” He was better than that, he was the very incarnation of

France, conquering Europe by the sword which he grasped, and the world

by the light which he shed. Marius saw in Bonaparte the dazzling

spectre which will always rise upon the frontier, and which will guard

the future. Despot but dictator; a despot resulting from a republic and

summing up a revolution. Napoleon became for him the man-people as

Jesus Christ is the man-God.

It will be perceived, that like all new converts to a religion, his

conversion intoxicated him, he hurled himself headlong into adhesion

and he went too far. His nature was so constructed; once on the

downward slope, it was almost impossible for him to put on the drag.

Fanaticism for the sword took possession of him, and complicated in his

mind his enthusiasm for the idea. He did not perceive that, along with

genius, and pell-mell, he was admitting force, that is to say, that he

was installing in two compartments of his idolatry, on the one hand

that which is divine, on the other that which is brutal. In many

respects, he had set about deceiving himself otherwise. He admitted

everything. There is a way of encountering error while on one’s way to

the truth. He had a violent sort of good faith which took everything in

the lump. In the new path which he had entered on, in judging the

mistakes of the old regime, as in measuring the glory of Napoleon, he

neglected the attenuating circumstances.

At all events, a tremendous step had been taken. Where he had formerly

beheld the fall of the monarchy, he now saw the advent of France. His

orientation had changed. What had been his East became the West. He had

turned squarely round.

All these revolutions were accomplished within him, without his family

obtaining an inkling of the case.

When, during this mysterious labor, he had entirely shed his old

Bourbon and ultra skin, when he had cast off the aristocrat, the

Jacobite and the Royalist, when he had become thoroughly a

revolutionist, profoundly democratic and republican, he went to an

engraver on the Quai des Orfévres and ordered a hundred cards bearing

this name: \_Le Baron Marius Pontmercy\_.

This was only the strictly logical consequence of the change which had

taken place in him, a change in which everything gravitated round his

father.

Only, as he did not know any one and could not sow his cards with any

porter, he put them in his pocket.

By another natural consequence, in proportion as he drew nearer to his

father, to the latter’s memory, and to the things for which the colonel

had fought five and twenty years before, he receded from his

grandfather. We have long ago said, that M. Gillenormand’s temper did

not please him. There already existed between them all the dissonances

of the grave young man and the frivolous old man. The gayety of Géronte

shocks and exasperates the melancholy of Werther. So long as the same

political opinions and the same ideas had been common to them both,

Marius had met M. Gillenormand there as on a bridge. When the bridge

fell, an abyss was formed. And then, over and above all, Marius

experienced unutterable impulses to revolt, when he reflected that it

was M. Gillenormand who had, from stupid motives, torn him ruthlessly

from the colonel, thus depriving the father of the child, and the child

of the father.

By dint of pity for his father, Marius had nearly arrived at aversion

for his grandfather.

Nothing of this sort, however, was betrayed on the exterior, as we have

already said. Only he grew colder and colder; laconic at meals, and

rare in the house. When his aunt scolded him for it, he was very gentle

and alleged his studies, his lectures, the examinations, etc., as a

pretext. His grandfather never departed from his infallible diagnosis:

“In love! I know all about it.”

From time to time Marius absented himself.

“Where is it that he goes off like this?” said his aunt.

On one of these trips, which were always very brief, he went to

Montfermeil, in order to obey the injunction which his father had left

him, and he sought the old sergeant to Waterloo, the inn-keeper

Thénardier. Thénardier had failed, the inn was closed, and no one knew

what had become of him. Marius was away from the house for four days on

this quest.

“He is getting decidedly wild,” said his grandfather.

They thought they had noticed that he wore something on his breast,

under his shirt, which was attached to his neck by a black ribbon.

CHAPTER VII—SOME PETTICOAT

We have mentioned a lancer.

He was a great-grand-nephew of M. Gillenormand, on the paternal side,

who led a garrison life, outside the family and far from the domestic

hearth. Lieutenant Théodule Gillenormand fulfilled all the conditions

required to make what is called a fine officer. He had “a lady’s

waist,” a victorious manner of trailing his sword and of twirling his

moustache in a hook. He visited Paris very rarely, and so rarely that

Marius had never seen him. The cousins knew each other only by name. We

think we have said that Théodule was the favorite of Aunt Gillenormand,

who preferred him because she did not see him. Not seeing people

permits one to attribute to them all possible perfections.

One morning, Mademoiselle Gillenormand the elder returned to her

apartment as much disturbed as her placidity was capable of allowing.

Marius had just asked his grandfather’s permission to take a little

trip, adding that he meant to set out that very evening. “Go!” had been

his grandfather’s reply, and M. Gillenormand had added in an aside, as

he raised his eyebrows to the top of his forehead: “Here he is passing

the night out again.” Mademoiselle Gillenormand had ascended to her

chamber greatly puzzled, and on the staircase had dropped this

exclamation: “This is too much!”—and this interrogation: “But where is

it that he goes?” She espied some adventure of the heart, more or less

illicit, a woman in the shadow, a rendezvous, a mystery, and she would

not have been sorry to thrust her spectacles into the affair. Tasting a

mystery resembles getting the first flavor of a scandal; sainted souls

do not detest this. There is some curiosity about scandal in the secret

compartments of bigotry.

So she was the prey of a vague appetite for learning a history.

In order to get rid of this curiosity which agitated her a little

beyond her wont, she took refuge in her talents, and set about

scalloping, with one layer of cotton after another, one of those

embroideries of the Empire and the Restoration, in which there are

numerous cart-wheels. The work was clumsy, the worker cross. She had

been seated at this for several hours when the door opened.

Mademoiselle Gillenormand raised her nose. Lieutenant Théodule stood

before her, making the regulation salute. She uttered a cry of delight.

One may be old, one may be a prude, one may be pious, one may be an

aunt, but it is always agreeable to see a lancer enter one’s chamber.

“You here, Théodule!” she exclaimed.

“On my way through town, aunt.”

“Embrace me.”

“Here goes!” said Théodule.

And he kissed her. Aunt Gillenormand went to her writing-desk and

opened it.

“You will remain with us a week at least?”

“I leave this very evening, aunt.”

“It is not possible!”

“Mathematically!”

“Remain, my little Théodule, I beseech you.”

“My heart says ‘yes,’ but my orders say ‘no.’ The matter is simple.

They are changing our garrison; we have been at Melun, we are being

transferred to Gaillon. It is necessary to pass through Paris in order

to get from the old post to the new one. I said: ‘I am going to see my

aunt.’”

“Here is something for your trouble.”

And she put ten louis into his hand.

“For my pleasure, you mean to say, my dear aunt.”

Théodule kissed her again, and she experienced the joy of having some

of the skin scratched from her neck by the braidings on his uniform.

“Are you making the journey on horseback, with your regiment?” she

asked him.

“No, aunt. I wanted to see you. I have special permission. My servant

is taking my horse; I am travelling by diligence. And, by the way, I

want to ask you something.”

“What is it?”

“Is my cousin Marius Pontmercy travelling so, too?”

“How do you know that?” said his aunt, suddenly pricked to the quick

with a lively curiosity.

“On my arrival, I went to the diligence to engage my seat in the

coupé.”

“Well?”

“A traveller had already come to engage a seat in the imperial. I saw

his name on the card.”

“What name?”

“Marius Pontmercy.”

“The wicked fellow!” exclaimed his aunt. “Ah! your cousin is not a

steady lad like yourself. To think that he is to pass the night in a

diligence!”

“Just as I am going to do.”

“But you—it is your duty; in his case, it is wildness.”

“Bosh!” said Théodule.

Here an event occurred to Mademoiselle Gillenormand the elder,—an idea

struck her. If she had been a man, she would have slapped her brow. She

apostrophized Théodule:—

“Are you aware whether your cousin knows you?”

“No. I have seen him; but he has never deigned to notice me.”

“So you are going to travel together?”

“He in the imperial, I in the coupé.”

“Where does this diligence run?”

“To Andelys.”

“Then that is where Marius is going?”

“Unless, like myself, he should stop on the way. I get down at Vernon,

in order to take the branch coach for Gaillon. I know nothing of

Marius’ plan of travel.”

“Marius! what an ugly name! what possessed them to name him Marius?

While you, at least, are called Théodule.”

“I would rather be called Alfred,” said the officer.

“Listen, Théodule.”

“I am listening, aunt.”

“Pay attention.”

“I am paying attention.”

“You understand?”

“Yes.”

“Well, Marius absents himself!”

“Eh! eh!”

“He travels.”

“Ah! ah!”

“He spends the night out.”

“Oh! oh!”

“We should like to know what there is behind all this.”

Théodule replied with the composure of a man of bronze:—

“Some petticoat or other.”

And with that inward laugh which denotes certainty, he added:—

“A lass.”

“That is evident,” exclaimed his aunt, who thought she heard M.

Gillenormand speaking, and who felt her conviction become irresistible

at that word \_fillette\_, accentuated in almost the very same fashion by

the granduncle and the grandnephew. She resumed:—

“Do us a favor. Follow Marius a little. He does not know you, it will

be easy. Since a lass there is, try to get a sight of her. You must

write us the tale. It will amuse his grandfather.”

Théodule had no excessive taste for this sort of spying; but he was

much touched by the ten louis, and he thought he saw a chance for a

possible sequel. He accepted the commission and said: “As you please,

aunt.”

And he added in an aside, to himself: “Here I am a duenna.”

Mademoiselle Gillenormand embraced him.

“You are not the man to play such pranks, Théodule. You obey

discipline, you are the slave of orders, you are a man of scruples and

duty, and you would not quit your family to go and see a creature.”

The lancer made the pleased grimace of Cartouche when praised for his

probity.

Marius, on the evening following this dialogue, mounted the diligence

without suspecting that he was watched. As for the watcher, the first

thing he did was to fall asleep. His slumber was complete and

conscientious. Argus snored all night long.

At daybreak, the conductor of the diligence shouted: “Vernon! relay of

Vernon! Travellers for Vernon!” And Lieutenant Théodule woke.

“Good,” he growled, still half asleep, “this is where I get out.”

Then, as his memory cleared by degrees, the effect of waking, he

recalled his aunt, the ten louis, and the account which he had

undertaken to render of the deeds and proceedings of Marius. This set

him to laughing.

“Perhaps he is no longer in the coach,” he thought, as he rebuttoned

the waistcoat of his undress uniform. “He may have stopped at Poissy;

he may have stopped at Triel; if he did not get out at Meulan, he may

have got out at Mantes, unless he got out at Rolleboise, or if he did

not go on as far as Pacy, with the choice of turning to the left at

Évreus, or to the right at Laroche-Guyon. Run after him, aunty. What

the devil am I to write to that good old soul?”

At that moment a pair of black trousers descending from the imperial,

made its appearance at the window of the coupé.

“Can that be Marius?” said the lieutenant.

It was Marius.

A little peasant girl, all entangled with the horses and the postilions

at the end of the vehicle, was offering flowers to the travellers.

“Give your ladies flowers!” she cried.

Marius approached her and purchased the finest flowers in her flat

basket.

“Come now,” said Théodule, leaping down from the coupé, “this piques my

curiosity. Who the deuce is he going to carry those flowers to? She

must be a splendidly handsome woman for so fine a bouquet. I want to

see her.”

And no longer in pursuance of orders, but from personal curiosity, like

dogs who hunt on their own account, he set out to follow Marius.

Marius paid no attention to Théodule. Elegant women descended from the

diligence; he did not glance at them. He seemed to see nothing around

him.

“He is pretty deeply in love!” thought Théodule.

Marius directed his steps towards the church.

“Capital,” said Théodule to himself. “Rendezvous seasoned with a bit of

mass are the best sort. Nothing is so exquisite as an ogle which passes

over the good God’s head.”

On arriving at the church, Marius did not enter it, but skirted the

apse. He disappeared behind one of the angles of the apse.

“The rendezvous is appointed outside,” said Théodule. “Let’s have a

look at the lass.”

And he advanced on the tips of his boots towards the corner which

Marius had turned.

On arriving there, he halted in amazement.

Marius, with his forehead clasped in his hands, was kneeling upon the

grass on a grave. He had strewn his bouquet there. At the extremity of

the grave, on a little swelling which marked the head, there stood a

cross of black wood with this name in white letters: COLONEL BARON

PONTMERCY. Marius’ sobs were audible.

The “lass” was a grave.

CHAPTER VIII—MARBLE AGAINST GRANITE

It was hither that Marius had come on the first occasion of his

absenting himself from Paris. It was hither that he had come every time

that M. Gillenormand had said: “He is sleeping out.”

Lieutenant Théodule was absolutely put out of countenance by this

unexpected encounter with a sepulchre; he experienced a singular and

disagreeable sensation which he was incapable of analyzing, and which

was composed of respect for the tomb, mingled with respect for the

colonel. He retreated, leaving Marius alone in the cemetery, and there

was discipline in this retreat. Death appeared to him with large

epaulets, and he almost made the military salute to him. Not knowing

what to write to his aunt, he decided not to write at all; and it is

probable that nothing would have resulted from the discovery made by

Théodule as to the love affairs of Marius, if, by one of those

mysterious arrangements which are so frequent in chance, the scene at

Vernon had not had an almost immediate counter-shock at Paris.

Marius returned from Vernon on the third day, in the middle of the

morning, descended at his grandfather’s door, and, wearied by the two

nights spent in the diligence, and feeling the need of repairing his

loss of sleep by an hour at the swimming-school, he mounted rapidly to

his chamber, took merely time enough to throw off his travelling-coat,

and the black ribbon which he wore round his neck, and went off to the

bath.

M. Gillenormand, who had risen betimes like all old men in good health,

had heard his entrance, and had made haste to climb, as quickly as his

old legs permitted, the stairs to the upper story where Marius lived,

in order to embrace him, and to question him while so doing, and to

find out where he had been.

But the youth had taken less time to descend than the old man had to

ascend, and when Father Gillenormand entered the attic, Marius was no

longer there.

The bed had not been disturbed, and on the bed lay, outspread, but not

defiantly the great-coat and the black ribbon.

“I like this better,” said M. Gillenormand.

And a moment later, he made his entrance into the salon, where

Mademoiselle Gillenormand was already seated, busily embroidering her

cart-wheels.

The entrance was a triumphant one.

M. Gillenormand held in one hand the great-coat, and in the other the

neck-ribbon, and exclaimed:—

“Victory! We are about to penetrate the mystery! We are going to learn

the most minute details; we are going to lay our finger on the

debaucheries of our sly friend! Here we have the romance itself. I have

the portrait!”

In fact, a case of black shagreen, resembling a medallion portrait, was

suspended from the ribbon.

The old man took this case and gazed at it for some time without

opening it, with that air of enjoyment, rapture, and wrath, with which

a poor hungry fellow beholds an admirable dinner which is not for him,

pass under his very nose.

“For this evidently is a portrait. I know all about such things. That

is worn tenderly on the heart. How stupid they are! Some abominable

fright that will make us shudder, probably! Young men have such bad

taste nowadays!”

“Let us see, father,” said the old spinster.

The case opened by the pressure of a spring. They found in it nothing

but a carefully folded paper.

\_“From the same to the same,”\_ said M. Gillenormand, bursting with

laughter. “I know what it is. A billet-doux.”

“Ah! let us read it!” said the aunt.

And she put on her spectacles. They unfolded the paper and read as

follows:—

“\_For my son\_.—The Emperor made me a Baron on the battlefield of

Waterloo. Since the Restoration disputes my right to this title which I

purchased with my blood, my son shall take it and bear it. That he will

be worthy of it is a matter of course.”

The feelings of father and daughter cannot be described. They felt

chilled as by the breath of a death’s-head. They did not exchange a

word.

Only, M. Gillenormand said in a low voice and as though speaking to

himself:—

“It is the slasher’s handwriting.”

The aunt examined the paper, turned it about in all directions, then

put it back in its case.

At the same moment a little oblong packet, enveloped in blue paper,

fell from one of the pockets of the great-coat. Mademoiselle

Gillenormand picked it up and unfolded the blue paper.

It contained Marius’ hundred cards. She handed one of them to M.

Gillenormand, who read: \_Le Baron Marius Pontmercy\_.

The old man rang the bell. Nicolette came. M. Gillenormand took the

ribbon, the case, and the coat, flung them all on the floor in the

middle of the room, and said:—

“Carry those duds away.”

A full hour passed in the most profound silence. The old man and the

old spinster had seated themselves with their backs to each other, and

were thinking, each on his own account, the same things, in all

probability.

At the expiration of this hour, Aunt Gillenormand said:—“A pretty state

of things!”

A few moments later, Marius made his appearance. He entered. Even

before he had crossed the threshold, he saw his grandfather holding one

of his own cards in his hand, and on catching sight of him, the latter

exclaimed with his air of bourgeois and grinning superiority which was

something crushing:—

“Well! well! well! well! well! so you are a baron now. I present you my

compliments. What is the meaning of this?”

Marius reddened slightly and replied:—

“It means that I am the son of my father.”

M. Gillenormand ceased to laugh, and said harshly:—

“I am your father.”

“My father,” retorted Marius, with downcast eyes and a severe air, “was

a humble and heroic man, who served the Republic and France gloriously,

who was great in the greatest history that men have ever made, who

lived in the bivouac for a quarter of a century, beneath grape-shot and

bullets, in snow and mud by day, beneath rain at night, who captured

two flags, who received twenty wounds, who died forgotten and

abandoned, and who never committed but one mistake, which was to love

too fondly two ingrates, his country and myself.”

This was more than M. Gillenormand could bear to hear. At the word

\_republic\_, he rose, or, to speak more correctly, he sprang to his

feet. Every word that Marius had just uttered produced on the visage of

the old Royalist the effect of the puffs of air from a forge upon a

blazing brand. From a dull hue he had turned red, from red, purple, and

from purple, flame-colored.

“Marius!” he cried. “Abominable child! I do not know what your father

was! I do not wish to know! I know nothing about that, and I do not

know him! But what I do know is, that there never was anything but

scoundrels among those men! They were all rascals, assassins, red-caps,

thieves! I say all! I say all! I know not one! I say all! Do you hear

me, Marius! See here, you are no more a baron than my slipper is! They

were all bandits in the service of Robespierre! All who served

B-u-o-naparté were brigands! They were all traitors who betrayed,

betrayed, betrayed their legitimate king! All cowards who fled before

the Prussians and the English at Waterloo! That is what I do know!

Whether Monsieur your father comes in that category, I do not know! I

am sorry for it, so much the worse, your humble servant!”

In his turn, it was Marius who was the firebrand and M. Gillenormand

who was the bellows. Marius quivered in every limb, he did not know

what would happen next, his brain was on fire. He was the priest who

beholds all his sacred wafers cast to the winds, the fakir who beholds

a passer-by spit upon his idol. It could not be that such things had

been uttered in his presence. What was he to do? His father had just

been trampled under foot and stamped upon in his presence, but by whom?

By his grandfather. How was he to avenge the one without outraging the

other? It was impossible for him to insult his grandfather and it was

equally impossible for him to leave his father unavenged. On the one

hand was a sacred grave, on the other hoary locks.

He stood there for several moments, staggering as though intoxicated,

with all this whirlwind dashing through his head; then he raised his

eyes, gazed fixedly at his grandfather, and cried in a voice of

thunder:—

“Down with the Bourbons, and that great hog of a Louis XVIII.!”

Louis XVIII. had been dead for four years; but it was all the same to

him.

The old man, who had been crimson, turned whiter than his hair. He

wheeled round towards a bust of M. le Duc de Berry, which stood on the

chimney-piece, and made a profound bow, with a sort of peculiar

majesty. Then he paced twice, slowly and in silence, from the fireplace

to the window and from the window to the fireplace, traversing the

whole length of the room, and making the polished floor creak as though

he had been a stone statue walking.

On his second turn, he bent over his daughter, who was watching this

encounter with the stupefied air of an antiquated lamb, and said to her

with a smile that was almost calm: “A baron like this gentleman, and a

bourgeois like myself cannot remain under the same roof.”

And drawing himself up, all at once, pallid, trembling, terrible, with

his brow rendered more lofty by the terrible radiance of wrath, he

extended his arm towards Marius and shouted to him:—

“Be off!”

Marius left the house.

On the following day, M. Gillenormand said to his daughter:

“You will send sixty pistoles every six months to that blood-drinker,

and you will never mention his name to me.”

Having an immense reserve fund of wrath to get rid of, and not knowing

what to do with it, he continued to address his daughter as \_you\_

instead of \_thou\_ for the next three months.

Marius, on his side, had gone forth in indignation. There was one

circumstance which, it must be admitted, aggravated his exasperation.

There are always petty fatalities of the sort which complicate domestic

dramas. They augment the grievances in such cases, although, in

reality, the wrongs are not increased by them. While carrying Marius’

“duds” precipitately to his chamber, at his grandfather’s command,

Nicolette had, inadvertently, let fall, probably, on the attic

staircase, which was dark, that medallion of black shagreen which

contained the paper penned by the colonel. Neither paper nor case could

afterwards be found. Marius was convinced that “Monsieur

Gillenormand”—from that day forth he never alluded to him otherwise—had

flung “his father’s testament” in the fire. He knew by heart the few

lines which the colonel had written, and, consequently, nothing was

lost. But the paper, the writing, that sacred relic,—all that was his

very heart. What had been done with it?

Marius had taken his departure without saying whither he was going, and

without knowing where, with thirty francs, his watch, and a few clothes

in a hand-bag. He had entered a hackney-coach, had engaged it by the

hour, and had directed his course at hap-hazard towards the Latin

quarter.

What was to become of Marius?

BOOK FOURTH—THE FRIENDS OF THE A B C

CHAPTER I—A GROUP WHICH BARELY MISSED BECOMING HISTORIC

At that epoch, which was, to all appearances indifferent, a certain

revolutionary quiver was vaguely current. Breaths which had started

forth from the depths of ’89 and ’93 were in the air. Youth was on the

point, may the reader pardon us the word, of moulting. People were

undergoing a transformation, almost without being conscious of it,

through the movement of the age. The needle which moves round the

compass also moves in souls. Each person was taking that step in

advance which he was bound to take. The Royalists were becoming

liberals, liberals were turning democrats. It was a flood tide

complicated with a thousand ebb movements; the peculiarity of ebbs is

to create intermixtures; hence the combination of very singular ideas;

people adored both Napoleon and liberty. We are making history here.

These were the mirages of that period. Opinions traverse phases.

Voltairian royalism, a quaint variety, had a no less singular sequel,

Bonapartist liberalism.

Other groups of minds were more serious. In that direction, they

sounded principles, they attached themselves to the right. They grew

enthusiastic for the absolute, they caught glimpses of infinite

realizations; the absolute, by its very rigidity, urges spirits towards

the sky and causes them to float in illimitable space. There is nothing

like dogma for bringing forth dreams. And there is nothing like dreams

for engendering the future. Utopia to-day, flesh and blood to-morrow.

These advanced opinions had a double foundation. A beginning of mystery

menaced “the established order of things,” which was suspicious and

underhand. A sign which was revolutionary to the highest degree. The

second thoughts of power meet the second thoughts of the populace in

the mine. The incubation of insurrections gives the retort to the

premeditation of \_coups d’état\_.

There did not, as yet, exist in France any of those vast underlying

organizations, like the German \_tugendbund\_ and Italian Carbonarism;

but here and there there were dark underminings, which were in process

of throwing off shoots. The Cougourde was being outlined at Aix; there

existed at Paris, among other affiliations of that nature, the society

of the Friends of the A B C.

What were these Friends of the A B C? A society which had for its

object apparently the education of children, in reality the elevation

of man.

They declared themselves the Friends of the A B C,—the \_Abaissé\_,—the

debased,—that is to say, the people. They wished to elevate the people.

It was a pun which we should do wrong to smile at. Puns are sometimes

serious factors in politics; witness the \_Castratus ad castra\_, which

made a general of the army of Narses; witness: \_Barbari et Barberini\_;

witness: \_Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram\_, etc., etc.

The Friends of the A B C were not numerous, it was a secret society in

the state of embryo, we might almost say a coterie, if coteries ended

in heroes. They assembled in Paris in two localities, near the

fish-market, in a wine-shop called \_Corinthe\_, of which more will be

heard later on, and near the Pantheon in a little café in the Rue

Saint-Michel called the \_Café Musain\_, now torn down; the first of

these meeting-places was close to the workingman, the second to the

students.

The assemblies of the Friends of the A B C were usually held in a back

room of the Café Musain.

This hall, which was tolerably remote from the café, with which it was

connected by an extremely long corridor, had two windows and an exit

with a private stairway on the little Rue des Grès. There they smoked

and drank, and gambled and laughed. There they conversed in very loud

tones about everything, and in whispers of other things. An old map of

France under the Republic was nailed to the wall,—a sign quite

sufficient to excite the suspicion of a police agent.

The greater part of the Friends of the A B C were students, who were on

cordial terms with the working classes. Here are the names of the

principal ones. They belong, in a certain measure, to history:

Enjolras, Combeferre, Jean Prouvaire, Feuilly, Courfeyrac, Bahorel,

Lesgle or Laigle, Joly, Grantaire.

These young men formed a sort of family, through the bond of

friendship. All, with the exception of Laigle, were from the South.

[Illustration: Friends of the a B C]

This was a remarkable group. It vanished in the invisible depths which

lie behind us. At the point of this drama which we have now reached, it

will not perhaps be superfluous to throw a ray of light upon these

youthful heads, before the reader beholds them plunging into the shadow

of a tragic adventure.

Enjolras, whose name we have mentioned first of all,—the reader shall

see why later on,—was an only son and wealthy.

Enjolras was a charming young man, who was capable of being terrible.

He was angelically handsome. He was a savage Antinous. One would have

said, to see the pensive thoughtfulness of his glance, that he had

already, in some previous state of existence, traversed the

revolutionary apocalypse. He possessed the tradition of it as though he

had been a witness. He was acquainted with all the minute details of

the great affair. A pontifical and warlike nature, a singular thing in

a youth. He was an officiating priest and a man of war; from the

immediate point of view, a soldier of the democracy; above the

contemporary movement, the priest of the ideal. His eyes were deep, his

lids a little red, his lower lip was thick and easily became

disdainful, his brow was lofty. A great deal of brow in a face is like

a great deal of horizon in a view. Like certain young men at the

beginning of this century and the end of the last, who became

illustrious at an early age, he was endowed with excessive youth, and

was as rosy as a young girl, although subject to hours of pallor.

Already a man, he still seemed a child. His two and twenty years

appeared to be but seventeen; he was serious, it did not seem as though

he were aware there was on earth a thing called woman. He had but one

passion—the right; but one thought—to overthrow the obstacle. On Mount

Aventine, he would have been Gracchus; in the Convention, he would have

been Saint-Just. He hardly saw the roses, he ignored spring, he did not

hear the carolling of the birds; the bare throat of Evadne would have

moved him no more than it would have moved Aristogeiton; he, like

Harmodius, thought flowers good for nothing except to conceal the

sword. He was severe in his enjoyments. He chastely dropped his eyes

before everything which was not the Republic. He was the marble lover

of liberty. His speech was harshly inspired, and had the thrill of a

hymn. He was subject to unexpected outbursts of soul. Woe to the

love-affair which should have risked itself beside him! If any grisette

of the Place Cambrai or the Rue Saint-Jean-de-Beauvais, seeing that

face of a youth escaped from college, that page’s mien, those long,

golden lashes, those blue eyes, that hair billowing in the wind, those

rosy cheeks, those fresh lips, those exquisite teeth, had conceived an

appetite for that complete aurora, and had tried her beauty on

Enjolras, an astounding and terrible glance would have promptly shown

her the abyss, and would have taught her not to confound the mighty

cherub of Ezekiel with the gallant Cherubino of Beaumarchais.

By the side of Enjolras, who represented the logic of the Revolution,

Combeferre represented its philosophy. Between the logic of the

Revolution and its philosophy there exists this difference—that its

logic may end in war, whereas its philosophy can end only in peace.

Combeferre complemented and rectified Enjolras. He was less lofty, but

broader. He desired to pour into all minds the extensive principles of

general ideas: he said: “Revolution, but civilization”; and around the

mountain peak he opened out a vast view of the blue sky. The Revolution

was more adapted for breathing with Combeferre than with Enjolras.

Enjolras expressed its divine right, and Combeferre its natural right.

The first attached himself to Robespierre; the second confined himself

to Condorcet. Combeferre lived the life of all the rest of the world

more than did Enjolras. If it had been granted to these two young men

to attain to history, the one would have been the just, the other the

wise man. Enjolras was the more virile, Combeferre the more humane.

\_Homo\_ and \_vir\_, that was the exact effect of their different shades.

Combeferre was as gentle as Enjolras was severe, through natural

whiteness. He loved the word \_citizen\_, but he preferred the word

\_man\_. He would gladly have said: \_Hombre\_, like the Spanish. He read

everything, went to the theatres, attended the courses of public

lecturers, learned the polarization of light from Arago, grew

enthusiastic over a lesson in which Geoffroy Sainte-Hilaire explained

the double function of the external carotid artery, and the internal,

the one which makes the face, and the one which makes the brain; he

kept up with what was going on, followed science step by step, compared

Saint-Simon with Fourier, deciphered hieroglyphics, broke the pebble

which he found and reasoned on geology, drew from memory a silkworm

moth, pointed out the faulty French in the Dictionary of the Academy,

studied Puységur and Deleuze, affirmed nothing, not even miracles;

denied nothing, not even ghosts; turned over the files of the

\_Moniteur\_, reflected. He declared that the future lies in the hand of

the schoolmaster, and busied himself with educational questions. He

desired that society should labor without relaxation at the elevation

of the moral and intellectual level, at coining science, at putting

ideas into circulation, at increasing the mind in youthful persons, and

he feared lest the present poverty of method, the paltriness from a

literary point of view confined to two or three centuries called

classic, the tyrannical dogmatism of official pedants, scholastic

prejudices and routines should end by converting our colleges into

artificial oyster beds. He was learned, a purist, exact, a graduate of

the Polytechnic, a close student, and at the same time, thoughtful

“even to chimæras,” so his friends said. He believed in all dreams,

railroads, the suppression of suffering in chirurgical operations, the

fixing of images in the dark chamber, the electric telegraph, the

steering of balloons. Moreover, he was not much alarmed by the citadels

erected against the human mind in every direction, by superstition,

despotism, and prejudice. He was one of those who think that science

will eventually turn the position. Enjolras was a chief, Combeferre was

a guide. One would have liked to fight under the one and to march

behind the other. It is not that Combeferre was not capable of

fighting, he did not refuse a hand-to-hand combat with the obstacle,

and to attack it by main force and explosively; but it suited him

better to bring the human race into accord with its destiny gradually,

by means of education, the inculcation of axioms, the promulgation of

positive laws; and, between two lights, his preference was rather for

illumination than for conflagration. A conflagration can create an

aurora, no doubt, but why not await the dawn? A volcano illuminates,

but daybreak furnishes a still better illumination. Possibly,

Combeferre preferred the whiteness of the beautiful to the blaze of the

sublime. A light troubled by smoke, progress purchased at the expense

of violence, only half satisfied this tender and serious spirit. The

headlong precipitation of a people into the truth, a ‘93, terrified

him; nevertheless, stagnation was still more repulsive to him, in it he

detected putrefaction and death; on the whole, he preferred scum to

miasma, and he preferred the torrent to the cesspool, and the falls of

Niagara to the lake of Montfaucon. In short, he desired neither halt

nor haste. While his tumultuous friends, captivated by the absolute,

adored and invoked splendid revolutionary adventures, Combeferre was

inclined to let progress, good progress, take its own course; he may

have been cold, but he was pure; methodical, but irreproachable;

phlegmatic, but imperturbable. Combeferre would have knelt and clasped

his hands to enable the future to arrive in all its candor, and that

nothing might disturb the immense and virtuous evolution of the races.

\_The good must be innocent\_, he repeated incessantly. And in fact, if

the grandeur of the Revolution consists in keeping the dazzling ideal

fixedly in view, and of soaring thither athwart the lightnings, with

fire and blood in its talons, the beauty of progress lies in being

spotless; and there exists between Washington, who represents the one,

and Danton, who incarnates the other, that difference which separates

the swan from the angel with the wings of an eagle.

Jean Prouvaire was a still softer shade than Combeferre. His name was

Jehan, owing to that petty momentary freak which mingled with the

powerful and profound movement whence sprang the very essential study

of the Middle Ages. Jean Prouvaire was in love; he cultivated a pot of

flowers, played on the flute, made verses, loved the people, pitied

woman, wept over the child, confounded God and the future in the same

confidence, and blamed the Revolution for having caused the fall of a

royal head, that of André Chénier. His voice was ordinarily delicate,

but suddenly grew manly. He was learned even to erudition, and almost

an Orientalist. Above all, he was good; and, a very simple thing to

those who know how nearly goodness borders on grandeur, in the matter

of poetry, he preferred the immense. He knew Italian, Latin, Greek, and

Hebrew; and these served him only for the perusal of four poets: Dante,

Juvenal, Æschylus, and Isaiah. In French, he preferred Corneille to

Racine, and Agrippa d’Aubigné to Corneille. He loved to saunter through

fields of wild oats and corn-flowers, and busied himself with clouds

nearly as much as with events. His mind had two attitudes, one on the

side towards man, the other on that towards God; he studied or he

contemplated. All day long, he buried himself in social questions,

salary, capital, credit, marriage, religion, liberty of thought,

education, penal servitude, poverty, association, property, production

and sharing, the enigma of this lower world which covers the human

ant-hill with darkness; and at night, he gazed upon the planets, those

enormous beings. Like Enjolras, he was wealthy and an only son. He

spoke softly, bowed his head, lowered his eyes, smiled with

embarrassment, dressed badly, had an awkward air, blushed at a mere

nothing, and was very timid. Yet he was intrepid.

Feuilly was a workingman, a fan-maker, orphaned both of father and

mother, who earned with difficulty three francs a day, and had but one

thought, to deliver the world. He had one other preoccupation, to

educate himself; he called this also, delivering himself. He had taught

himself to read and write; everything that he knew, he had learned by

himself. Feuilly had a generous heart. The range of his embrace was

immense. This orphan had adopted the peoples. As his mother had failed

him, he meditated on his country. He brooded with the profound

divination of the man of the people, over what we now call the \_idea of

the nationality\_, had learned history with the express object of raging

with full knowledge of the case. In this club of young Utopians,

occupied chiefly with France, he represented the outside world. He had

for his specialty Greece, Poland, Hungary, Roumania, Italy. He uttered

these names incessantly, appropriately and inappropriately, with the

tenacity of right. The violations of Turkey on Greece and Thessaly, of

Russia on Warsaw, of Austria on Venice, enraged him. Above all things,

the great violence of 1772 aroused him. There is no more sovereign

eloquence than the true in indignation; he was eloquent with that

eloquence. He was inexhaustible on that infamous date of 1772, on the

subject of that noble and valiant race suppressed by treason, and that

three-sided crime, on that monstrous ambush, the prototype and pattern

of all those horrible suppressions of states, which, since that time,

have struck many a noble nation, and have annulled their certificate of

birth, so to speak. All contemporary social crimes have their origin in

the partition of Poland. The partition of Poland is a theorem of which

all present political outrages are the corollaries. There has not been

a despot, nor a traitor for nearly a century back, who has not signed,

approved, counter-signed, and copied, \_ne variatur\_, the partition of

Poland. When the record of modern treasons was examined, that was the

first thing which made its appearance. The congress of Vienna consulted

that crime before consummating its own. 1772 sounded the onset; 1815

was the death of the game. Such was Feuilly’s habitual text. This poor

workingman had constituted himself the tutor of Justice, and she

recompensed him by rendering him great. The fact is, that there is

eternity in right. Warsaw can no more be Tartar than Venice can be

Teuton. Kings lose their pains and their honor in the attempt to make

them so. Sooner or later, the submerged part floats to the surface and

reappears. Greece becomes Greece again, Italy is once more Italy. The

protest of right against the deed persists forever. The theft of a

nation cannot be allowed by prescription. These lofty deeds of

rascality have no future. A nation cannot have its mark extracted like

a pocket handkerchief.

Courfeyrac had a father who was called M. de Courfeyrac. One of the

false ideas of the bourgeoisie under the Restoration as regards

aristocracy and the nobility was to believe in the particle. The

particle, as every one knows, possesses no significance. But the

bourgeois of the epoch of \_la Minerve\_ estimated so highly that poor

\_de\_, that they thought themselves bound to abdicate it. M. de

Chauvelin had himself called M. Chauvelin; M. de Caumartin, M.

Caumartin; M. de Constant de Robecque, Benjamin Constant; M. de

Lafayette, M. Lafayette. Courfeyrac had not wished to remain behind the

rest, and called himself plain Courfeyrac.

We might almost, so far as Courfeyrac is concerned, stop here, and

confine ourselves to saying with regard to what remains: “For

Courfeyrac, see Tholomyès.”

Courfeyrac had, in fact, that animation of youth which may be called

the \_beauté du diable\_ of the mind. Later on, this disappears like the

playfulness of the kitten, and all this grace ends, with the bourgeois,

on two legs, and with the tomcat, on four paws.

This sort of wit is transmitted from generation to generation of the

successive levies of youth who traverse the schools, who pass it from

hand to hand, \_quasi cursores\_, and is almost always exactly the same;

so that, as we have just pointed out, any one who had listened to

Courfeyrac in 1828 would have thought he heard Tholomyès in 1817. Only,

Courfeyrac was an honorable fellow. Beneath the apparent similarities

of the exterior mind, the difference between him and Tholomyès was very

great. The latent man which existed in the two was totally different in

the first from what it was in the second. There was in Tholomyès a

district attorney, and in Courfeyrac a paladin.

Enjolras was the chief, Combeferre was the guide, Courfeyrac was the

centre. The others gave more light, he shed more warmth; the truth is,

that he possessed all the qualities of a centre, roundness and

radiance.

Bahorel had figured in the bloody tumult of June, 1822, on the occasion

of the burial of young Lallemand.

Bahorel was a good-natured mortal, who kept bad company, brave, a

spendthrift, prodigal, and to the verge of generosity, talkative, and

at times eloquent, bold to the verge of effrontery; the best fellow

possible; he had daring waistcoats, and scarlet opinions; a wholesale

blusterer, that is to say, loving nothing so much as a quarrel, unless

it were an uprising; and nothing so much as an uprising, unless it were

a revolution; always ready to smash a window-pane, then to tear up the

pavement, then to demolish a government, just to see the effect of it;

a student in his eleventh year. He had nosed about the law, but did not

practise it. He had taken for his device: “Never a lawyer,” and for his

armorial bearings a nightstand in which was visible a square cap. Every

time that he passed the law-school, which rarely happened, he buttoned

up his frock-coat,—the paletot had not yet been invented,—and took

hygienic precautions. Of the school porter he said: “What a fine old

man!” and of the dean, M. Delvincourt: “What a monument!” In his

lectures he espied subjects for ballads, and in his professors

occasions for caricature. He wasted a tolerably large allowance,

something like three thousand francs a year, in doing nothing.

He had peasant parents whom he had contrived to imbue with respect for

their son.

He said of them: “They are peasants and not bourgeois; that is the

reason they are intelligent.”

Bahorel, a man of caprice, was scattered over numerous cafés; the

others had habits, he had none. He sauntered. To stray is human. To

saunter is Parisian. In reality, he had a penetrating mind and was more

of a thinker than appeared to view.

He served as a connecting link between the Friends of the A B C and

other still unorganized groups, which were destined to take form later

on.

In this conclave of young heads, there was one bald member.

The Marquis d’Avaray, whom Louis XVIII. made a duke for having assisted

him to enter a hackney-coach on the day when he emigrated, was wont to

relate, that in 1814, on his return to France, as the King was

disembarking at Calais, a man handed him a petition.

“What is your request?” said the King.

“Sire, a post-office.”

“What is your name?”

“L’Aigle.”

The King frowned, glanced at the signature of the petition and beheld

the name written thus: LESGLE. This non-Bonaparte orthography touched

the King and he began to smile. “Sire,” resumed the man with the

petition, “I had for ancestor a keeper of the hounds surnamed

Lesgueules. This surname furnished my name. I am called Lesgueules, by

contraction Lesgle, and by corruption l’Aigle.” This caused the King to

smile broadly. Later on he gave the man the posting office of Meaux,

either intentionally or accidentally.

The bald member of the group was the son of this Lesgle, or Légle, and

he signed himself, Légle [de Meaux]. As an abbreviation, his companions

called him Bossuet.

Bossuet was a gay but unlucky fellow. His specialty was not to succeed

in anything. As an offset, he laughed at everything. At five and twenty

he was bald. His father had ended by owning a house and a field; but

he, the son, had made haste to lose that house and field in a bad

speculation. He had nothing left. He possessed knowledge and wit, but

all he did miscarried. Everything failed him and everybody deceived

him; what he was building tumbled down on top of him. If he were

splitting wood, he cut off a finger. If he had a mistress, he speedily

discovered that he had a friend also. Some misfortune happened to him

every moment, hence his joviality. He said: “I live under falling

tiles.” He was not easily astonished, because, for him, an accident was

what he had foreseen, he took his bad luck serenely, and smiled at the

teasing of fate, like a person who is listening to pleasantries. He was

poor, but his fund of good humor was inexhaustible. He soon reached his

last sou, never his last burst of laughter. When adversity entered his

doors, he saluted this old acquaintance cordially, he tapped all

catastrophes on the stomach; he was familiar with fatality to the point

of calling it by its nickname: “Good day, Guignon,” he said to it.

These persecutions of fate had rendered him inventive. He was full of

resources. He had no money, but he found means, when it seemed good to

him, to indulge in “unbridled extravagance.” One night, he went so far

as to eat a “hundred francs” in a supper with a wench, which inspired

him to make this memorable remark in the midst of the orgy: “Pull off

my boots, you five-louis jade.”

Bossuet was slowly directing his steps towards the profession of a

lawyer; he was pursuing his law studies after the manner of Bahorel.

Bossuet had not much domicile, sometimes none at all. He lodged now

with one, now with another, most often with Joly. Joly was studying

medicine. He was two years younger than Bossuet.

Joly was the “malade imaginaire” junior. What he had won in medicine

was to be more of an invalid than a doctor. At three and twenty he

thought himself a valetudinarian, and passed his life in inspecting his

tongue in the mirror. He affirmed that man becomes magnetic like a

needle, and in his chamber he placed his bed with its head to the

south, and the foot to the north, so that, at night, the circulation of

his blood might not be interfered with by the great electric current of

the globe. During thunder storms, he felt his pulse. Otherwise, he was

the gayest of them all. All these young, maniacal, puny, merry

incoherences lived in harmony together, and the result was an eccentric

and agreeable being whom his comrades, who were prodigal of winged

consonants, called Jolllly. “You may fly away on the four \_L’s\_,” Jean

Prouvaire said to him.23

Joly had a trick of touching his nose with the tip of his cane, which

is an indication of a sagacious mind.

All these young men who differed so greatly, and who, on the whole, can

only be discussed seriously, held the same religion: Progress.

All were the direct sons of the French Revolution. The most giddy of

them became solemn when they pronounced that date: ’89. Their fathers

in the flesh had been, either royalists, doctrinaires, it matters not

what; this confusion anterior to themselves, who were young, did not

concern them at all; the pure blood of principle ran in their veins.

They attached themselves, without intermediate shades, to incorruptible

right and absolute duty.

Affiliated and initiated, they sketched out the ideal underground.

Among all these glowing hearts and thoroughly convinced minds, there

was one sceptic. How came he there? By juxtaposition. This sceptic’s

name was Grantaire, and he was in the habit of signing himself with

this rebus: R. Grantaire was a man who took good care not to believe in

anything. Moreover, he was one of the students who had learned the most

during their course at Paris; he knew that the best coffee was to be

had at the Café Lemblin, and the best billiards at the Café Voltaire,

that good cakes and lasses were to be found at the Ermitage, on the

Boulevard du Maine, spatchcocked chickens at Mother Sauget’s, excellent

matelotes at the Barrière de la Cunette, and a certain thin white wine

at the Barrière du Compat. He knew the best place for everything; in

addition, boxing and foot-fencing and some dances; and he was a

thorough single-stick player. He was a tremendous drinker to boot. He

was inordinately homely: the prettiest boot-stitcher of that day, Irma

Boissy, enraged with his homeliness, pronounced sentence on him as

follows: “Grantaire is impossible”; but Grantaire’s fatuity was not to

be disconcerted. He stared tenderly and fixedly at all women, with the

air of saying to them all: “If I only chose!” and of trying to make his

comrades believe that he was in general demand.

All those words: rights of the people, rights of man, the social

contract, the French Revolution, the Republic, democracy, humanity,

civilization, religion, progress, came very near to signifying nothing

whatever to Grantaire. He smiled at them. Scepticism, that caries of

the intelligence, had not left him a single whole idea. He lived with

irony. This was his axiom: “There is but one certainty, my full glass.”

He sneered at all devotion in all parties, the father as well as the

brother, Robespierre junior as well as Loizerolles. “They are greatly

in advance to be dead,” he exclaimed. He said of the crucifix: “There

is a gibbet which has been a success.” A rover, a gambler, a libertine,

often drunk, he displeased these young dreamers by humming incessantly:

“J’aimons les filles, et j’aimons le bon vin.” Air: Vive Henri IV.

However, this sceptic had one fanaticism. This fanaticism was neither a

dogma, nor an idea, nor an art, nor a science; it was a man: Enjolras.

Grantaire admired, loved, and venerated Enjolras. To whom did this

anarchical scoffer unite himself in this phalanx of absolute minds? To

the most absolute. In what manner had Enjolras subjugated him? By his

ideas? No. By his character. A phenomenon which is often observable. A

sceptic who adheres to a believer is as simple as the law of

complementary colors. That which we lack attracts us. No one loves the

light like the blind man. The dwarf adores the drum-major. The toad

always has his eyes fixed on heaven. Why? In order to watch the bird in

its flight. Grantaire, in whom writhed doubt, loved to watch faith soar

in Enjolras. He had need of Enjolras. That chaste, healthy, firm,

upright, hard, candid nature charmed him, without his being clearly

aware of it, and without the idea of explaining it to himself having

occurred to him. He admired his opposite by instinct. His soft,

yielding, dislocated, sickly, shapeless ideas attached themselves to

Enjolras as to a spinal column. His moral backbone leaned on that

firmness. Grantaire in the presence of Enjolras became some one once

more. He was, himself, moreover, composed of two elements, which were,

to all appearance, incompatible. He was ironical and cordial. His

indifference loved. His mind could get along without belief, but his

heart could not get along without friendship. A profound contradiction;

for an affection is a conviction. His nature was thus constituted.

There are men who seem to be born to be the reverse, the obverse, the

wrong side. They are Pollux, Patrocles, Nisus, Eudamidas, Ephestion,

Pechmeja. They only exist on condition that they are backed up with

another man; their name is a sequel, and is only written preceded by

the conjunction \_and\_; and their existence is not their own; it is the

other side of an existence which is not theirs. Grantaire was one of

these men. He was the obverse of Enjolras.

One might almost say that affinities begin with the letters of the

alphabet. In the series O and P are inseparable. You can, at will,

pronounce O and P or Orestes and Pylades.

Grantaire, Enjolras’ true satellite, inhabited this circle of young

men; he lived there, he took no pleasure anywhere but there; he

followed them everywhere. His joy was to see these forms go and come

through the fumes of wine. They tolerated him on account of his good

humor.

Enjolras, the believer, disdained this sceptic; and, a sober man

himself, scorned this drunkard. He accorded him a little lofty pity.

Grantaire was an unaccepted Pylades. Always harshly treated by

Enjolras, roughly repulsed, rejected yet ever returning to the charge,

he said of Enjolras: “What fine marble!”

CHAPTER II—BLONDEAU’S FUNERAL ORATION BY BOSSUET

On a certain afternoon, which had, as will be seen hereafter, some

coincidence with the events heretofore related, Laigle de Meaux was to

be seen leaning in a sensual manner against the doorpost of the Café

Musain. He had the air of a caryatid on a vacation; he carried nothing

but his reverie, however. He was staring at the Place Saint-Michel. To

lean one’s back against a thing is equivalent to lying down while

standing erect, which attitude is not hated by thinkers. Laigle de

Meaux was pondering without melancholy, over a little misadventure

which had befallen him two days previously at the law-school, and which

had modified his personal plans for the future, plans which were rather

indistinct in any case.

Reverie does not prevent a cab from passing by, nor the dreamer from

taking note of that cab. Laigle de Meaux, whose eyes were straying

about in a sort of diffuse lounging, perceived, athwart his

somnambulism, a two-wheeled vehicle proceeding through the place, at a

foot pace and apparently in indecision. For whom was this cabriolet?

Why was it driving at a walk? Laigle took a survey. In it, beside the

coachman, sat a young man, and in front of the young man lay a rather

bulky hand-bag. The bag displayed to passers-by the following name

inscribed in large black letters on a card which was sewn to the stuff:

MARIUS PONTMERCY.

This name caused Laigle to change his attitude. He drew himself up and

hurled this apostrophe at the young man in the cabriolet:—

“Monsieur Marius Pontmercy!”

The cabriolet thus addressed came to a halt.

The young man, who also seemed deeply buried in thought, raised his

eyes:—

“Hey?” said he.

“You are M. Marius Pontmercy?”

“Certainly.”

“I was looking for you,” resumed Laigle de Meaux.

“How so?” demanded Marius; for it was he: in fact, he had just quitted

his grandfather’s, and had before him a face which he now beheld for

the first time. “I do not know you.”

“Neither do I know you,” responded Laigle.

Marius thought he had encountered a wag, the beginning of a

mystification in the open street. He was not in a very good humor at

the moment. He frowned. Laigle de Meaux went on imperturbably:—

“You were not at the school day before yesterday.”

“That is possible.”

“That is certain.”

“You are a student?” demanded Marius.

“Yes, sir. Like yourself. Day before yesterday, I entered the school,

by chance. You know, one does have such freaks sometimes. The professor

was just calling the roll. You are not unaware that they are very

ridiculous on such occasions. At the third call, unanswered, your name

is erased from the list. Sixty francs in the gulf.”

Marius began to listen.

“It was Blondeau who was making the call. You know Blondeau, he has a

very pointed and very malicious nose, and he delights to scent out the

absent. He slyly began with the letter P. I was not listening, not

being compromised by that letter. The call was not going badly. No

erasures; the universe was present. Blondeau was grieved. I said to

myself: ‘Blondeau, my love, you will not get the very smallest sort of

an execution to-day.’ All at once Blondeau calls, ‘Marius Pontmercy!’

No one answers. Blondeau, filled with hope, repeats more loudly:

‘Marius Pontmercy!’ And he takes his pen. Monsieur, I have bowels of

compassion. I said to myself hastily: ‘Here’s a brave fellow who is

going to get scratched out. Attention. Here is a veritable mortal who

is not exact. He’s not a good student. Here is none of your

heavy-sides, a student who studies, a greenhorn pedant, strong on

letters, theology, science, and sapience, one of those dull wits cut by

the square; a pin by profession. He is an honorable idler who lounges,

who practises country jaunts, who cultivates the grisette, who pays

court to the fair sex, who is at this very moment, perhaps, with my

mistress. Let us save him. Death to Blondeau!’ At that moment, Blondeau

dipped his pen in, all black with erasures in the ink, cast his yellow

eyes round the audience room, and repeated for the third time: ‘Marius

Pontmercy!’ I replied: ‘Present!’ This is why you were not crossed

off.”

“Monsieur!—” said Marius.

“And why I was,” added Laigle de Meaux.

“I do not understand you,” said Marius.

Laigle resumed:—

“Nothing is more simple. I was close to the desk to reply, and close to

the door for the purpose of flight. The professor gazed at me with a

certain intensity. All of a sudden, Blondeau, who must be the malicious

nose alluded to by Boileau, skipped to the letter L. L is my letter. I

am from Meaux, and my name is Lesgle.”

“L’Aigle!” interrupted Marius, “what fine name!”

“Monsieur, Blondeau came to this fine name, and called: ‘Laigle!’ I

reply: ‘Present!’ Then Blondeau gazes at me, with the gentleness of a

tiger, and says to me: ‘If you are Pontmercy, you are not Laigle.’ A

phrase which has a disobliging air for you, but which was lugubrious

only for me. That said, he crossed me off.”

Marius exclaimed:—

“I am mortified, sir—”

“First of all,” interposed Laigle, “I demand permission to embalm

Blondeau in a few phrases of deeply felt eulogium. I will assume that

he is dead. There will be no great change required in his gauntness, in

his pallor, in his coldness, and in his smell. And I say: ‘\_Erudimini

qui judicatis terram\_. Here lies Blondeau, Blondeau the Nose, Blondeau

Nasica, the ox of discipline, \_bos disciplinæ\_, the bloodhound of the

password, the angel of the roll-call, who was upright, square, exact,

rigid, honest, and hideous. God crossed him off as he crossed me off.’”

Marius resumed:—

“I am very sorry—”

“Young man,” said Laigle de Meaux, “let this serve you as a lesson. In

future, be exact.”

“I really beg you a thousand pardons.”

“Do not expose your neighbor to the danger of having his name erased

again.”

“I am extremely sorry—”

Laigle burst out laughing.

“And I am delighted. I was on the brink of becoming a lawyer. This

erasure saves me. I renounce the triumphs of the bar. I shall not

defend the widow, and I shall not attack the orphan. No more toga, no

more stage. Here is my erasure all ready for me. It is to you that I am

indebted for it, Monsieur Pontmercy. I intend to pay a solemn call of

thanks upon you. Where do you live?”

“In this cab,” said Marius.

“A sign of opulence,” retorted Laigle calmly. “I congratulate you. You

have there a rent of nine thousand francs per annum.”

At that moment, Courfeyrac emerged from the café.

Marius smiled sadly.

“I have paid this rent for the last two hours, and I aspire to get rid

of it; but there is a sort of history attached to it, and I don’t know

where to go.”

“Come to my place, sir,” said Courfeyrac.

“I have the priority,” observed Laigle, “but I have no home.”

“Hold your tongue, Bossuet,” said Courfeyrac.

“Bossuet,” said Marius, “but I thought that your name was Laigle.”

“De Meaux,” replied Laigle; “by metaphor, Bossuet.”

Courfeyrac entered the cab.

“Coachman,” said he, “hotel de la Porte-Saint-Jacques.”

And that very evening, Marius found himself installed in a chamber of

the hotel de la Porte-Saint-Jacques side by side with Courfeyrac.

CHAPTER III—MARIUS’ ASTONISHMENTS

In a few days, Marius had become Courfeyrac’s friend. Youth is the

season for prompt welding and the rapid healing of scars. Marius

breathed freely in Courfeyrac’s society, a decidedly new thing for him.

Courfeyrac put no questions to him. He did not even think of such a

thing. At that age, faces disclose everything on the spot. Words are

superfluous. There are young men of whom it can be said that their

countenances chatter. One looks at them and one knows them.

One morning, however, Courfeyrac abruptly addressed this interrogation

to him:—

“By the way, have you any political opinions?”

“The idea!” said Marius, almost affronted by the question.

“What are you?”

“A democrat-Bonapartist.”

“The gray hue of a reassured rat,” said Courfeyrac.

On the following day, Courfeyrac introduced Marius at the Café Musain.

Then he whispered in his ear, with a smile: “I must give you your entry

to the revolution.” And he led him to the hall of the Friends of the A

B C. He presented him to the other comrades, saying this simple word

which Marius did not understand: “A pupil.”

Marius had fallen into a wasps’-nest of wits. However, although he was

silent and grave, he was, nonetheless, both winged and armed.

Marius, up to that time solitary and inclined to soliloquy, and to

asides, both by habit and by taste, was a little fluttered by this

covey of young men around him. All these various initiatives solicited

his attention at once, and pulled him about. The tumultuous movements

of these minds at liberty and at work set his ideas in a whirl.

Sometimes, in his trouble, they fled so far from him, that he had

difficulty in recovering them. He heard them talk of philosophy, of

literature, of art, of history, of religion, in unexpected fashion. He

caught glimpses of strange aspects; and, as he did not place them in

proper perspective, he was not altogether sure that it was not chaos

that he grasped. On abandoning his grandfather’s opinions for the

opinions of his father, he had supposed himself fixed; he now

suspected, with uneasiness, and without daring to avow it to himself,

that he was not. The angle at which he saw everything began to be

displaced anew. A certain oscillation set all the horizons of his

brains in motion. An odd internal upsetting. He almost suffered from

it.

It seemed as though there were no “consecrated things” for those young

men. Marius heard singular propositions on every sort of subject, which

embarrassed his still timid mind.

A theatre poster presented itself, adorned with the title of a tragedy

from the ancient repertory called classic: “Down with tragedy dear to

the bourgeois!” cried Bahorel. And Marius heard Combeferre reply:—

“You are wrong, Bahorel. The bourgeoisie loves tragedy, and the

bourgeoisie must be left at peace on that score. Bewigged tragedy has a

reason for its existence, and I am not one of those who, by order of

Æschylus, contest its right to existence. There are rough outlines in

nature; there are, in creation, ready-made parodies; a beak which is

not a beak, wings which are not wings, gills which are not gills, paws

which are not paws, a cry of pain which arouses a desire to laugh,

there is the duck. Now, since poultry exists by the side of the bird, I

do not see why classic tragedy should not exist in the face of antique

tragedy.”

Or chance decreed that Marius should traverse Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau

between Enjolras and Courfeyrac.

Courfeyrac took his arm:—

“Pay attention. This is the Rue Plâtrière, now called Rue Jean-Jacques

Rousseau, on account of a singular household which lived in it sixty

years ago. This consisted of Jean-Jacques and Thérèse. From time to

time, little beings were born there. Thérèse gave birth to them,

Jean-Jacques represented them as foundlings.”

And Enjolras addressed Courfeyrac roughly:—

“Silence in the presence of Jean-Jacques! I admire that man. He denied

his own children, that may be; but he adopted the people.”

Not one of these young men articulated the word: The Emperor. Jean

Prouvaire alone sometimes said Napoleon; all the others said

“Bonaparte.” Enjolras pronounced it “Buonaparte.”

Marius was vaguely surprised. \_Initium sapientiæ\_.

CHAPTER IV—THE BACK ROOM OF THE CAFÉ MUSAIN

One of the conversations among the young men, at which Marius was

present and in which he sometimes joined, was a veritable shock to his

mind.

This took place in the back room of the Café Musain. Nearly all the

Friends of the A B C had convened that evening. The argand lamp was

solemnly lighted. They talked of one thing and another, without passion

and with noise. With the exception of Enjolras and Marius, who held

their peace, all were haranguing rather at hap-hazard. Conversations

between comrades sometimes are subject to these peaceable tumults. It

was a game and an uproar as much as a conversation. They tossed words

to each other and caught them up in turn. They were chattering in all

quarters.

No woman was admitted to this back room, except Louison, the

dish-washer of the café, who passed through it from time to time, to go

to her washing in the “lavatory.”

Grantaire, thoroughly drunk, was deafening the corner of which he had

taken possession, reasoning and contradicting at the top of his lungs,

and shouting:—

“I am thirsty. Mortals, I am dreaming: that the tun of Heidelberg has

an attack of apoplexy, and that I am one of the dozen leeches which

will be applied to it. I want a drink. I desire to forget life. Life is

a hideous invention of I know not whom. It lasts no time at all, and is

worth nothing. One breaks one’s neck in living. Life is a theatre set

in which there are but few practicable entrances. Happiness is an

antique reliquary painted on one side only. Ecclesiastes says: ‘All is

vanity.’ I agree with that good man, who never existed, perhaps. Zero

not wishing to go stark naked, clothed himself in vanity. O vanity! The

patching up of everything with big words! a kitchen is a laboratory, a

dancer is a professor, an acrobat is a gymnast, a boxer is a pugilist,

an apothecary is a chemist, a wigmaker is an artist, a hodman is an

architect, a jockey is a sportsman, a wood-louse is a pterigybranche.

Vanity has a right and a wrong side; the right side is stupid, it is

the negro with his glass beads; the wrong side is foolish, it is the

philosopher with his rags. I weep over the one and I laugh over the

other. What are called honors and dignities, and even dignity and

honor, are generally of pinchbeck. Kings make playthings of human

pride. Caligula made a horse a consul; Charles II. made a knight of a

sirloin. Wrap yourself up now, then, between Consul Incitatus and

Baronet Roastbeef. As for the intrinsic value of people, it is no

longer respectable in the least. Listen to the panegyric which neighbor

makes of neighbor. White on white is ferocious; if the lily could

speak, what a setting down it would give the dove! A bigoted woman

prating of a devout woman is more venomous than the asp and the cobra.

It is a shame that I am ignorant, otherwise I would quote to you a mass

of things; but I know nothing. For instance, I have always been witty;

when I was a pupil of Gros, instead of daubing wretched little

pictures, I passed my time in pilfering apples; \_rapin\_24 is the

masculine of \_rapine\_. So much for myself; as for the rest of you, you

are worth no more than I am. I scoff at your perfections, excellencies,

and qualities. Every good quality tends towards a defect; economy

borders on avarice, the generous man is next door to the prodigal, the

brave man rubs elbows with the braggart; he who says very pious says a

trifle bigoted; there are just as many vices in virtue as there are

holes in Diogenes’ cloak. Whom do you admire, the slain or the slayer,

Cæsar or Brutus? Generally men are in favor of the slayer. Long live

Brutus, he has slain! There lies the virtue. Virtue, granted, but

madness also. There are queer spots on those great men. The Brutus who

killed Cæsar was in love with the statue of a little boy. This statue

was from the hand of the Greek sculptor Strongylion, who also carved

that figure of an Amazon known as the Beautiful Leg, Eucnemos, which

Nero carried with him in his travels. This Strongylion left but two

statues which placed Nero and Brutus in accord. Brutus was in love with

the one, Nero with the other. All history is nothing but wearisome

repetition. One century is the plagiarist of the other. The battle of

Marengo copies the battle of Pydna; the Tolbiac of Clovis and the

Austerlitz of Napoleon are as like each other as two drops of water. I

don’t attach much importance to victory. Nothing is so stupid as to

conquer; true glory lies in convincing. But try to prove something! If

you are content with success, what mediocrity, and with conquering,

what wretchedness! Alas, vanity and cowardice everywhere. Everything

obeys success, even grammar. \_Si volet usus\_, says Horace. Therefore I

disdain the human race. Shall we descend to the party at all? Do you

wish me to begin admiring the peoples? What people, if you please?

Shall it be Greece? The Athenians, those Parisians of days gone by,

slew Phocion, as we might say Coligny, and fawned upon tyrants to such

an extent that Anacephorus said of Pisistratus: “His urine attracts the

bees.” The most prominent man in Greece for fifty years was that

grammarian Philetas, who was so small and so thin that he was obliged

to load his shoes with lead in order not to be blown away by the wind.

There stood on the great square in Corinth a statue carved by Silanion

and catalogued by Pliny; this statue represented Episthates. What did

Episthates do? He invented a trip. That sums up Greece and glory. Let

us pass on to others. Shall I admire England? Shall I admire France?

France? Why? Because of Paris? I have just told you my opinion of

Athens. England? Why? Because of London? I hate Carthage. And then,

London, the metropolis of luxury, is the headquarters of wretchedness.

There are a hundred deaths a year of hunger in the parish of

Charing-Cross alone. Such is Albion. I add, as the climax, that I have

seen an Englishwoman dancing in a wreath of roses and blue spectacles.

A fig then for England! If I do not admire John Bull, shall I admire

Brother Jonathan? I have but little taste for that slave-holding

brother. Take away \_Time is money\_, what remains of England? Take away

\_Cotton is king\_, what remains of America? Germany is the lymph, Italy

is the bile. Shall we go into ecstasies over Russia? Voltaire admired

it. He also admired China. I admit that Russia has its beauties, among

others, a stout despotism; but I pity the despots. Their health is

delicate. A decapitated Alexis, a poignarded Peter, a strangled Paul,

another Paul crushed flat with kicks, divers Ivans strangled, with

their throats cut, numerous Nicholases and Basils poisoned, all this

indicates that the palace of the Emperors of Russia is in a condition

of flagrant insalubrity. All civilized peoples offer this detail to the

admiration of the thinker; war; now, war, civilized war, exhausts and

sums up all the forms of ruffianism, from the brigandage of the

Trabuceros in the gorges of Mont Jaxa to the marauding of the Comanche

Indians in the Doubtful Pass. ‘Bah!’ you will say to me, ‘but Europe is

certainly better than Asia?’ I admit that Asia is a farce; but I do not

precisely see what you find to laugh at in the Grand Lama, you peoples

of the west, who have mingled with your fashions and your elegances all

the complicated filth of majesty, from the dirty chemise of Queen

Isabella to the chamber-chair of the Dauphin. Gentlemen of the human

race, I tell you, not a bit of it! It is at Brussels that the most beer

is consumed, at Stockholm the most brandy, at Madrid the most

chocolate, at Amsterdam the most gin, at London the most wine, at

Constantinople the most coffee, at Paris the most absinthe; there are

all the useful notions. Paris carries the day, in short. In Paris, even

the rag-pickers are sybarites; Diogenes would have loved to be a

rag-picker of the Place Maubert better than to be a philosopher at the

Piræus. Learn this in addition; the wineshops of the rag-pickers are

called \_bibines\_; the most celebrated are the \_Saucepan\_ and \_The

Slaughter-House\_. Hence, tea-gardens, goguettes, caboulots, bouibuis,

mastroquets, bastringues, manezingues, bibines of the rag-pickers,

caravanseries of the caliphs, I certify to you, I am a voluptuary, I

eat at Richard’s at forty sous a head, I must have Persian carpets to

roll naked Cleopatra in! Where is Cleopatra? Ah! So it is you, Louison.

Good day.”

Thus did Grantaire, more than intoxicated, launch into speech, catching

at the dish-washer in her passage, from his corner in the back room of

the Café Musain.

Bossuet, extending his hand towards him, tried to impose silence on

him, and Grantaire began again worse than ever:—

“Aigle de Meaux, down with your paws. You produce on me no effect with

your gesture of Hippocrates refusing Artaxerxes’ bric-à-brac. I excuse

you from the task of soothing me. Moreover, I am sad. What do you wish

me to say to you? Man is evil, man is deformed; the butterfly is a

success, man is a failure. God made a mistake with that animal. A crowd

offers a choice of ugliness. The first comer is a wretch,

\_Femme\_—woman—rhymes with \_infâme\_,—infamous. Yes, I have the spleen,

complicated with melancholy, with homesickness, plus hypochondria, and

I am vexed and I rage, and I yawn, and I am bored, and I am tired to

death, and I am stupid! Let God go to the devil!”

“Silence then, capital R!” resumed Bossuet, who was discussing a point

of law behind the scenes, and who was plunged more than waist high in a

phrase of judicial slang, of which this is the conclusion:—

“—And as for me, although I am hardly a legist, and at the most, an

amateur attorney, I maintain this: that, in accordance with the terms

of the customs of Normandy, at Saint-Michel, and for each year, an

equivalent must be paid to the profit of the lord of the manor, saving

the rights of others, and by all and several, the proprietors as well

as those seized with inheritance, and that, for all emphyteuses,

leases, freeholds, contracts of domain, mortgages—”

“Echo, plaintive nymph,” hummed Grantaire.

Near Grantaire, an almost silent table, a sheet of paper, an inkstand

and a pen between two glasses of brandy, announced that a vaudeville

was being sketched out.

This great affair was being discussed in a low voice, and the two heads

at work touched each other: “Let us begin by finding names. When one

has the names, one finds the subject.”

“That is true. Dictate. I will write.”

“Monsieur Dorimon.”

“An independent gentleman?”

“Of course.”

“His daughter, Célestine.”

“—tine. What next?”

“Colonel Sainval.”

“Sainval is stale. I should say Valsin.”

Beside the vaudeville aspirants, another group, which was also taking

advantage of the uproar to talk low, was discussing a duel. An old

fellow of thirty was counselling a young one of eighteen, and

explaining to him what sort of an adversary he had to deal with.

“The deuce! Look out for yourself. He is a fine swordsman. His play is

neat. He has the attack, no wasted feints, wrist, dash, lightning, a

just parade, mathematical parries, \_bigre!\_ and he is left-handed.”

In the angle opposite Grantaire, Joly and Bahorel were playing

dominoes, and talking of love.

“You are in luck, that you are,” Joly was saying. “You have a mistress

who is always laughing.”

“That is a fault of hers,” returned Bahorel. “One’s mistress does wrong

to laugh. That encourages one to deceive her. To see her gay removes

your remorse; if you see her sad, your conscience pricks you.”

“Ingrate! a woman who laughs is such a good thing! And you never

quarrel!”

“That is because of the treaty which we have made. On forming our

little Holy Alliance we assigned ourselves each our frontier, which we

never cross. What is situated on the side of winter belongs to Vaud, on

the side of the wind to Gex. Hence the peace.”

“Peace is happiness digesting.”

“And you, Jolllly, where do you stand in your entanglement with

Mamselle—you know whom I mean?”

“She sulks at me with cruel patience.”

“Yet you are a lover to soften the heart with gauntness.”

“Alas!”

“In your place, I would let her alone.”

“That is easy enough to say.”

“And to do. Is not her name Musichetta?”

“Yes. Ah! my poor Bahorel, she is a superb girl, very literary, with

tiny feet, little hands, she dresses well, and is white and dimpled,

with the eyes of a fortune-teller. I am wild over her.”

“My dear fellow, then in order to please her, you must be elegant, and

produce effects with your knees. Buy a good pair of trousers of

double-milled cloth at Staub’s. That will assist.”

“At what price?” shouted Grantaire.

The third corner was delivered up to a poetical discussion. Pagan

mythology was giving battle to Christian mythology. The question was

about Olympus, whose part was taken by Jean Prouvaire, out of pure

romanticism.

Jean Prouvaire was timid only in repose. Once excited, he burst forth,

a sort of mirth accentuated his enthusiasm, and he was at once both

laughing and lyric.

“Let us not insult the gods,” said he. “The gods may not have taken

their departure. Jupiter does not impress me as dead. The gods are

dreams, you say. Well, even in nature, such as it is to-day, after the

flight of these dreams, we still find all the grand old pagan myths.

Such and such a mountain with the profile of a citadel, like the

Vignemale, for example, is still to me the headdress of Cybele; it has

not been proved to me that Pan does not come at night to breathe into

the hollow trunks of the willows, stopping up the holes in turn with

his fingers, and I have always believed that Io had something to do

with the cascade of Pissevache.”

In the last corner, they were talking politics. The Charter which had

been granted was getting roughly handled. Combeferre was upholding it

weakly. Courfeyrac was energetically making a breach in it. On the

table lay an unfortunate copy of the famous Touquet Charter. Courfeyrac

had seized it, and was brandishing it, mingling with his arguments the

rattling of this sheet of paper.

“In the first place, I won’t have any kings; if it were only from an

economical point of view, I don’t want any; a king is a parasite. One

does not have kings gratis. Listen to this: the dearness of kings. At

the death of François I., the national debt of France amounted to an

income of thirty thousand livres; at the death of Louis XIV. it was two

milliards, six hundred millions, at twenty-eight livres the mark, which

was equivalent in 1760, according to Desmarets, to four milliards, five

hundred millions, which would to-day be equivalent to twelve milliards.

In the second place, and no offence to Combeferre, a charter granted is

but a poor expedient of civilization. To save the transition, to soften

the passage, to deaden the shock, to cause the nation to pass

insensibly from the monarchy to democracy by the practice of

constitutional fictions,—what detestable reasons all those are! No! no!

let us never enlighten the people with false daylight. Principles

dwindle and pale in your constitutional cellar. No illegitimacy, no

compromise, no grant from the king to the people. In all such grants

there is an Article 14. By the side of the hand which gives there is

the claw which snatches back. I refuse your charter point-blank. A

charter is a mask; the lie lurks beneath it. A people which accepts a

charter abdicates. The law is only the law when entire. No! no

charter!”

It was winter; a couple of fagots were crackling in the fireplace. This

was tempting, and Courfeyrac could not resist. He crumpled the poor

Touquet Charter in his fist, and flung it in the fire. The paper

flashed up. Combeferre watched the masterpiece of Louis XVIII. burn

philosophically, and contented himself with saying:—

“The charter metamorphosed into flame.”

And sarcasms, sallies, jests, that French thing which is called

\_entrain\_, and that English thing which is called humor, good and bad

taste, good and bad reasons, all the wild pyrotechnics of dialogue,

mounting together and crossing from all points of the room, produced a

sort of merry bombardment over their heads.

CHAPTER V—ENLARGEMENT OF HORIZON

The shocks of youthful minds among themselves have this admirable

property, that one can never foresee the spark, nor divine the

lightning flash. What will dart out presently? No one knows. The burst

of laughter starts from a tender feeling.

At the moment of jest, the serious makes its entry. Impulses depend on

the first chance word. The spirit of each is sovereign, jest suffices

to open the field to the unexpected. These are conversations with

abrupt turns, in which the perspective changes suddenly. Chance is the

stage-manager of such conversations.

A severe thought, starting oddly from a clash of words, suddenly

traversed the conflict of quips in which Grantaire, Bahorel, Prouvaire,

Bossuet, Combeferre, and Courfeyrac were confusedly fencing.

How does a phrase crop up in a dialogue? Whence comes it that it

suddenly impresses itself on the attention of those who hear it? We

have just said, that no one knows anything about it. In the midst of

the uproar, Bossuet all at once terminated some apostrophe to

Combeferre, with this date:—

“June 18th, 1815, Waterloo.”

At this name of Waterloo, Marius, who was leaning his elbows on a

table, beside a glass of water, removed his wrist from beneath his

chin, and began to gaze fixedly at the audience.

“Pardieu!” exclaimed Courfeyrac (“Parbleu” was falling into disuse at

this period), “that number 18 is strange and strikes me. It is

Bonaparte’s fatal number. Place Louis in front and Brumaire behind, you

have the whole destiny of the man, with this significant peculiarity,

that the end treads close on the heels of the commencement.”

Enjolras, who had remained mute up to that point, broke the silence and

addressed this remark to Combeferre:—

“You mean to say, the crime and the expiation.”

This word \_crime\_ overpassed the measure of what Marius, who was

already greatly agitated by the abrupt evocation of Waterloo, could

accept.

He rose, walked slowly to the map of France spread out on the wall, and

at whose base an island was visible in a separate compartment, laid his

finger on this compartment and said:—

“Corsica, a little island which has rendered France very great.”

This was like a breath of icy air. All ceased talking. They felt that

something was on the point of occurring.

Bahorel, replying to Bossuet, was just assuming an attitude of the

torso to which he was addicted. He gave it up to listen.

Enjolras, whose blue eye was not fixed on any one, and who seemed to be

gazing at space, replied, without glancing at Marius:—

“France needs no Corsica to be great. France is great because she is

France. \_Quia nomina leo\_.”

Marius felt no desire to retreat; he turned towards Enjolras, and his

voice burst forth with a vibration which came from a quiver of his very

being:—

“God forbid that I should diminish France! But amalgamating Napoleon

with her is not diminishing her. Come! let us argue the question. I am

a newcomer among you, but I will confess that you amaze me. Where do we

stand? Who are we? Who are you? Who am I? Let us come to an explanation

about the Emperor. I hear you say \_Buonaparte\_, accenting the \_u\_ like

the Royalists. I warn you that my grandfather does better still; he

says \_Buonaparté\_’. I thought you were young men. Where, then, is your

enthusiasm? And what are you doing with it? Whom do you admire, if you

do not admire the Emperor? And what more do you want? If you will have

none of that great man, what great men would you like? He had

everything. He was complete. He had in his brain the sum of human

faculties. He made codes like Justinian, he dictated like Cæsar, his

conversation was mingled with the lightning-flash of Pascal, with the

thunderclap of Tacitus, he made history and he wrote it, his bulletins

are Iliads, he combined the cipher of Newton with the metaphor of

Mahomet, he left behind him in the East words as great as the pyramids,

at Tilsit he taught Emperors majesty, at the Academy of Sciences he

replied to Laplace, in the Council of State he held his own against

Merlin, he gave a soul to the geometry of the first, and to the

chicanery of the last, he was a legist with the attorneys and sidereal

with the astronomers; like Cromwell blowing out one of two candles, he

went to the Temple to bargain for a curtain tassel; he saw everything;

he knew everything; which did not prevent him from laughing

good-naturedly beside the cradle of his little child; and all at once,

frightened Europe lent an ear, armies put themselves in motion, parks

of artillery rumbled, pontoons stretched over the rivers, clouds of

cavalry galloped in the storm, cries, trumpets, a trembling of thrones

in every direction, the frontiers of kingdoms oscillated on the map,

the sound of a superhuman sword was heard, as it was drawn from its

sheath; they beheld him, him, rise erect on the horizon with a blazing

brand in his hand, and a glow in his eyes, unfolding amid the thunder,

his two wings, the grand army and the old guard, and he was the

archangel of war!”

All held their peace, and Enjolras bowed his head. Silence always

produces somewhat the effect of acquiescence, of the enemy being driven

to the wall. Marius continued with increased enthusiasm, and almost

without pausing for breath:—

“Let us be just, my friends! What a splendid destiny for a nation to be

the Empire of such an Emperor, when that nation is France and when it

adds its own genius to the genius of that man! To appear and to reign,

to march and to triumph, to have for halting-places all capitals, to

take his grenadiers and to make kings of them, to decree the falls of

dynasties, and to transfigure Europe at the pace of a charge; to make

you feel that when you threaten you lay your hand on the hilt of the

sword of God; to follow in a single man, Hannibal, Cæsar, Charlemagne;

to be the people of some one who mingles with your dawns the startling

announcement of a battle won, to have the cannon of the Invalides to

rouse you in the morning, to hurl into abysses of light prodigious

words which flame forever, Marengo, Arcola, Austerlitz, Jena, Wagram!

To cause constellations of victories to flash forth at each instant

from the zenith of the centuries, to make the French Empire a pendant

to the Roman Empire, to be the great nation and to give birth to the

grand army, to make its legions fly forth over all the earth, as a

mountain sends out its eagles on all sides to conquer, to dominate, to

strike with lightning, to be in Europe a sort of nation gilded through

glory, to sound athwart the centuries a trumpet-blast of Titans, to

conquer the world twice, by conquest and by dazzling, that is sublime;

and what greater thing is there?”

“To be free,” said Combeferre.

Marius lowered his head in his turn; that cold and simple word had

traversed his epic effusion like a blade of steel, and he felt it

vanishing within him. When he raised his eyes, Combeferre was no longer

there. Probably satisfied with his reply to the apotheosis, he had just

taken his departure, and all, with the exception of Enjolras, had

followed him. The room had been emptied. Enjolras, left alone with

Marius, was gazing gravely at him. Marius, however, having rallied his

ideas to some extent, did not consider himself beaten; there lingered

in him a trace of inward fermentation which was on the point, no doubt,

of translating itself into syllogisms arrayed against Enjolras, when

all of a sudden, they heard some one singing on the stairs as he went.

It was Combeferre, and this is what he was singing:—

“Si César m’avait donné

La gloire et la guerre,

Et qu’il me fallait quitter

L’amour de ma mère,

Je dirais au grand César:

Reprends ton sceptre et ton char,

J’aime mieux ma mère, ô gué!

J’aime mieux ma mère!”25

The wild and tender accents with which Combeferre sang communicated to

this couplet a sort of strange grandeur. Marius, thoughtfully, and with

his eyes diked on the ceiling, repeated almost mechanically: “My

mother?—”

At that moment, he felt Enjolras’ hand on his shoulder.

“Citizen,” said Enjolras to him, “my mother is the Republic.”

CHAPTER VI—RES ANGUSTA

That evening left Marius profoundly shaken, and with a melancholy

shadow in his soul. He felt what the earth may possibly feel, at the

moment when it is torn open with the iron, in order that grain may be

deposited within it; it feels only the wound; the quiver of the germ

and the joy of the fruit only arrive later.

Marius was gloomy. He had but just acquired a faith; must he then

reject it already? He affirmed to himself that he would not. He

declared to himself that he would not doubt, and he began to doubt in

spite of himself. To stand between two religions, from one of which you

have not as yet emerged, and another into which you have not yet

entered, is intolerable; and twilight is pleasing only to bat-like

souls. Marius was clear-eyed, and he required the true light. The

half-lights of doubt pained him. Whatever may have been his desire to

remain where he was, he could not halt there, he was irresistibly

constrained to continue, to advance, to examine, to think, to march

further. Whither would this lead him? He feared, after having taken so

many steps which had brought him nearer to his father, to now take a

step which should estrange him from that father. His discomfort was

augmented by all the reflections which occurred to him. An escarpment

rose around him. He was in accord neither with his grandfather nor with

his friends; daring in the eyes of the one, he was behind the times in

the eyes of the others, and he recognized the fact that he was doubly

isolated, on the side of age and on the side of youth. He ceased to go

to the Café Musain.

In the troubled state of his conscience, he no longer thought of

certain serious sides of existence. The realities of life do not allow

themselves to be forgotten. They soon elbowed him abruptly.

One morning, the proprietor of the hotel entered Marius’ room and said

to him:—

“Monsieur Courfeyrac answered for you.”

“Yes.”

“But I must have my money.”

“Request Courfeyrac to come and talk with me,” said Marius.

Courfeyrac having made his appearance, the host left them. Marius then

told him what it had not before occurred to him to relate, that he was

the same as alone in the world, and had no relatives.

“What is to become of you?” said Courfeyrac.

“I do not know in the least,” replied Marius.

“What are you going to do?”

“I do not know.”

“Have you any money?”

“Fifteen francs.”

“Do you want me to lend you some?”

“Never.”

“Have you clothes?”

“Here is what I have.”

“Have you trinkets?”

“A watch.”

“Silver?”

“Gold; here it is.”

“I know a clothes-dealer who will take your frock-coat and a pair of

trousers.”

“That is good.”

“You will then have only a pair of trousers, a waistcoat, a hat and a

coat.”

“And my boots.”

“What! you will not go barefoot? What opulence!”

“That will be enough.”

“I know a watchmaker who will buy your watch.”

“That is good.”

“No; it is not good. What will you do after that?”

“Whatever is necessary. Anything honest, that is to say.”

“Do you know English?”

“No.”

“Do you know German?”

“No.”

“So much the worse.”

“Why?”

“Because one of my friends, a publisher, is getting up a sort of an

encyclopædia, for which you might have translated English or German

articles. It is badly paid work, but one can live by it.”

“I will learn English and German.”

“And in the meanwhile?”

“In the meanwhile I will live on my clothes and my watch.”

The clothes-dealer was sent for. He paid twenty francs for the cast-off

garments. They went to the watchmaker’s. He bought the watch for

forty-five francs.

“That is not bad,” said Marius to Courfeyrac, on their return to the

hotel, “with my fifteen francs, that makes eighty.”

“And the hotel bill?” observed Courfeyrac.

“Hello, I had forgotten that,” said Marius.

The landlord presented his bill, which had to be paid on the spot. It

amounted to seventy francs.

“I have ten francs left,” said Marius.

“The deuce,” exclaimed Courfeyrac, “you will eat up five francs while

you are learning English, and five while learning German. That will be

swallowing a tongue very fast, or a hundred sous very slowly.”

In the meantime Aunt Gillenormand, a rather good-hearted person at

bottom in difficulties, had finally hunted up Marius’ abode.

One morning, on his return from the law-school, Marius found a letter

from his aunt, and the \_sixty pistoles\_, that is to say, six hundred

francs in gold, in a sealed box.

Marius sent back the thirty louis to his aunt, with a respectful

letter, in which he stated that he had sufficient means of subsistence

and that he should be able thenceforth to supply all his needs. At that

moment, he had three francs left.

His aunt did not inform his grandfather of this refusal for fear of

exasperating him. Besides, had he not said: “Let me never hear the name

of that blood-drinker again!”

Marius left the hotel de la Porte Saint-Jacques, as he did not wish to

run in debt there.

BOOK FIFTH—THE EXCELLENCE OF MISFORTUNE

CHAPTER I—MARIUS INDIGENT

[Illustration: Excellence of Misfortune]

Life became hard for Marius. It was nothing to eat his clothes and his

watch. He ate of that terrible, inexpressible thing that is called \_de

la vache enragé\_; that is to say, he endured great hardships and

privations. A terrible thing it is, containing days without bread,

nights without sleep, evenings without a candle, a hearth without a

fire, weeks without work, a future without hope, a coat out at the

elbows, an old hat which evokes the laughter of young girls, a door

which one finds locked on one at night because one’s rent is not paid,

the insolence of the porter and the cook-shop man, the sneers of

neighbors, humiliations, dignity trampled on, work of whatever nature

accepted, disgusts, bitterness, despondency. Marius learned how all

this is eaten, and how such are often the only things which one has to

devour. At that moment of his existence when a man needs his pride,

because he needs love, he felt that he was jeered at because he was

badly dressed, and ridiculous because he was poor. At the age when

youth swells the heart with imperial pride, he dropped his eyes more

than once on his dilapidated boots, and he knew the unjust shame and

the poignant blushes of wretchedness. Admirable and terrible trial from

which the feeble emerge base, from which the strong emerge sublime. A

crucible into which destiny casts a man, whenever it desires a

scoundrel or a demi-god.

For many great deeds are performed in petty combats. There are

instances of bravery ignored and obstinate, which defend themselves

step by step in that fatal onslaught of necessities and turpitudes.

Noble and mysterious triumphs which no eye beholds, which are requited

with no renown, which are saluted with no trumpet blast. Life,

misfortune, isolation, abandonment, poverty, are the fields of battle

which have their heroes; obscure heroes, who are, sometimes, grander

than the heroes who win renown.

Firm and rare natures are thus created; misery, almost always a

step-mother, is sometimes a mother; destitution gives birth to might of

soul and spirit; distress is the nurse of pride; unhappiness is a good

milk for the magnanimous.

There came a moment in Marius’ life, when he swept his own landing,

when he bought his sou’s worth of Brie cheese at the fruiterer’s, when

he waited until twilight had fallen to slip into the baker’s and

purchase a loaf, which he carried off furtively to his attic as though

he had stolen it. Sometimes there could be seen gliding into the

butcher’s shop on the corner, in the midst of the bantering cooks who

elbowed him, an awkward young man, carrying big books under his arm,

who had a timid yet angry air, who, on entering, removed his hat from a

brow whereon stood drops of perspiration, made a profound bow to the

butcher’s astonished wife, asked for a mutton cutlet, paid six or seven

sous for it, wrapped it up in a paper, put it under his arm, between

two books, and went away. It was Marius. On this cutlet, which he

cooked for himself, he lived for three days.

On the first day he ate the meat, on the second he ate the fat, on the

third he gnawed the bone. Aunt Gillenormand made repeated attempts, and

sent him the sixty pistoles several times. Marius returned them on

every occasion, saying that he needed nothing.

He was still in mourning for his father when the revolution which we

have just described was effected within him. From that time forth, he

had not put off his black garments. But his garments were quitting him.

The day came when he had no longer a coat. The trousers would go next.

What was to be done? Courfeyrac, to whom he had, on his side, done some

good turns, gave him an old coat. For thirty sous, Marius got it turned

by some porter or other, and it was a new coat. But this coat was

green. Then Marius ceased to go out until after nightfall. This made

his coat black. As he wished always to appear in mourning, he clothed

himself with the night.

In spite of all this, he got admitted to practice as a lawyer. He was

supposed to live in Courfeyrac’s room, which was decent, and where a

certain number of law-books backed up and completed by several

dilapidated volumes of romance, passed as the library required by the

regulations. He had his letters addressed to Courfeyrac’s quarters.

When Marius became a lawyer, he informed his grandfather of the fact in

a letter which was cold but full of submission and respect. M.

Gillenormand trembled as he took the letter, read it, tore it in four

pieces, and threw it into the waste-basket. Two or three days later,

Mademoiselle Gillenormand heard her father, who was alone in his room,

talking aloud to himself. He always did this whenever he was greatly

agitated. She listened, and the old man was saying: “If you were not a

fool, you would know that one cannot be a baron and a lawyer at the

same time.”

CHAPTER II—MARIUS POOR

It is the same with wretchedness as with everything else. It ends by

becoming bearable. It finally assumes a form, and adjusts itself. One

vegetates, that is to say, one develops in a certain meagre fashion,

which is, however, sufficient for life. This is the mode in which the

existence of Marius Pontmercy was arranged:

He had passed the worst straits; the narrow pass was opening out a

little in front of him. By dint of toil, perseverance, courage, and

will, he had managed to draw from his work about seven hundred francs a

year. He had learned German and English; thanks to Courfeyrac, who had

put him in communication with his friend the publisher, Marius filled

the modest post of utility man in the literature of the publishing

house. He drew up prospectuses, translated newspapers, annotated

editions, compiled biographies, etc.; net product, year in and year

out, seven hundred francs. He lived on it. How? Not so badly. We will

explain.

Marius occupied in the Gorbeau house, for an annual sum of thirty

francs, a den minus a fireplace, called a cabinet, which contained only

the most indispensable articles of furniture. This furniture belonged

to him. He gave three francs a month to the old \_principal tenant\_ to

come and sweep his hole, and to bring him a little hot water every

morning, a fresh egg, and a penny roll. He breakfasted on this egg and

roll. His breakfast varied in cost from two to four sous, according as

eggs were dear or cheap. At six o’clock in the evening he descended the

Rue Saint-Jacques to dine at Rousseau’s, opposite Basset’s, the

stamp-dealer’s, on the corner of the Rue des Mathurins. He ate no soup.

He took a six-sou plate of meat, a half-portion of vegetables for three

sous, and a three-sou dessert. For three sous he got as much bread as

he wished. As for wine, he drank water. When he paid at the desk where

Madam Rousseau, at that period still plump and rosy majestically

presided, he gave a sou to the waiter, and Madam Rousseau gave him a

smile. Then he went away. For sixteen sous he had a smile and a dinner.

This Restaurant Rousseau, where so few bottles and so many water

carafes were emptied, was a calming potion rather than a restaurant. It

no longer exists. The proprietor had a fine nickname: he was called

\_Rousseau the Aquatic\_.

Thus, breakfast four sous, dinner sixteen sous; his food cost him

twenty sous a day; which made three hundred and sixty-five francs a

year. Add the thirty francs for rent, and the thirty-six francs to the

old woman, plus a few trifling expenses; for four hundred and fifty

francs, Marius was fed, lodged, and waited on. His clothing cost him a

hundred francs, his linen fifty francs, his washing fifty francs; the

whole did not exceed six hundred and fifty francs. He was rich. He

sometimes lent ten francs to a friend. Courfeyrac had once been able to

borrow sixty francs of him. As far as fire was concerned, as Marius had

no fireplace, he had “simplified matters.”

Marius always had two complete suits of clothes, the one old, “for

every day”; the other, brand new for special occasions. Both were

black. He had but three shirts, one on his person, the second in the

commode, and the third in the washerwoman’s hands. He renewed them as

they wore out. They were always ragged, which caused him to button his

coat to the chin.

It had required years for Marius to attain to this flourishing

condition. Hard years; difficult, some of them, to traverse, others to

climb. Marius had not failed for a single day. He had endured

everything in the way of destitution; he had done everything except

contract debts. He did himself the justice to say that he had never

owed any one a sou. A debt was, to him, the beginning of slavery. He

even said to himself, that a creditor is worse than a master; for the

master possesses only your person, a creditor possesses your dignity

and can administer to it a box on the ear. Rather than borrow, he went

without food. He had passed many a day fasting. Feeling that all

extremes meet, and that, if one is not on one’s guard, lowered fortunes

may lead to baseness of soul, he kept a jealous watch on his pride.

Such and such a formality or action, which, in any other situation

would have appeared merely a deference to him, now seemed insipidity,

and he nerved himself against it. His face wore a sort of severe flush.

He was timid even to rudeness.

During all these trials he had felt himself encouraged and even

uplifted, at times, by a secret force that he possessed within himself.

The soul aids the body, and at certain moments, raises it. It is the

only bird which bears up its own cage.

Besides his father’s name, another name was graven in Marius’ heart,

the name of Thénardier. Marius, with his grave and enthusiastic nature,

surrounded with a sort of aureole the man to whom, in his thoughts, he

owed his father’s life,—that intrepid sergeant who had saved the

colonel amid the bullets and the cannon-balls of Waterloo. He never

separated the memory of this man from the memory of his father, and he

associated them in his veneration. It was a sort of worship in two

steps, with the grand altar for the colonel and the lesser one for

Thénardier. What redoubled the tenderness of his gratitude towards

Thénardier, was the idea of the distress into which he knew that

Thénardier had fallen, and which had engulfed the latter. Marius had

learned at Montfermeil of the ruin and bankruptcy of the unfortunate

inn-keeper. Since that time, he had made unheard-of efforts to find

traces of him and to reach him in that dark abyss of misery in which

Thénardier had disappeared. Marius had beaten the whole country; he had

gone to Chelles, to Bondy, to Gourney, to Nogent, to Lagny. He had

persisted for three years, expending in these explorations the little

money which he had laid by. No one had been able to give him any news

of Thénardier: he was supposed to have gone abroad. His creditors had

also sought him, with less love than Marius, but with as much

assiduity, and had not been able to lay their hands on him. Marius

blamed himself, and was almost angry with himself for his lack of

success in his researches. It was the only debt left him by the

colonel, and Marius made it a matter of honor to pay it. “What,” he

thought, “when my father lay dying on the field of battle, did

Thénardier contrive to find him amid the smoke and the grape-shot, and

bear him off on his shoulders, and yet he owed him nothing, and I, who

owe so much to Thénardier, cannot join him in this shadow where he is

lying in the pangs of death, and in my turn bring him back from death

to life! Oh! I will find him!” To find Thénardier, in fact, Marius

would have given one of his arms, to rescue him from his misery, he

would have sacrificed all his blood. To see Thénardier, to render

Thénardier some service, to say to him: “You do not know me; well, I do

know you! Here I am. Dispose of me!” This was Marius’ sweetest and most

magnificent dream.

CHAPTER III—MARIUS GROWN UP

At this epoch, Marius was twenty years of age. It was three years since

he had left his grandfather. Both parties had remained on the same

terms, without attempting to approach each other, and without seeking

to see each other. Besides, what was the use of seeing each other?

Marius was the brass vase, while Father Gillenormand was the iron pot.

We admit that Marius was mistaken as to his grandfather’s heart. He had

imagined that M. Gillenormand had never loved him, and that that

crusty, harsh, and smiling old fellow who cursed, shouted, and stormed

and brandished his cane, cherished for him, at the most, only that

affection, which is at once slight and severe, of the dotards of

comedy. Marius was in error. There are fathers who do not love their

children; there exists no grandfather who does not adore his grandson.

At bottom, as we have said, M. Gillenormand idolized Marius. He

idolized him after his own fashion, with an accompaniment of

snappishness and boxes on the ear; but, this child once gone, he felt a

black void in his heart; he would allow no one to mention the child to

him, and all the while secretly regretted that he was so well obeyed.

At first, he hoped that this Buonapartist, this Jacobin, this

terrorist, this Septembrist, would return. But the weeks passed by,

years passed; to M. Gillenormand’s great despair, the “blood-drinker”

did not make his appearance. “I could not do otherwise than turn him

out,” said the grandfather to himself, and he asked himself: “If the

thing were to do over again, would I do it?” His pride instantly

answered “yes,” but his aged head, which he shook in silence, replied

sadly “no.” He had his hours of depression. He missed Marius. Old men

need affection as they need the sun. It is warmth. Strong as his nature

was, the absence of Marius had wrought some change in him. Nothing in

the world could have induced him to take a step towards “that rogue”;

but he suffered. He never inquired about him, but he thought of him

incessantly. He lived in the Marais in a more and more retired manner;

he was still merry and violent as of old, but his merriment had a

convulsive harshness, and his violences always terminated in a sort of

gentle and gloomy dejection. He sometimes said: “Oh! if he only would

return, what a good box on the ear I would give him!”

As for his aunt, she thought too little to love much; Marius was no

longer for her much more than a vague black form; and she eventually

came to occupy herself with him much less than with the cat or the

paroquet which she probably had. What augmented Father Gillenormand’s

secret suffering was, that he locked it all up within his breast, and

did not allow its existence to be divined. His sorrow was like those

recently invented furnaces which consume their own smoke. It sometimes

happened that officious busybodies spoke to him of Marius, and asked

him: “What is your grandson doing?” “What has become of him?” The old

bourgeois replied with a sigh, that he was a sad case, and giving a

fillip to his cuff, if he wished to appear gay: “Monsieur le Baron de

Pontmercy is practising pettifogging in some corner or other.”

While the old man regretted, Marius applauded himself. As is the case

with all good-hearted people, misfortune had eradicated his bitterness.

He only thought of M. Gillenormand in an amiable light, but he had set

his mind on not receiving anything more from the man who \_had been

unkind to his father\_. This was the mitigated translation of his first

indignation. Moreover, he was happy at having suffered, and at

suffering still. It was for his father’s sake. The hardness of his life

satisfied and pleased him. He said to himself with a sort of joy that—

\_it was certainly the least he could do\_; that it was an

expiation;—that, had it not been for that, he would have been punished

in some other way and later on for his impious indifference towards his

father, and such a father! that it would not have been just that his

father should have all the suffering, and he none of it; and that, in

any case, what were his toils and his destitution compared with the

colonel’s heroic life? that, in short, the only way for him to approach

his father and resemble him, was to be brave in the face of indigence,

as the other had been valiant before the enemy; and that that was, no

doubt, what the colonel had meant to imply by the words: “He will be

worthy of it.” Words which Marius continued to wear, not on his breast,

since the colonel’s writing had disappeared, but in his heart.

And then, on the day when his grandfather had turned him out of doors,

he had been only a child, now he was a man. He felt it. Misery, we

repeat, had been good for him. Poverty in youth, when it succeeds, has

this magnificent property about it, that it turns the whole will

towards effort, and the whole soul towards aspiration. Poverty

instantly lays material life bare and renders it hideous; hence

inexpressible bounds towards the ideal life. The wealthy young man has

a hundred coarse and brilliant distractions, horse races, hunting,

dogs, tobacco, gaming, good repasts, and all the rest of it;

occupations for the baser side of the soul, at the expense of the

loftier and more delicate sides. The poor young man wins his bread with

difficulty; he eats; when he has eaten, he has nothing more but

meditation. He goes to the spectacles which God furnishes gratis; he

gazes at the sky, space, the stars, flowers, children, the humanity

among which he is suffering, the creation amid which he beams. He gazes

so much on humanity that he perceives its soul, he gazes upon creation

to such an extent that he beholds God. He dreams, he feels himself

great; he dreams on, and feels himself tender. From the egotism of the

man who suffers he passes to the compassion of the man who meditates.

An admirable sentiment breaks forth in him, forgetfulness of self and

pity for all. As he thinks of the innumerable enjoyments which nature

offers, gives, and lavishes to souls which stand open, and refuses to

souls that are closed, he comes to pity, he the millionnaire of the

mind, the millionnaire of money. All hatred departs from his heart, in

proportion as light penetrates his spirit. And is he unhappy? No. The

misery of a young man is never miserable. The first young lad who comes

to hand, however poor he may be, with his strength, his health, his

rapid walk, his brilliant eyes, his warmly circulating blood, his black

hair, his red lips, his white teeth, his pure breath, will always

arouse the envy of an aged emperor. And then, every morning, he sets

himself afresh to the task of earning his bread; and while his hands

earn his bread, his dorsal column gains pride, his brain gathers ideas.

His task finished, he returns to ineffable ecstasies, to contemplation,

to joys; he beholds his feet set in afflictions, in obstacles, on the

pavement, in the nettles, sometimes in the mire; his head in the light.

He is firm, serene, gentle, peaceful, attentive, serious, content with

little, kindly; and he thanks God for having bestowed on him those two

forms of riches which many a rich man lacks: work, which makes him

free; and thought, which makes him dignified.

This is what had happened with Marius. To tell the truth, he inclined a

little too much to the side of contemplation. From the day when he had

succeeded in earning his living with some approach to certainty, he had

stopped, thinking it good to be poor, and retrenching time from his

work to give to thought; that is to say, he sometimes passed entire

days in meditation, absorbed, engulfed, like a visionary, in the mute

voluptuousness of ecstasy and inward radiance. He had thus propounded

the problem of his life: to toil as little as possible at material

labor, in order to toil as much as possible at the labor which is

impalpable; in other words, to bestow a few hours on real life, and to

cast the rest to the infinite. As he believed that he lacked nothing,

he did not perceive that contemplation, thus understood, ends by

becoming one of the forms of idleness; that he was contenting himself

with conquering the first necessities of life, and that he was resting

from his labors too soon.

It was evident that, for this energetic and enthusiastic nature, this

could only be a transitory state, and that, at the first shock against

the inevitable complications of destiny, Marius would awaken.

In the meantime, although he was a lawyer, and whatever Father

Gillenormand thought about the matter, he was not practising, he was

not even pettifogging. Meditation had turned him aside from pleading.

To haunt attorneys, to follow the court, to hunt up cases—what a bore!

Why should he do it? He saw no reason for changing the manner of

gaining his livelihood! The obscure and ill-paid publishing

establishment had come to mean for him a sure source of work which did

not involve too much labor, as we have explained, and which sufficed

for his wants.

One of the publishers for whom he worked, M. Magimel, I think, offered

to take him into his own house, to lodge him well, to furnish him with

regular occupation, and to give him fifteen hundred francs a year. To

be well lodged! Fifteen hundred francs! No doubt. But renounce his

liberty! Be on fixed wages! A sort of hired man of letters! According

to Marius’ opinion, if he accepted, his position would become both

better and worse at the same time, he acquired comfort, and lost his

dignity; it was a fine and complete unhappiness converted into a

repulsive and ridiculous state of torture: something like the case of a

blind man who should recover the sight of one eye. He refused.

Marius dwelt in solitude. Owing to his taste for remaining outside of

everything, and through having been too much alarmed, he had not

entered decidedly into the group presided over by Enjolras. They had

remained good friends; they were ready to assist each other on occasion

in every possible way; but nothing more. Marius had two friends: one

young, Courfeyrac; and one old, M. Mabeuf. He inclined more to the old

man. In the first place, he owed to him the revolution which had taken

place within him; to him he was indebted for having known and loved his

father. “He operated on me for a cataract,” he said.

The churchwarden had certainly played a decisive part.

It was not, however, that M. Mabeuf had been anything but the calm and

impassive agent of Providence in this connection. He had enlightened

Marius by chance and without being aware of the fact, as does a candle

which some one brings; he had been the candle and not the some one.

As for Marius’ inward political revolution, M. Mabeuf was totally

incapable of comprehending it, of willing or of directing it.

As we shall see M. Mabeuf again, later on, a few words will not be

superfluous.

CHAPTER IV—M. MABEUF

On the day when M. Mabeuf said to Marius: “Certainly I approve of

political opinions,” he expressed the real state of his mind. All

political opinions were matters of indifference to him, and he approved

them all, without distinction, provided they left him in peace, as the

Greeks called the Furies “the beautiful, the good, the charming,” the

Eumenides. M. Mabeuf’s political opinion consisted in a passionate love

for plants, and, above all, for books. Like all the rest of the world,

he possessed the termination in \_ist\_, without which no one could exist

at that time, but he was neither a Royalist, a Bonapartist, a Chartist,

an Orleanist, nor an Anarchist; he was a \_bouquinist\_, a collector of

old books. He did not understand how men could busy themselves with

hating each other because of silly stuff like the charter, democracy,

legitimacy, monarchy, the republic, etc., when there were in the world

all sorts of mosses, grasses, and shrubs which they might be looking

at, and heaps of folios, and even of 32mos, which they might turn over.

He took good care not to become useless; having books did not prevent

his reading, being a botanist did not prevent his being a gardener.

When he made Pontmercy’s acquaintance, this sympathy had existed

between the colonel and himself—that what the colonel did for flowers,

he did for fruits. M. Mabeuf had succeeded in producing seedling pears

as savory as the pears of St. Germain; it is from one of his

combinations, apparently, that the October Mirabelle, now celebrated

and no less perfumed than the summer Mirabelle, owes its origin. He

went to mass rather from gentleness than from piety, and because, as he

loved the faces of men, but hated their noise, he found them assembled

and silent only in church. Feeling that he must be something in the

State, he had chosen the career of warden. However, he had never

succeeded in loving any woman as much as a tulip bulb, nor any man as

much as an Elzevir. He had long passed sixty, when, one day, some one

asked him: “Have you never been married?” “I have forgotten,” said he.

When it sometimes happened to him—and to whom does it not happen?—to

say: “Oh! if I were only rich!” it was not when ogling a pretty girl,

as was the case with Father Gillenormand, but when contemplating an old

book. He lived alone with an old housekeeper. He was somewhat gouty,

and when he was asleep, his aged fingers, stiffened with rheumatism,

lay crooked up in the folds of his sheets. He had composed and

published a \_Flora of the Environs of Cauteretz\_, with colored plates,

a work which enjoyed a tolerable measure of esteem and which sold well.

People rang his bell, in the Rue Mésières, two or three times a day, to

ask for it. He drew as much as two thousand francs a year from it; this

constituted nearly the whole of his fortune. Although poor, he had had

the talent to form for himself, by dint of patience, privations, and

time, a precious collection of rare copies of every sort. He never went

out without a book under his arm, and he often returned with two. The

sole decoration of the four rooms on the ground floor, which composed

his lodgings, consisted of framed herbariums, and engravings of the old

masters. The sight of a sword or a gun chilled his blood. He had never

approached a cannon in his life, even at the Invalides. He had a

passable stomach, a brother who was a curé, perfectly white hair, no

teeth, either in his mouth or his mind, a trembling in every limb, a

Picard accent, an infantile laugh, the air of an old sheep, and he was

easily frightened. Add to this, that he had no other friendship, no

other acquaintance among the living, than an old bookseller of the

Porte-Saint-Jacques, named Royal. His dream was to naturalize indigo in

France.

His servant was also a sort of innocent. The poor good old woman was a

spinster. Sultan, her cat, which might have mewed Allegri’s miserere in

the Sixtine Chapel, had filled her heart and sufficed for the quantity

of passion which existed in her. None of her dreams had ever proceeded

as far as man. She had never been able to get further than her cat.

Like him, she had a moustache. Her glory consisted in her caps, which

were always white. She passed her time, on Sundays, after mass, in

counting over the linen in her chest, and in spreading out on her bed

the dresses in the piece which she bought and never had made up. She

knew how to read. M. Mabeuf had nicknamed her Mother Plutarque.

M. Mabeuf had taken a fancy to Marius, because Marius, being young and

gentle, warmed his age without startling his timidity. Youth combined

with gentleness produces on old people the effect of the sun without

wind. When Marius was saturated with military glory, with gunpowder,

with marches and countermarches, and with all those prodigious battles

in which his father had given and received such tremendous blows of the

sword, he went to see M. Mabeuf, and M. Mabeuf talked to him of his

hero from the point of view of flowers.

His brother the curé died about 1830, and almost immediately, as when

the night is drawing on, the whole horizon grew dark for M. Mabeuf. A

notary’s failure deprived him of the sum of ten thousand francs, which

was all that he possessed in his brother’s right and his own. The

Revolution of July brought a crisis to publishing. In a period of

embarrassment, the first thing which does not sell is a \_Flora. The

Flora of the Environs of Cauteretz\_ stopped short. Weeks passed by

without a single purchaser. Sometimes M. Mabeuf started at the sound of

the bell. “Monsieur,” said Mother Plutarque sadly, “it is the

water-carrier.” In short, one day, M. Mabeuf quitted the Rue Mésières,

abdicated the functions of warden, gave up Saint-Sulpice, sold not a

part of his books, but of his prints,—that to which he was the least

attached,—and installed himself in a little house on the Rue

Montparnasse, where, however, he remained but one quarter for two

reasons: in the first place, the ground floor and the garden cost three

hundred francs, and he dared not spend more than two hundred francs on

his rent; in the second, being near Faton’s shooting-gallery, he could

hear the pistol-shots; which was intolerable to him.

He carried off his \_Flora\_, his copper-plates, his herbariums, his

portfolios, and his books, and established himself near the

Salpêtrière, in a sort of thatched cottage of the village of

Austerlitz, where, for fifty crowns a year, he got three rooms and a

garden enclosed by a hedge, and containing a well. He took advantage of

this removal to sell off nearly all his furniture. On the day of his

entrance into his new quarters, he was very gay, and drove the nails on

which his engravings and herbariums were to hang, with his own hands,

dug in his garden the rest of the day, and at night, perceiving that

Mother Plutarque had a melancholy air, and was very thoughtful, he

tapped her on the shoulder and said to her with a smile: “We have the

indigo!”

Only two visitors, the bookseller of the Porte-Saint-Jacques and

Marius, were admitted to view the thatched cottage at Austerlitz, a

brawling name which was, to tell the truth, extremely disagreeable to

him.

However, as we have just pointed out, brains which are absorbed in some

bit of wisdom, or folly, or, as it often happens, in both at once, are

but slowly accessible to the things of actual life. Their own destiny

is a far-off thing to them. There results from such concentration a

passivity, which, if it were the outcome of reasoning, would resemble

philosophy. One declines, descends, trickles away, even crumbles away,

and yet is hardly conscious of it one’s self. It always ends, it is

true, in an awakening, but the awakening is tardy. In the meantime, it

seems as though we held ourselves neutral in the game which is going on

between our happiness and our unhappiness. We are the stake, and we

look on at the game with indifference.

It is thus that, athwart the cloud which formed about him, when all his

hopes were extinguished one after the other, M. Mabeuf remained rather

puerilely, but profoundly serene. His habits of mind had the regular

swing of a pendulum. Once mounted on an illusion, he went for a very

long time, even after the illusion had disappeared. A clock does not

stop short at the precise moment when the key is lost.

M. Mabeuf had his innocent pleasures. These pleasures were inexpensive

and unexpected; the merest chance furnished them. One day, Mother

Plutarque was reading a romance in one corner of the room. She was

reading aloud, finding that she understood better thus. To read aloud

is to assure one’s self of what one is reading. There are people who

read very loud, and who have the appearance of giving themselves their

word of honor as to what they are perusing.

It was with this sort of energy that Mother Plutarque was reading the

romance which she had in hand. M. Mabeuf heard her without listening to

her.

In the course of her reading, Mother Plutarque came to this phrase. It

was a question of an officer of dragoons and a beauty:—

“—The beauty pouted, and the dragoon—”

Here she interrupted herself to wipe her glasses.

“Bouddha and the Dragon,” struck in M. Mabeuf in a low voice. “Yes, it

is true that there was a dragon, which, from the depths of its cave,

spouted flame through his maw and set the heavens on fire. Many stars

had already been consumed by this monster, which, besides, had the

claws of a tiger. Bouddha went into its den and succeeded in converting

the dragon. That is a good book that you are reading, Mother Plutarque.

There is no more beautiful legend in existence.”

And M. Mabeuf fell into a delicious reverie.

CHAPTER V—POVERTY A GOOD NEIGHBOR FOR MISERY

Marius liked this candid old man who saw himself gradually falling into

the clutches of indigence, and who came to feel astonishment, little by

little, without, however, being made melancholy by it. Marius met

Courfeyrac and sought out M. Mabeuf. Very rarely, however; twice a

month at most.

Marius’ pleasure consisted in taking long walks alone on the outer

boulevards, or in the Champs-de-Mars, or in the least frequented alleys

of the Luxembourg. He often spent half a day in gazing at a market

garden, the beds of lettuce, the chickens on the dung-heap, the horse

turning the water-wheel. The passers-by stared at him in surprise, and

some of them thought his attire suspicious and his mien sinister. He

was only a poor young man dreaming in an objectless way.

It was during one of his strolls that he had hit upon the Gorbeau

house, and, tempted by its isolation and its cheapness, had taken up

his abode there. He was known there only under the name of M. Marius.

Some of his father’s old generals or old comrades had invited him to go

and see them, when they learned about him. Marius had not refused their

invitations. They afforded opportunities of talking about his father.

Thus he went from time to time, to Comte Pajol, to General Bellavesne,

to General Fririon, to the Invalides. There was music and dancing

there. On such evenings, Marius put on his new coat. But he never went

to these evening parties or balls except on days when it was freezing

cold, because he could not afford a carriage, and he did not wish to

arrive with boots otherwise than like mirrors.

He said sometimes, but without bitterness: “Men are so made that in a

drawing-room you may be soiled everywhere except on your shoes. In

order to insure a good reception there, only one irreproachable thing

is asked of you; your conscience? No, your boots.”

All passions except those of the heart are dissipated by reverie.

Marius’ political fevers vanished thus. The Revolution of 1830 assisted

in the process, by satisfying and calming him. He remained the same,

setting aside his fits of wrath. He still held the same opinions. Only,

they had been tempered. To speak accurately, he had no longer any

opinions, he had sympathies. To what party did he belong? To the party

of humanity. Out of humanity he chose France; out of the Nation he

chose the people; out of the people he chose the woman. It was to that

point above all, that his pity was directed. Now he preferred an idea

to a deed, a poet to a hero, and he admired a book like Job more than

an event like Marengo. And then, when, after a day spent in meditation,

he returned in the evening through the boulevards, and caught a glimpse

through the branches of the trees of the fathomless space beyond, the

nameless gleams, the abyss, the shadow, the mystery, all that which is

only human seemed very pretty indeed to him.

He thought that he had, and he really had, in fact, arrived at the

truth of life and of human philosophy, and he had ended by gazing at

nothing but heaven, the only thing which Truth can perceive from the

bottom of her well.

This did not prevent him from multiplying his plans, his combinations,

his scaffoldings, his projects for the future. In this state of

reverie, an eye which could have cast a glance into Marius’ interior

would have been dazzled with the purity of that soul. In fact, had it

been given to our eyes of the flesh to gaze into the consciences of

others, we should be able to judge a man much more surely according to

what he dreams, than according to what he thinks. There is will in

thought, there is none in dreams. Reverie, which is utterly

spontaneous, takes and keeps, even in the gigantic and the ideal, the

form of our spirit. Nothing proceeds more directly and more sincerely

from the very depth of our soul, than our unpremeditated and boundless

aspirations towards the splendors of destiny. In these aspirations,

much more than in deliberate, rational co-ordinated ideas, is the real

character of a man to be found. Our chimæras are the things which the

most resemble us. Each one of us dreams of the unknown and the

impossible in accordance with his nature.

Towards the middle of this year 1831, the old woman who waited on

Marius told him that his neighbors, the wretched Jondrette family, had

been turned out of doors. Marius, who passed nearly the whole of his

days out of the house, hardly knew that he had any neighbors.

“Why are they turned out?” he asked.

“Because they do not pay their rent; they owe for two quarters.”

“How much is it?”

“Twenty francs,” said the old woman.

Marius had thirty francs saved up in a drawer.

“Here,” he said to the old woman, “take these twenty-five francs. Pay

for the poor people and give them five francs, and do not tell them

that it was I.”

CHAPTER VI—THE SUBSTITUTE

It chanced that the regiment to which Lieutenant Théodule belonged came

to perform garrison duty in Paris. This inspired Aunt Gillenormand with

a second idea. She had, on the first occasion, hit upon the plan of

having Marius spied upon by Théodule; now she plotted to have Théodule

take Marius’ place.

At all events and in case the grandfather should feel the vague need of

a young face in the house,—these rays of dawn are sometimes sweet to

ruin,—it was expedient to find another Marius. “Take it as a simple

erratum,” she thought, “such as one sees in books. For Marius, read

Théodule.”

A grandnephew is almost the same as a grandson; in default of a lawyer

one takes a lancer.

One morning, when M. Gillenormand was about to read something in the

\_Quotidienne\_, his daughter entered and said to him in her sweetest

voice; for the question concerned her favorite:—

“Father, Théodule is coming to present his respects to you this

morning.”

“Who’s Théodule?”

“Your grandnephew.”

“Ah!” said the grandfather.

Then he went back to his reading, thought no more of his grandnephew,

who was merely some Théodule or other, and soon flew into a rage, which

almost always happened when he read. The “sheet” which he held,

although Royalist, of course, announced for the following day, without

any softening phrases, one of these little events which were of daily

occurrence at that date in Paris: “That the students of the schools of

law and medicine were to assemble on the Place du Panthéon, at

midday,—to deliberate.” The discussion concerned one of the questions

of the moment, the artillery of the National Guard, and a conflict

between the Minister of War and “the citizen’s militia,” on the subject

of the cannon parked in the courtyard of the Louvre. The students were

to “deliberate” over this. It did not take much more than this to swell

M. Gillenormand’s rage.

He thought of Marius, who was a student, and who would probably go with

the rest, to “deliberate, at midday, on the Place du Panthéon.”

As he was indulging in this painful dream, Lieutenant Théodule entered

clad in plain clothes as a bourgeois, which was clever of him, and was

discreetly introduced by Mademoiselle Gillenormand. The lancer had

reasoned as follows: “The old druid has not sunk all his money in a

life pension. It is well to disguise one’s self as a civilian from time

to time.”

Mademoiselle Gillenormand said aloud to her father:—

“Théodule, your grandnephew.”

And in a low voice to the lieutenant:—

“Approve of everything.”

And she withdrew.

The lieutenant, who was but little accustomed to such venerable

encounters, stammered with some timidity: “Good day, uncle,”—and made a

salute composed of the involuntary and mechanical outline of the

military salute finished off as a bourgeois salute.

“Ah! so it’s you; that is well, sit down,” said the old gentleman.

That said, he totally forgot the lancer.

Théodule seated himself, and M. Gillenormand rose.

M. Gillenormand began to pace back and forth, his hands in his pockets,

talking aloud, and twitching, with his irritated old fingers, at the

two watches which he wore in his two fobs.

“That pack of brats! they convene on the Place du Panthéon! by my life!

urchins who were with their nurses but yesterday! If one were to

squeeze their noses, milk would burst out. And they deliberate

to-morrow, at midday. What are we coming to? What are we coming to? It

is clear that we are making for the abyss. That is what the

\_descamisados\_ have brought us to! To deliberate on the citizen

artillery! To go and jabber in the open air over the jibes of the

National Guard! And with whom are they to meet there? Just see whither

Jacobinism leads. I will bet anything you like, a million against a

counter, that there will be no one there but returned convicts and

released galley-slaves. The Republicans and the galley-slaves,—they

form but one nose and one handkerchief. Carnot used to say: ‘Where

would you have me go, traitor?’ Fouché replied: ‘Wherever you please,

imbecile!’ That’s what the Republicans are like.”

“That is true,” said Théodule.

M. Gillenormand half turned his head, saw Théodule, and went on:—

“When one reflects that that scoundrel was so vile as to turn

carbonaro! Why did you leave my house? To go and become a Republican!

Pssst! In the first place, the people want none of your republic, they

have common sense, they know well that there always have been kings,

and that there always will be; they know well that the people are only

the people, after all, they make sport of it, of your republic—do you

understand, idiot? Is it not a horrible caprice? To fall in love with

Père Duchesne, to make sheep’s-eyes at the guillotine, to sing

romances, and play on the guitar under the balcony of ’93—it’s enough

to make one spit on all these young fellows, such fools are they! They

are all alike. Not one escapes. It suffices for them to breathe the air

which blows through the street to lose their senses. The nineteenth

century is poison. The first scamp that happens along lets his beard

grow like a goat’s, thinks himself a real scoundrel, and abandons his

old relatives. He’s a Republican, he’s a romantic. What does that mean,

romantic? Do me the favor to tell me what it is. All possible follies.

A year ago, they ran to \_Hernani\_. Now, I just ask you, \_Hernani!\_

antitheses! abominations which are not even written in French! And

then, they have cannons in the courtyard of the Louvre. Such are the

rascalities of this age!”

“You are right, uncle,” said Théodule.

M. Gillenormand resumed:—

“Cannons in the courtyard of the Museum! For what purpose? Do you want

to fire grape-shot at the Apollo Belvedere? What have those cartridges

to do with the Venus de Medici? Oh! the young men of the present day

are all blackguards! What a pretty creature is their Benjamin Constant!

And those who are not rascals are simpletons! They do all they can to

make themselves ugly, they are badly dressed, they are afraid of women,

in the presence of petticoats they have a mendicant air which sets the

girls into fits of laughter; on my word of honor, one would say the

poor creatures were ashamed of love. They are deformed, and they

complete themselves by being stupid; they repeat the puns of Tiercelin

and Potier, they have sack coats, stablemen’s waistcoats, shirts of

coarse linen, trousers of coarse cloth, boots of coarse leather, and

their rigmarole resembles their plumage. One might make use of their

jargon to put new soles on their old shoes. And all this awkward batch

of brats has political opinions, if you please. Political opinions

should be strictly forbidden. They fabricate systems, they recast

society, they demolish the monarchy, they fling all laws to the earth,

they put the attic in the cellar’s place and my porter in the place of

the King, they turn Europe topsy-turvy, they reconstruct the world, and

all their love affairs consist in staring slily at the ankles of the

laundresses as these women climb into their carts. Ah! Marius! Ah! you

blackguard! to go and vociferate on the public place! to discuss, to

debate, to take measures! They call that measures, just God! Disorder

humbles itself and becomes silly. I have seen chaos, I now see a mess.

Students deliberating on the National Guard,—such a thing could not be

seen among the Ogibewas nor the Cadodaches! Savages who go naked, with

their noddles dressed like a shuttlecock, with a club in their paws,

are less of brutes than those bachelors of arts! The four-penny

monkeys! And they set up for judges! Those creatures deliberate and

ratiocinate! The end of the world is come! This is plainly the end of

this miserable terraqueous globe! A final hiccough was required, and

France has emitted it. Deliberate, my rascals! Such things will happen

so long as they go and read the newspapers under the arcades of the

Odéon. That costs them a sou, and their good sense, and their

intelligence, and their heart and their soul, and their wits. They

emerge thence, and decamp from their families. All newspapers are

pests; all, even the \_Drapeau Blanc!\_ At bottom, Martainville was a

Jacobin. Ah! just Heaven! you may boast of having driven your

grandfather to despair, that you may!”

“That is evident,” said Théodule.

And profiting by the fact that M. Gillenormand was taking breath, the

lancer added in a magisterial manner:—

“There should be no other newspaper than the \_Moniteur\_, and no other

book than the \_Annuaire Militaire\_.”

M. Gillenormand continued:—

“It is like their Sieyès! A regicide ending in a senator; for that is

the way they always end. They give themselves a scar with the address

of \_thou\_ as citizens, in order to get themselves called, eventually,

\_Monsieur le Comte\_. Monsieur le Comte as big as my arm, assassins of

September. The philosopher Sieyès! I will do myself the justice to say,

that I have never had any better opinion of the philosophies of all

those philosophers, than of the spectacles of the grimacer of Tivoli!

One day I saw the Senators cross the Quai Malplaquet in mantles of

violet velvet sown with bees, with hats à la Henri IV. They were

hideous. One would have pronounced them monkeys from the tiger’s court.

Citizens, I declare to you, that your progress is madness, that your

humanity is a dream, that your revolution is a crime, that your

republic is a monster, that your young and virgin France comes from the

brothel, and I maintain it against all, whoever you may be, whether

journalists, economists, legists, or even were you better judges of

liberty, of equality, and fraternity than the knife of the guillotine!

And that I announce to you, my fine fellows!”

“Parbleu!” cried the lieutenant, “that is wonderfully true.”

M. Gillenormand paused in a gesture which he had begun, wheeled round,

stared Lancer Théodule intently in the eyes, and said to him:—

“You are a fool.”

BOOK SIXTH—THE CONJUNCTION OF TWO STARS

CHAPTER I—THE SOBRIQUET: MODE OF FORMATION OF FAMILY NAMES

Marius was, at this epoch, a handsome young man, of medium stature,

with thick and intensely black hair, a lofty and intelligent brow,

well-opened and passionate nostrils, an air of calmness and sincerity,

and with something indescribably proud, thoughtful, and innocent over

his whole countenance. His profile, all of whose lines were rounded,

without thereby losing their firmness, had a certain Germanic

sweetness, which has made its way into the French physiognomy by way of

Alsace and Lorraine, and that complete absence of angles which rendered

the Sicambres so easily recognizable among the Romans, and which

distinguishes the leonine from the aquiline race. He was at that period

of life when the mind of men who think is composed, in nearly equal

parts, of depth and ingenuousness. A grave situation being given, he

had all that is required to be stupid: one more turn of the key, and he

might be sublime. His manners were reserved, cold, polished, not very

genial. As his mouth was charming, his lips the reddest, and his teeth

the whitest in the world, his smile corrected the severity of his face,

as a whole. At certain moments, that pure brow and that voluptuous

smile presented a singular contrast. His eyes were small, but his

glance was large.

At the period of his most abject misery, he had observed that young

girls turned round when he passed by, and he fled or hid, with death in

his soul. He thought that they were staring at him because of his old

clothes, and that they were laughing at them; the fact is, that they

stared at him because of his grace, and that they dreamed of him.

This mute misunderstanding between him and the pretty passers-by had

made him shy. He chose none of them for the excellent reason that he

fled from all of them. He lived thus indefinitely,—stupidly, as

Courfeyrac said.

Courfeyrac also said to him: “Do not aspire to be venerable” [they

called each other \_thou\_; it is the tendency of youthful friendships to

slip into this mode of address]. “Let me give you a piece of advice, my

dear fellow. Don’t read so many books, and look a little more at the

lasses. The jades have some good points about them, O Marius! By dint

of fleeing and blushing, you will become brutalized.”

On other occasions, Courfeyrac encountered him and said:—“Good morning,

Monsieur l’Abbé!”

When Courfeyrac had addressed to him some remark of this nature, Marius

avoided women, both young and old, more than ever for a week to come,

and he avoided Courfeyrac to boot.

Nevertheless, there existed in all the immensity of creation, two women

whom Marius did not flee, and to whom he paid no attention whatever. In

truth, he would have been very much amazed if he had been informed that

they were women. One was the bearded old woman who swept out his

chamber, and caused Courfeyrac to say: “Seeing that his servant woman

wears his beard, Marius does not wear his own beard.” The other was a

sort of little girl whom he saw very often, and whom he never looked

at.

For more than a year, Marius had noticed in one of the walks of the

Luxembourg, the one which skirts the parapet of the Pépinière, a man

and a very young girl, who were almost always seated side by side on

the same bench, at the most solitary end of the alley, on the Rue de

l’Ouest side. Every time that that chance which meddles with the

strolls of persons whose gaze is turned inwards, led Marius to that

walk,—and it was nearly every day,—he found this couple there. The man

appeared to be about sixty years of age; he seemed sad and serious; his

whole person presented the robust and weary aspect peculiar to military

men who have retired from the service. If he had worn a decoration,

Marius would have said: “He is an ex-officer.” He had a kindly but

unapproachable air, and he never let his glance linger on the eyes of

any one. He wore blue trousers, a blue frock coat and a broad-brimmed

hat, which always appeared to be new, a black cravat, a quaker shirt,

that is to say, it was dazzlingly white, but of coarse linen. A

grisette who passed near him one day, said: “Here’s a very tidy

widower.” His hair was very white.

The first time that the young girl who accompanied him came and seated

herself on the bench which they seemed to have adopted, she was a sort

of child thirteen or fourteen years of age, so thin as to be almost

homely, awkward, insignificant, and with a possible promise of handsome

eyes. Only, they were always raised with a sort of displeasing

assurance. Her dress was both aged and childish, like the dress of the

scholars in a convent; it consisted of a badly cut gown of black

merino. They had the air of being father and daughter.

Marius scanned this old man, who was not yet aged, and this little

girl, who was not yet a person, for a few days, and thereafter paid no

attention to them. They, on their side, did not appear even to see him.

They conversed together with a peaceful and indifferent air. The girl

chattered incessantly and merrily. The old man talked but little, and,

at times, he fixed on her eyes overflowing with an ineffable paternity.

Marius had acquired the mechanical habit of strolling in that walk. He

invariably found them there.

This is the way things went:—

Marius liked to arrive by the end of the alley which was furthest from

their bench; he walked the whole length of the alley, passed in front

of them, then returned to the extremity whence he had come, and began

again. This he did five or six times in the course of his promenade,

and the promenade was taken five or six times a week, without its

having occurred to him or to these people to exchange a greeting. That

personage, and that young girl, although they appeared,—and perhaps

because they appeared,—to shun all glances, had, naturally, caused some

attention on the part of the five or six students who strolled along

the Pépinière from time to time; the studious after their lectures, the

others after their game of billiards. Courfeyrac, who was among the

last, had observed them several times, but, finding the girl homely, he

had speedily and carefully kept out of the way. He had fled,

discharging at them a sobriquet, like a Parthian dart. Impressed solely

with the child’s gown and the old man’s hair, he had dubbed the

daughter Mademoiselle Lanoire, and the father, Monsieur Leblanc, so

that as no one knew them under any other title, this nickname became a

law in the default of any other name. The students said: “Ah! Monsieur

Leblanc is on his bench.” And Marius, like the rest, had found it

convenient to call this unknown gentleman Monsieur Leblanc.

We shall follow their example, and we shall say M. Leblanc, in order to

facilitate this tale.

So Marius saw them nearly every day, at the same hour, during the first

year. He found the man to his taste, but the girl insipid.

CHAPTER II—LUX FACTA EST

During the second year, precisely at the point in this history which

the reader has now reached, it chanced that this habit of the

Luxembourg was interrupted, without Marius himself being quite aware

why, and nearly six months elapsed, during which he did not set foot in

the alley. One day, at last, he returned thither once more; it was a

serene summer morning, and Marius was in joyous mood, as one is when

the weather is fine. It seemed to him that he had in his heart all the

songs of the birds that he was listening to, and all the bits of blue

sky of which he caught glimpses through the leaves of the trees.

He went straight to “his alley,” and when he reached the end of it he

perceived, still on the same bench, that well-known couple. Only, when

he approached, it certainly was the same man; but it seemed to him that

it was no longer the same girl. The person whom he now beheld was a

tall and beautiful creature, possessed of all the most charming lines

of a woman at the precise moment when they are still combined with all

the most ingenuous graces of the child; a pure and fugitive moment,

which can be expressed only by these two words,—“fifteen years.” She

had wonderful brown hair, shaded with threads of gold, a brow that

seemed made of marble, cheeks that seemed made of rose-leaf, a pale

flush, an agitated whiteness, an exquisite mouth, whence smiles darted

like sunbeams, and words like music, a head such as Raphael would have

given to Mary, set upon a neck that Jean Goujon would have attributed

to a Venus. And, in order that nothing might be lacking to this

bewitching face, her nose was not handsome—it was pretty; neither

straight nor curved, neither Italian nor Greek; it was the Parisian

nose, that is to say, spiritual, delicate, irregular, pure,—which

drives painters to despair, and charms poets.

When Marius passed near her, he could not see her eyes, which were

constantly lowered. He saw only her long chestnut lashes, permeated

with shadow and modesty.

This did not prevent the beautiful child from smiling as she listened

to what the white-haired old man was saying to her, and nothing could

be more fascinating than that fresh smile, combined with those drooping

eyes.

For a moment, Marius thought that she was another daughter of the same

man, a sister of the former, no doubt. But when the invariable habit of

his stroll brought him, for the second time, near the bench, and he had

examined her attentively, he recognized her as the same. In six months

the little girl had become a young maiden; that was all. Nothing is

more frequent than this phenomenon. There is a moment when girls

blossom out in the twinkling of an eye, and become roses all at once.

One left them children but yesterday; today, one finds them disquieting

to the feelings.

This child had not only grown, she had become idealized. As three days

in April suffice to cover certain trees with flowers, six months had

sufficed to clothe her with beauty. Her April had arrived.

One sometimes sees people, who, poor and mean, seem to wake up, pass

suddenly from indigence to luxury, indulge in expenditures of all

sorts, and become dazzling, prodigal, magnificent, all of a sudden.

That is the result of having pocketed an income; a note fell due

yesterday. The young girl had received her quarterly income.

And then, she was no longer the school-girl with her felt hat, her

merino gown, her scholar’s shoes, and red hands; taste had come to her

with beauty; she was a well-dressed person, clad with a sort of rich

and simple elegance, and without affectation. She wore a dress of black

damask, a cape of the same material, and a bonnet of white crape. Her

white gloves displayed the delicacy of the hand which toyed with the

carved, Chinese ivory handle of a parasol, and her silken shoe outlined

the smallness of her foot. When one passed near her, her whole toilette

exhaled a youthful and penetrating perfume.

As for the man, he was the same as usual.

The second time that Marius approached her, the young girl raised her

eyelids; her eyes were of a deep, celestial blue, but in that veiled

azure, there was, as yet, nothing but the glance of a child. She looked

at Marius indifferently, as she would have stared at the brat running

beneath the sycamores, or the marble vase which cast a shadow on the

bench, and Marius, on his side, continued his promenade, and thought

about something else.

He passed near the bench where the young girl sat, five or six times,

but without even turning his eyes in her direction.

On the following days, he returned, as was his wont, to the Luxembourg;

as usual, he found there “the father and daughter;” but he paid no

further attention to them. He thought no more about the girl now that

she was beautiful than he had when she was homely. He passed very near

the bench where she sat, because such was his habit.

CHAPTER III—EFFECT OF THE SPRING

One day, the air was warm, the Luxembourg was inundated with light and

shade, the sky was as pure as though the angels had washed it that

morning, the sparrows were giving vent to little twitters in the depths

of the chestnut-trees. Marius had thrown open his whole soul to nature,

he was not thinking of anything, he simply lived and breathed, he

passed near the bench, the young girl raised her eyes to him, the two

glances met.

What was there in the young girl’s glance on this occasion? Marius

could not have told. There was nothing and there was everything. It was

a strange flash.

She dropped her eyes, and he pursued his way.

What he had just seen was no longer the ingenuous and simple eye of a

child; it was a mysterious gulf which had half opened, then abruptly

closed again.

There comes a day when the young girl glances in this manner. Woe to

him who chances to be there!

That first gaze of a soul which does not, as yet, know itself, is like

the dawn in the sky. It is the awakening of something radiant and

strange. Nothing can give any idea of the dangerous charm of that

unexpected gleam, which flashes suddenly and vaguely forth from

adorable shadows, and which is composed of all the innocence of the

present, and of all the passion of the future. It is a sort of

undecided tenderness which reveals itself by chance, and which waits.

It is a snare which the innocent maiden sets unknown to herself, and in

which she captures hearts without either wishing or knowing it. It is a

virgin looking like a woman.

It is rare that a profound reverie does not spring from that glance,

where it falls. All purities and all candors meet in that celestial and

fatal gleam which, more than all the best-planned tender glances of

coquettes, possesses the magic power of causing the sudden blossoming,

in the depths of the soul, of that sombre flower, impregnated with

perfume and with poison, which is called love.

That evening, on his return to his garret, Marius cast his eyes over

his garments, and perceived, for the first time, that he had been so

slovenly, indecorous, and inconceivably stupid as to go for his walk in

the Luxembourg with his “every-day clothes,” that is to say, with a hat

battered near the band, coarse carter’s boots, black trousers which

showed white at the knees, and a black coat which was pale at the

elbows.

CHAPTER IV—BEGINNING OF A GREAT MALADY

On the following day, at the accustomed hour, Marius drew from his

wardrobe his new coat, his new trousers, his new hat, and his new

boots; he clothed himself in this complete panoply, put on his gloves,

a tremendous luxury, and set off for the Luxembourg.

On the way thither, he encountered Courfeyrac, and pretended not to see

him. Courfeyrac, on his return home, said to his friends:—

“I have just met Marius’ new hat and new coat, with Marius inside them.

He was going to pass an examination, no doubt. He looked utterly

stupid.”

On arriving at the Luxembourg, Marius made the tour of the fountain

basin, and stared at the swans; then he remained for a long time in

contemplation before a statue whose head was perfectly black with

mould, and one of whose hips was missing. Near the basin there was a

bourgeois forty years of age, with a prominent stomach, who was holding

by the hand a little urchin of five, and saying to him: “Shun excess,

my son, keep at an equal distance from despotism and from anarchy.”

Marius listened to this bourgeois. Then he made the circuit of the

basin once more. At last he directed his course towards “his alley,”

slowly, and as if with regret. One would have said that he was both

forced to go there and withheld from doing so. He did not perceive it

himself, and thought that he was doing as he always did.

On turning into the walk, he saw M. Leblanc and the young girl at the

other end, “on their bench.” He buttoned his coat up to the very top,

pulled it down on his body so that there might be no wrinkles,

examined, with a certain complaisance, the lustrous gleams of his

trousers, and marched on the bench. This march savored of an attack,

and certainly of a desire for conquest. So I say that he marched on the

bench, as I should say: “Hannibal marched on Rome.”

However, all his movements were purely mechanical, and he had

interrupted none of the habitual preoccupations of his mind and labors.

At that moment, he was thinking that the \_Manuel du Baccalauréat\_ was a

stupid book, and that it must have been drawn up by rare idiots, to

allow of three tragedies of Racine and only one comedy of Molière being

analyzed therein as masterpieces of the human mind. There was a

piercing whistling going on in his ears. As he approached the bench, he

held fast to the folds in his coat, and fixed his eyes on the young

girl. It seemed to him that she filled the entire extremity of the

alley with a vague blue light.

In proportion as he drew near, his pace slackened more and more. On

arriving at some little distance from the bench, and long before he had

reached the end of the walk, he halted, and could not explain to

himself why he retraced his steps. He did not even say to himself that

he would not go as far as the end. It was only with difficulty that the

young girl could have perceived him in the distance and noted his fine

appearance in his new clothes. Nevertheless, he held himself very

erect, in case any one should be looking at him from behind.

He attained the opposite end, then came back, and this time he

approached a little nearer to the bench. He even got to within three

intervals of trees, but there he felt an indescribable impossibility of

proceeding further, and he hesitated. He thought he saw the young

girl’s face bending towards him. But he exerted a manly and violent

effort, subdued his hesitation, and walked straight ahead. A few

seconds later, he rushed in front of the bench, erect and firm,

reddening to the very ears, without daring to cast a glance either to

the right or to the left, with his hand thrust into his coat like a

statesman. At the moment when he passed,—under the cannon of the

place,—he felt his heart beat wildly. As on the preceding day, she wore

her damask gown and her crape bonnet. He heard an ineffable voice,

which must have been “her voice.” She was talking tranquilly. She was

very pretty. He felt it, although he made no attempt to see her. “She

could not, however,” he thought, “help feeling esteem and consideration

for me, if she only knew that I am the veritable author of the

dissertation on Marcos Obrégon de la Ronde, which M. François de

Neufchâteau put, as though it were his own, at the head of his edition

of \_Gil Blas\_.” He went beyond the bench as far as the extremity of the

walk, which was very near, then turned on his heel and passed once more

in front of the lovely girl. This time, he was very pale. Moreover, all

his emotions were disagreeable. As he went further from the bench and

the young girl, and while his back was turned to her, he fancied that

she was gazing after him, and that made him stumble.

He did not attempt to approach the bench again; he halted near the

middle of the walk, and there, a thing which he never did, he sat down,

and reflecting in the most profoundly indistinct depths of his spirit,

that after all, it was hard that persons whose white bonnet and black

gown he admired should be absolutely insensible to his splendid

trousers and his new coat.

At the expiration of a quarter of an hour, he rose, as though he were

on the point of again beginning his march towards that bench which was

surrounded by an aureole. But he remained standing there, motionless.

For the first time in fifteen months, he said to himself that that

gentleman who sat there every day with his daughter, had, on his side,

noticed him, and probably considered his assiduity singular.

For the first time, also, he was conscious of some irreverence in

designating that stranger, even in his secret thoughts, by the

sobriquet of M. Leblanc.

He stood thus for several minutes, with drooping head, tracing figures

in the sand, with the cane which he held in his hand.

Then he turned abruptly in the direction opposite to the bench, to M.

Leblanc and his daughter, and went home.

That day he forgot to dine. At eight o’clock in the evening he

perceived this fact, and as it was too late to go down to the Rue

Saint-Jacques, he said: “Never mind!” and ate a bit of bread.

He did not go to bed until he had brushed his coat and folded it up

with great care.

CHAPTER V—DIVERS CLAPS OF THUNDER FALL ON MA’AM BOUGON

On the following day, Ma’am Bougon, as Courfeyrac styled the old

portress-principal-tenant, housekeeper of the Gorbeau hovel, Ma’am

Bougon, whose name was, in reality, Madame Burgon, as we have found

out, but this iconoclast, Courfeyrac, respected nothing,—Ma’am Bougon

observed, with stupefaction, that M. Marius was going out again in his

new coat.

He went to the Luxembourg again, but he did not proceed further than

his bench midway of the alley. He seated himself there, as on the

preceding day, surveying from a distance, and clearly making out, the

white bonnet, the black dress, and above all, that blue light. He did

not stir from it, and only went home when the gates of the Luxembourg

closed. He did not see M. Leblanc and his daughter retire. He concluded

that they had quitted the garden by the gate on the Rue de l’Ouest.

Later on, several weeks afterwards, when he came to think it over, he

could never recall where he had dined that evening.

On the following day, which was the third, Ma’am Bougon was

thunderstruck. Marius went out in his new coat. “Three days in

succession!” she exclaimed.

She tried to follow him, but Marius walked briskly, and with immense

strides; it was a hippopotamus undertaking the pursuit of a chamois.

She lost sight of him in two minutes, and returned breathless,

three-quarters choked with asthma, and furious. “If there is any

sense,” she growled, “in putting on one’s best clothes every day, and

making people run like this!”

Marius betook himself to the Luxembourg.

The young girl was there with M. Leblanc. Marius approached as near as

he could, pretending to be busy reading a book, but he halted afar off,

then returned and seated himself on his bench, where he spent four

hours in watching the house-sparrows who were skipping about the walk,

and who produced on him the impression that they were making sport of

him.

A fortnight passed thus. Marius went to the Luxembourg no longer for

the sake of strolling there, but to seat himself always in the same

spot, and that without knowing why. Once arrived there, he did not

stir. He put on his new coat every morning, for the purpose of not

showing himself, and he began all over again on the morrow.

She was decidedly a marvellous beauty. The only remark approaching a

criticism, that could be made, was, that the contradiction between her

gaze, which was melancholy, and her smile, which was merry, gave a

rather wild effect to her face, which sometimes caused this sweet

countenance to become strange without ceasing to be charming.

CHAPTER VI—TAKEN PRISONER

On one of the last days of the second week, Marius was seated on his

bench, as usual, holding in his hand an open book, of which he had not

turned a page for the last two hours. All at once he started. An event

was taking place at the other extremity of the walk. Leblanc and his

daughter had just left their seat, and the daughter had taken her

father’s arm, and both were advancing slowly, towards the middle of the

alley where Marius was. Marius closed his book, then opened it again,

then forced himself to read; he trembled; the aureole was coming

straight towards him. “Ah! good Heavens!” thought he, “I shall not have

time to strike an attitude.” Still the white-haired man and the girl

advanced. It seemed to him that this lasted for a century, and that it

was but a second. “What are they coming in this direction for?” he

asked himself. “What! She will pass here? Her feet will tread this

sand, this walk, two paces from me?” He was utterly upset, he would

have liked to be very handsome, he would have liked to own the cross.

He heard the soft and measured sound of their approaching footsteps. He

imagined that M. Leblanc was darting angry glances at him. “Is that

gentleman going to address me?” he thought to himself. He dropped his

head; when he raised it again, they were very near him. The young girl

passed, and as she passed, she glanced at him. She gazed steadily at

him, with a pensive sweetness which thrilled Marius from head to foot.

It seemed to him that she was reproaching him for having allowed so

long a time to elapse without coming as far as her, and that she was

saying to him: “I am coming myself.” Marius was dazzled by those eyes

fraught with rays and abysses.

He felt his brain on fire. She had come to him, what joy! And then, how

she had looked at him! She appeared to him more beautiful than he had

ever seen her yet. Beautiful with a beauty which was wholly feminine

and angelic, with a complete beauty which would have made Petrarch sing

and Dante kneel. It seemed to him that he was floating free in the

azure heavens. At the same time, he was horribly vexed because there

was dust on his boots.

He thought he felt sure that she had looked at his boots too.

He followed her with his eyes until she disappeared. Then he started up

and walked about the Luxembourg garden like a madman. It is possible

that, at times, he laughed to himself and talked aloud. He was so

dreamy when he came near the children’s nurses, that each one of them

thought him in love with her.

He quitted the Luxembourg, hoping to find her again in the street.

He encountered Courfeyrac under the arcades of the Odéon, and said to

him: “Come and dine with me.” They went off to Rousseau’s and spent six

francs. Marius ate like an ogre. He gave the waiter six sous. At

dessert, he said to Courfeyrac. “Have you read the paper? What a fine

discourse Audry de Puyraveau delivered!”

He was desperately in love.

After dinner, he said to Courfeyrac: “I will treat you to the play.”

They went to the Porte-Sainte-Martin to see Frédérick in \_l’Auberge des

Adrets\_. Marius was enormously amused.

At the same time, he had a redoubled attack of shyness. On emerging

from the theatre, he refused to look at the garter of a modiste who was

stepping across a gutter, and Courfeyrac, who said: “I should like to

put that woman in my collection,” almost horrified him.

Courfeyrac invited him to breakfast at the Café Voltaire on the

following morning. Marius went thither, and ate even more than on the

preceding evening. He was very thoughtful and very merry. One would

have said that he was taking advantage of every occasion to laugh

uproariously. He tenderly embraced some man or other from the

provinces, who was presented to him. A circle of students formed round

the table, and they spoke of the nonsense paid for by the State which

was uttered from the rostrum in the Sorbonne, then the conversation

fell upon the faults and omissions in Guicherat’s dictionaries and

grammars. Marius interrupted the discussion to exclaim: “But it is very

agreeable, all the same to have the cross!”

“That’s queer!” whispered Courfeyrac to Jean Prouvaire.

“No,” responded Prouvaire, “that’s serious.”

It was serious; in fact, Marius had reached that first violent and

charming hour with which grand passions begin.

A glance had wrought all this.

When the mine is charged, when the conflagration is ready, nothing is

more simple. A glance is a spark.

It was all over with him. Marius loved a woman. His fate was entering

the unknown.

The glance of women resembles certain combinations of wheels, which are

tranquil in appearance yet formidable. You pass close to them every

day, peaceably and with impunity, and without a suspicion of anything.

A moment arrives when you forget that the thing is there. You go and

come, dream, speak, laugh. All at once you feel yourself clutched; all

is over. The wheels hold you fast, the glance has ensnared you. It has

caught you, no matter where or how, by some portion of your thought

which was fluttering loose, by some distraction which had attacked you.

You are lost. The whole of you passes into it. A chain of mysterious

forces takes possession of you. You struggle in vain; no more human

succor is possible. You go on falling from gearing to gearing, from

agony to agony, from torture to torture, you, your mind, your fortune,

your future, your soul; and, according to whether you are in the power

of a wicked creature, or of a noble heart, you will not escape from

this terrifying machine otherwise than disfigured with shame, or

transfigured by passion.

CHAPTER VII—ADVENTURES OF THE LETTER U DELIVERED OVER TO CONJECTURES

Isolation, detachment, from everything, pride, independence, the taste

of nature, the absence of daily and material activity, the life within

himself, the secret conflicts of chastity, a benevolent ecstasy towards

all creation, had prepared Marius for this possession which is called

passion. His worship of his father had gradually become a religion,

and, like all religions, it had retreated to the depths of his soul.

Something was required in the foreground. Love came.

A full month elapsed, during which Marius went every day to the

Luxembourg. When the hour arrived, nothing could hold him back.—“He is

on duty,” said Courfeyrac. Marius lived in a state of delight. It is

certain that the young girl did look at him.

He had finally grown bold, and approached the bench. Still, he did not

pass in front of it any more, in obedience to the instinct of timidity

and to the instinct of prudence common to lovers. He considered it

better not to attract “the attention of the father.” He combined his

stations behind the trees and the pedestals of the statues with a

profound diplomacy, so that he might be seen as much as possible by the

young girl and as little as possible by the old gentleman. Sometimes,

he remained motionless by the half-hour together in the shade of a

Leonidas or a Spartacus, holding in his hand a book, above which his

eyes, gently raised, sought the beautiful girl, and she, on her side,

turned her charming profile towards him with a vague smile. While

conversing in the most natural and tranquil manner in the world with

the white-haired man, she bent upon Marius all the reveries of a

virginal and passionate eye. Ancient and time-honored manœuvre which

Eve understood from the very first day of the world, and which every

woman understands from the very first day of her life! her mouth

replied to one, and her glance replied to another.

It must be supposed, that M. Leblanc finally noticed something, for

often, when Marius arrived, he rose and began to walk about. He had

abandoned their accustomed place and had adopted the bench by the

Gladiator, near the other end of the walk, as though with the object of

seeing whether Marius would pursue them thither. Marius did not

understand, and committed this error. “The father” began to grow

inexact, and no longer brought “his daughter” every day. Sometimes, he

came alone. Then Marius did not stay. Another blunder.

Marius paid no heed to these symptoms. From the phase of timidity, he

had passed, by a natural and fatal progress, to the phase of blindness.

His love increased. He dreamed of it every night. And then, an

unexpected bliss had happened to him, oil on the fire, a redoubling of

the shadows over his eyes. One evening, at dusk, he had found, on the

bench which “M. Leblanc and his daughter” had just quitted, a

handkerchief, a very simple handkerchief, without embroidery, but

white, and fine, and which seemed to him to exhale ineffable perfume.

He seized it with rapture. This handkerchief was marked with the

letters U. F. Marius knew nothing about this beautiful child,—neither

her family name, her Christian name nor her abode; these two letters

were the first thing of her that he had gained possession of, adorable

initials, upon which he immediately began to construct his scaffolding.

U was evidently the Christian name. “Ursule!” he thought, “what a

delicious name!” He kissed the handkerchief, drank it in, placed it on

his heart, on his flesh, during the day, and at night, laid it beneath

his lips that he might fall asleep on it.

“I feel that her whole soul lies within it!” he exclaimed.

This handkerchief belonged to the old gentleman, who had simply let it

fall from his pocket.

In the days which followed the finding of this treasure, he only

displayed himself at the Luxembourg in the act of kissing the

handkerchief and laying it on his heart. The beautiful child understood

nothing of all this, and signified it to him by imperceptible signs.

“O modesty!” said Marius.

CHAPTER VIII—THE VETERANS THEMSELVES CAN BE HAPPY

Since we have pronounced the word modesty, and since we conceal

nothing, we ought to say that once, nevertheless, in spite of his

ecstasies, “his Ursule” caused him very serious grief. It was on one of

the days when she persuaded M. Leblanc to leave the bench and stroll

along the walk. A brisk May breeze was blowing, which swayed the crests

of the plaintain-trees. The father and daughter, arm in arm, had just

passed Marius’ bench. Marius had risen to his feet behind them, and was

following them with his eyes, as was fitting in the desperate situation

of his soul.

All at once, a gust of wind, more merry than the rest, and probably

charged with performing the affairs of Springtime, swept down from the

nursery, flung itself on the alley, enveloped the young girl in a

delicious shiver, worthy of Virgil’s nymphs, and the fawns of

Theocritus, and lifted her dress, the robe more sacred than that of

Isis, almost to the height of her garter. A leg of exquisite shape

appeared. Marius saw it. He was exasperated and furious.

The young girl had hastily thrust down her dress, with a divinely

troubled motion, but he was nonetheless angry for all that. He was

alone in the alley, it is true. But there might have been some one

there. And what if there had been some one there! Can any one

comprehend such a thing? What she had just done is horrible!—Alas, the

poor child had done nothing; there had been but one culprit, the wind;

but Marius, in whom quivered the Bartholo who exists in Cherubin, was

determined to be vexed, and was jealous of his own shadow. It is thus,

in fact, that the harsh and capricious jealousy of the flesh awakens in

the human heart, and takes possession of it, even without any right.

Moreover, setting aside even that jealousy, the sight of that charming

leg had contained nothing agreeable for him; the white stocking of the

first woman he chanced to meet would have afforded him more pleasure.

When “his Ursule,” after having reached the end of the walk, retraced

her steps with M. Leblanc, and passed in front of the bench on which

Marius had seated himself once more, Marius darted a sullen and

ferocious glance at her. The young girl gave way to that slight

straightening up with a backward movement, accompanied by a raising of

the eyelids, which signifies: “Well, what is the matter?”

This was “their first quarrel.”

Marius had hardly made this scene at her with his eyes, when some one

crossed the walk. It was a veteran, very much bent, extremely wrinkled,

and pale, in a uniform of the Louis XV. pattern, bearing on his breast

the little oval plaque of red cloth, with the crossed swords, the

soldier’s cross of Saint-Louis, and adorned, in addition, with a

coat-sleeve, which had no arm within it, with a silver chin and a

wooden leg. Marius thought he perceived that this man had an extremely

well satisfied air. It even struck him that the aged cynic, as he

hobbled along past him, addressed to him a very fraternal and very

merry wink, as though some chance had created an understanding between

them, and as though they had shared some piece of good luck together.

What did that relic of Mars mean by being so contented? What had passed

between that wooden leg and the other? Marius reached a paroxysm of

jealousy.—“Perhaps he was there!” he said to himself; “perhaps he

saw!”—And he felt a desire to exterminate the veteran.

With the aid of time, all points grow dull. Marius’ wrath against

“Ursule,” just and legitimate as it was, passed off. He finally

pardoned her; but this cost him a great effort; he sulked for three

days.

Nevertheless, in spite of all this, and because of all this, his

passion augmented and grew to madness.

CHAPTER IX—ECLIPSE

The reader has just seen how Marius discovered, or thought that he

discovered, that \_She\_ was named Ursule.

Appetite grows with loving. To know that her name was Ursule was a

great deal; it was very little. In three or four weeks, Marius had

devoured this bliss. He wanted another. He wanted to know where she

lived.

He had committed his first blunder, by falling into the ambush of the

bench by the Gladiator. He had committed a second, by not remaining at

the Luxembourg when M. Leblanc came thither alone. He now committed a

third, and an immense one. He followed “Ursule.”

She lived in the Rue de l’Ouest, in the most unfrequented spot, in a

new, three-story house, of modest appearance.

From that moment forth, Marius added to his happiness of seeing her at

the Luxembourg the happiness of following her home.

His hunger was increasing. He knew her first name, at least, a charming

name, a genuine woman’s name; he knew where she lived; he wanted to

know who she was.

One evening, after he had followed them to their dwelling, and had seen

them disappear through the carriage gate, he entered in their train and

said boldly to the porter:—

“Is that the gentleman who lives on the first floor, who has just come

in?”

“No,” replied the porter. “He is the gentleman on the third floor.”

Another step gained. This success emboldened Marius.

“On the front?” he asked.

“Parbleu!” said the porter, “the house is only built on the street.”

“And what is that gentleman’s business?” began Marius again.

“He is a gentleman of property, sir. A very kind man who does good to

the unfortunate, though not rich himself.”

“What is his name?” resumed Marius.

The porter raised his head and said:—

“Are you a police spy, sir?”

Marius went off quite abashed, but delighted. He was getting on.

“Good,” thought he, “I know that her name is Ursule, that she is the

daughter of a gentleman who lives on his income, and that she lives

there, on the third floor, in the Rue de l’Ouest.”

On the following day, M. Leblanc and his daughter made only a very

brief stay in the Luxembourg; they went away while it was still broad

daylight. Marius followed them to the Rue de l’Ouest, as he had taken

up the habit of doing. On arriving at the carriage entrance M. Leblanc

made his daughter pass in first, then paused, before crossing the

threshold, and stared intently at Marius.

On the next day they did not come to the Luxembourg. Marius waited for

them all day in vain.

At nightfall, he went to the Rue de l’Ouest, and saw a light in the

windows of the third story.

He walked about beneath the windows until the light was extinguished.

The next day, no one at the Luxembourg. Marius waited all day, then

went and did sentinel duty under their windows. This carried him on to

ten o’clock in the evening.

His dinner took care of itself. Fever nourishes the sick man, and love

the lover.

He spent a week in this manner. M. Leblanc no longer appeared at the

Luxembourg.

Marius indulged in melancholy conjectures; he dared not watch the

porte-cochère during the day; he contented himself with going at night

to gaze upon the red light of the windows. At times he saw shadows flit

across them, and his heart began to beat.

On the eighth day, when he arrived under the windows, there was no

light in them.

“Hello!” he said, “the lamp is not lighted yet. But it is dark. Can

they have gone out?” He waited until ten o’clock. Until midnight. Until

one in the morning. Not a light appeared in the windows of the third

story, and no one entered the house.

He went away in a very gloomy frame of mind.

On the morrow,—for he only existed from morrow to morrow, there was, so

to speak, no to-day for him,—on the morrow, he found no one at the

Luxembourg; he had expected this. At dusk, he went to the house.

No light in the windows; the shades were drawn; the third floor was

totally dark.

Marius rapped at the porte-cochère, entered, and said to the porter:—

“The gentleman on the third floor?”

“Has moved away,” replied the porter.

Marius reeled and said feebly:—

“How long ago?”

“Yesterday.”

“Where is he living now?”

“I don’t know anything about it.”

“So he has not left his new address?”

“No.”

And the porter, raising his eyes, recognized Marius.

“Come! So it’s you!” said he; “but you are decidedly a spy then?”

BOOK SEVENTH—PATRON MINETTE

CHAPTER I—MINES AND MINERS

Human societies all have what is called in theatrical parlance, \_a

third lower floor\_. The social soil is everywhere undermined, sometimes

for good, sometimes for evil. These works are superposed one upon the

other. There are superior mines and inferior mines. There is a top and

a bottom in this obscure sub-soil, which sometimes gives way beneath

civilization, and which our indifference and heedlessness trample under

foot. The Encyclopedia, in the last century, was a mine that was almost

open to the sky. The shades, those sombre hatchers of primitive

Christianity, only awaited an opportunity to bring about an explosion

under the Cæsars and to inundate the human race with light. For in the

sacred shadows there lies latent light. Volcanoes are full of a shadow

that is capable of flashing forth. Every form begins by being night.

The catacombs, in which the first mass was said, were not alone the

cellar of Rome, they were the vaults of the world.

Beneath the social construction, that complicated marvel of a

structure, there are excavations of all sorts. There is the religious

mine, the philosophical mine, the economic mine, the revolutionary

mine. Such and such a pick-axe with the idea, such a pick with ciphers.

Such another with wrath. People hail and answer each other from one

catacomb to another. Utopias travel about underground, in the pipes.

There they branch out in every direction. They sometimes meet, and

fraternize there. Jean-Jacques lends his pick to Diogenes, who lends

him his lantern. Sometimes they enter into combat there. Calvin seizes

Socinius by the hair. But nothing arrests nor interrupts the tension of

all these energies toward the goal, and the vast, simultaneous

activity, which goes and comes, mounts, descends, and mounts again in

these obscurities, and which immense unknown swarming slowly transforms

the top and the bottom and the inside and the outside. Society hardly

even suspects this digging which leaves its surface intact and changes

its bowels. There are as many different subterranean stages as there

are varying works, as there are extractions. What emerges from these

deep excavations? The future.

The deeper one goes, the more mysterious are the toilers. The work is

good, up to a degree which the social philosophies are able to

recognize; beyond that degree it is doubtful and mixed; lower down, it

becomes terrible. At a certain depth, the excavations are no longer

penetrable by the spirit of civilization, the limit breathable by man

has been passed; a beginning of monsters is possible.

The descending scale is a strange one; and each one of the rungs of

this ladder corresponds to a stage where philosophy can find foothold,

and where one encounters one of these workmen, sometimes divine,

sometimes misshapen. Below John Huss, there is Luther; below Luther,

there is Descartes; below Descartes, there is Voltaire; below Voltaire,

there is Condorcet; below Condorcet, there is Robespierre; below

Robespierre, there is Marat; below Marat there is Babeuf. And so it

goes on. Lower down, confusedly, at the limit which separates the

indistinct from the invisible, one perceives other gloomy men, who

perhaps do not exist as yet. The men of yesterday are spectres; those

of to-morrow are forms. The eye of the spirit distinguishes them but

obscurely. The embryonic work of the future is one of the visions of

philosophy.

A world in limbo, in the state of fœtus, what an unheard-of spectre!

Saint-Simon, Owen, Fourier, are there also, in lateral galleries.

Surely, although a divine and invisible chain unknown to themselves,

binds together all these subterranean pioneers who, almost always,

think themselves isolated, and who are not so, their works vary

greatly, and the light of some contrasts with the blaze of others. The

first are paradisiacal, the last are tragic. Nevertheless, whatever may

be the contrast, all these toilers, from the highest to the most

nocturnal, from the wisest to the most foolish, possess one likeness,

and this is it: disinterestedness. Marat forgets himself like Jesus.

They throw themselves on one side, they omit themselves, they think not

of themselves. They have a glance, and that glance seeks the absolute.

The first has the whole heavens in his eyes; the last, enigmatical

though he may be, has still, beneath his eyelids, the pale beam of the

infinite. Venerate the man, whoever he may be, who has this sign—the

starry eye.

The shadowy eye is the other sign.

With it, evil commences. Reflect and tremble in the presence of any one

who has no glance at all. The social order has its black miners.

There is a point where depth is tantamount to burial, and where light

becomes extinct.

Below all these mines which we have just mentioned, below all these

galleries, below this whole immense, subterranean, venous system of

progress and utopia, much further on in the earth, much lower than

Marat, lower than Babeuf, lower, much lower, and without any connection

with the upper levels, there lies the last mine. A formidable spot.

This is what we have designated as the \_le troisième dessous\_. It is

the grave of shadows. It is the cellar of the blind. \_Inferi\_.

This communicates with the abyss.

CHAPTER II—THE LOWEST DEPTHS

There disinterestedness vanishes. The demon is vaguely outlined; each

one is for himself. The \_I\_ in the eyes howls, seeks, fumbles, and

gnaws. The social Ugolino is in this gulf.

The wild spectres who roam in this grave, almost beasts, almost

phantoms, are not occupied with universal progress; they are ignorant

both of the idea and of the word; they take no thought for anything but

the satisfaction of their individual desires. They are almost

unconscious, and there exists within them a sort of terrible

obliteration. They have two mothers, both step-mothers, ignorance and

misery. They have a guide, necessity; and for all forms of

satisfaction, appetite. They are brutally voracious, that is to say,

ferocious, not after the fashion of the tyrant, but after the fashion

of the tiger. From suffering these spectres pass to crime; fatal

affiliation, dizzy creation, logic of darkness. That which crawls in

the social third lower level is no longer complaint stifled by the

absolute; it is the protest of matter. Man there becomes a dragon. To

be hungry, to be thirsty—that is the point of departure; to be

Satan—that is the point reached. From that vault Lacenaire emerges.

We have just seen, in Book Fourth, one of the compartments of the upper

mine, of the great political, revolutionary, and philosophical

excavation. There, as we have just said, all is pure, noble, dignified,

honest. There, assuredly, one might be misled; but error is worthy of

veneration there, so thoroughly does it imply heroism. The work there

effected, taken as a whole has a name: Progress.

The moment has now come when we must take a look at other depths,

hideous depths. There exists beneath society, we insist upon this

point, and there will exist, until that day when ignorance shall be

dissipated, the great cavern of evil.

This cavern is below all, and is the foe of all. It is hatred, without

exception. This cavern knows no philosophers; its dagger has never cut

a pen. Its blackness has no connection with the sublime blackness of

the inkstand. Never have the fingers of night which contract beneath

this stifling ceiling, turned the leaves of a book nor unfolded a

newspaper. Babeuf is a speculator to Cartouche; Marat is an aristocrat

to Schinderhannes. This cavern has for its object the destruction of

everything.

Of everything. Including the upper superior mines, which it execrates.

It not only undermines, in its hideous swarming, the actual social

order; it undermines philosophy, it undermines human thought, it

undermines civilization, it undermines revolution, it undermines

progress. Its name is simply theft, prostitution, murder,

assassination. It is darkness, and it desires chaos. Its vault is

formed of ignorance.

All the others, those above it, have but one object—to suppress it. It

is to this point that philosophy and progress tend, with all their

organs simultaneously, by their amelioration of the real, as well as by

their contemplation of the absolute. Destroy the cavern Ignorance and

you destroy the lair Crime.

Let us condense, in a few words, a part of what we have just written.

The only social peril is darkness.

Humanity is identity. All men are made of the same clay. There is no

difference, here below, at least, in predestination. The same shadow in

front, the same flesh in the present, the same ashes afterwards. But

ignorance, mingled with the human paste, blackens it. This incurable

blackness takes possession of the interior of a man and is there

converted into evil.

CHAPTER III—BABET, GUEULEMER, CLAQUESOUS, AND MONTPARNASSE

A quartette of ruffians, Claquesous, Gueulemer, Babet, and Montparnasse

governed the third lower floor of Paris, from 1830 to 1835.

Gueulemer was a Hercules of no defined position. For his lair he had

the sewer of the Arche-Marion. He was six feet high, his pectoral

muscles were of marble, his biceps of brass, his breath was that of a

cavern, his torso that of a colossus, his head that of a bird. One

thought one beheld the Farnese Hercules clad in duck trousers and a

cotton velvet waistcoat. Gueulemer, built after this sculptural

fashion, might have subdued monsters; he had found it more expeditious

to be one. A low brow, large temples, less than forty years of age, but

with crow’s-feet, harsh, short hair, cheeks like a brush, a beard like

that of a wild boar; the reader can see the man before him. His muscles

called for work, his stupidity would have none of it. He was a great,

idle force. He was an assassin through coolness. He was thought to be a

creole. He had, probably, somewhat to do with Marshal Brune, having

been a porter at Avignon in 1815. After this stage, he had turned

ruffian.

The diaphaneity of Babet contrasted with the grossness of Gueulemer.

Babet was thin and learned. He was transparent but impenetrable.

Daylight was visible through his bones, but nothing through his eyes.

He declared that he was a chemist. He had been a jack of all trades. He

had played in vaudeville at Saint-Mihiel. He was a man of purpose, a

fine talker, who underlined his smiles and accentuated his gestures.

His occupation consisted in selling, in the open air, plaster busts and

portraits of “the head of the State.” In addition to this, he extracted

teeth. He had exhibited phenomena at fairs, and he had owned a booth

with a trumpet and this poster: “Babet, Dental Artist, Member of the

Academies, makes physical experiments on metals and metalloids,

extracts teeth, undertakes stumps abandoned by his brother

practitioners. Price: one tooth, one franc, fifty centimes; two teeth,

two francs; three teeth, two francs, fifty. Take advantage of this

opportunity.” This \_Take advantage of this opportunity\_ meant: Have as

many teeth extracted as possible. He had been married and had had

children. He did not know what had become of his wife and children. He

had lost them as one loses his handkerchief. Babet read the papers, a

striking exception in the world to which he belonged. One day, at the

period when he had his family with him in his booth on wheels, he had

read in the \_Messager\_, that a woman had just given birth to a child,

who was doing well, and had a calf’s muzzle, and he exclaimed: “There’s

a fortune! my wife has not the wit to present me with a child like

that!”

Later on he had abandoned everything, in order to “undertake Paris.”

This was his expression.

Who was Claquesous? He was night. He waited until the sky was daubed

with black, before he showed himself. At nightfall he emerged from the

hole whither he returned before daylight. Where was this hole? No one

knew. He only addressed his accomplices in the most absolute darkness,

and with his back turned to them. Was his name Claquesous? Certainly

not. If a candle was brought, he put on a mask. He was a ventriloquist.

Babet said: “Claquesous is a nocturne for two voices.” Claquesous was

vague, terrible, and a roamer. No one was sure whether he had a name,

Claquesous being a sobriquet; none was sure that he had a voice, as his

stomach spoke more frequently than his voice; no one was sure that he

had a face, as he was never seen without his mask. He disappeared as

though he had vanished into thin air; when he appeared, it was as

though he sprang from the earth.

A lugubrious being was Montparnasse. Montparnasse was a child; less

than twenty years of age, with a handsome face, lips like cherries,

charming black hair, the brilliant light of springtime in his eyes; he

had all vices and aspired to all crimes.

The digestion of evil aroused in him an appetite for worse. It was the

street boy turned pickpocket, and a pickpocket turned garroter. He was

genteel, effeminate, graceful, robust, sluggish, ferocious. The rim of

his hat was curled up on the left side, in order to make room for a

tuft of hair, after the style of 1829. He lived by robbery with

violence. His coat was of the best cut, but threadbare. Montparnasse

was a fashion-plate in misery and given to the commission of murders.

The cause of all this youth’s crimes was the desire to be well-dressed.

The first grisette who had said to him: “You are handsome!” had cast

the stain of darkness into his heart, and had made a Cain of this Abel.

Finding that he was handsome, he desired to be elegant: now, the height

of elegance is idleness; idleness in a poor man means crime. Few

prowlers were so dreaded as Montparnasse. At eighteen, he had already

numerous corpses in his past. More than one passer-by lay with

outstretched arms in the presence of this wretch, with his face in a

pool of blood. Curled, pomaded, with laced waist, the hips of a woman,

the bust of a Prussian officer, the murmur of admiration from the

boulevard wenches surrounding him, his cravat knowingly tied, a

bludgeon in his pocket, a flower in his buttonhole; such was this dandy

of the sepulchre.

CHAPTER IV—COMPOSITION OF THE TROUPE

These four ruffians formed a sort of Proteus, winding like a serpent

among the police, and striving to escape Vidocq’s indiscreet glances

“under divers forms, tree, flame, fountain,” lending each other their

names and their traps, hiding in their own shadows, boxes with secret

compartments and refuges for each other, stripping off their

personalities, as one removes his false nose at a masked ball,

sometimes simplifying matters to the point of consisting of but one

individual, sometimes multiplying themselves to such a point that

Coco-Latour himself took them for a whole throng.

These four men were not four men; they were a sort of mysterious robber

with four heads, operating on a grand scale on Paris; they were that

monstrous polyp of evil, which inhabits the crypt of society.

Thanks to their ramifications, and to the network underlying their

relations, Babet, Gueulemer, Claquesous, and Montparnasse were charged

with the general enterprise of the ambushes of the department of the

Seine. The inventors of ideas of that nature, men with nocturnal

imaginations, applied to them to have their ideas executed. They

furnished the canvas to the four rascals, and the latter undertook the

preparation of the scenery. They labored at the stage setting. They

were always in a condition to lend a force proportioned and suitable to

all crimes which demanded a lift of the shoulder, and which were

sufficiently lucrative. When a crime was in quest of arms, they

under-let their accomplices. They kept a troupe of actors of the

shadows at the disposition of all underground tragedies.

They were in the habit of assembling at nightfall, the hour when they

woke up, on the plains which adjoin the Salpêtrière. There they held

their conferences. They had twelve black hours before them; they

regulated their employment accordingly.

\_Patron-Minette\_,—such was the name which was bestowed in the

subterranean circulation on the association of these four men. In the

fantastic, ancient, popular parlance, which is vanishing day by day,

\_Patron-Minette\_ signifies the morning, the same as \_entre chien et

loup\_—between dog and wolf—signifies the evening. This appellation,

\_Patron-Minette\_, was probably derived from the hour at which their

work ended, the dawn being the vanishing moment for phantoms and for

the separation of ruffians. These four men were known under this title.

When the President of the Assizes visited Lacenaire in his prison, and

questioned him concerning a misdeed which Lacenaire denied, “Who did

it?” demanded the President. Lacenaire made this response, enigmatical

so far as the magistrate was concerned, but clear to the police:

“Perhaps it was Patron-Minette.”

A piece can sometimes be divined on the enunciation of the personages;

in the same manner a band can almost be judged from the list of

ruffians composing it. Here are the appellations to which the principal

members of Patron-Minette answered,—for the names have survived in

special memoirs.

Panchaud, alias Printanier, alias Bigrenaille.

Brujon. [There was a Brujon dynasty; we cannot refrain from

interpolating this word.]

Boulatruelle, the road-mender already introduced.

Laveuve.

Finistère.

Homère-Hogu, a negro.

Mardisoir. (Tuesday evening.)

Dépêche. (Make haste.)

Fauntleroy, alias Bouquetière (the Flower Girl).

Glorieux, a discharged convict.

Barrecarrosse (Stop-carriage), called Monsieur Dupont.

L’Esplanade-du-Sud.

Poussagrive.

Carmagnolet.

Kruideniers, called Bizarro.

Mangedentelle. (Lace-eater.)

Les-pieds-en-l’Air. (Feet in the air.)

Demi-Liard, called Deux-Milliards.

Etc., etc.

We pass over some, and not the worst of them. These names have faces

attached. They do not express merely beings, but species. Each one of

these names corresponds to a variety of those misshapen fungi from the

under side of civilization.

Those beings, who were not very lavish with their countenances, were

not among the men whom one sees passing along the streets. Fatigued by

the wild nights which they passed, they went off by day to sleep,

sometimes in the lime-kilns, sometimes in the abandoned quarries of

Montmatre or Montrouge, sometimes in the sewers. They ran to earth.

What became of these men? They still exist. They have always existed.

Horace speaks of them: \_Ambubaiarum collegia, pharmacopolæ, mendici,

mimæ\_; and so long as society remains what it is, they will remain what

they are. Beneath the obscure roof of their cavern, they are

continually born again from the social ooze. They return, spectres, but

always identical; only, they no longer bear the same names and they are

no longer in the same skins. The individuals extirpated, the tribe

subsists.

They always have the same faculties. From the vagrant to the tramp, the

race is maintained in its purity. They divine purses in pockets, they

scent out watches in fobs. Gold and silver possess an odor for them.

There exist ingenuous bourgeois, of whom it might be said, that they

have a “stealable” air. These men patiently pursue these bourgeois.

They experience the quivers of a spider at the passage of a stranger or

of a man from the country.

These men are terrible, when one encounters them, or catches a glimpse

of them, towards midnight, on a deserted boulevard. They do not seem to

be men but forms composed of living mists; one would say that they

habitually constitute one mass with the shadows, that they are in no

wise distinct from them, that they possess no other soul than the

darkness, and that it is only momentarily and for the purpose of living

for a few minutes a monstrous life, that they have separated from the

night.

What is necessary to cause these spectres to vanish? Light. Light in

floods. Not a single bat can resist the dawn. Light up society from

below.

BOOK EIGHTH—THE WICKED POOR MAN

CHAPTER I—MARIUS, WHILE SEEKING A GIRL IN A BONNET, ENCOUNTERS A MAN IN

A CAP

Summer passed, then the autumn; winter came. Neither M. Leblanc nor the

young girl had again set foot in the Luxembourg garden. Thenceforth,

Marius had but one thought,—to gaze once more on that sweet and

adorable face. He sought constantly, he sought everywhere; he found

nothing. He was no longer Marius, the enthusiastic dreamer, the firm,

resolute, ardent man, the bold defier of fate, the brain which erected

future on future, the young spirit encumbered with plans, with

projects, with pride, with ideas and wishes; he was a lost dog. He fell

into a black melancholy. All was over. Work disgusted him, walking

tired him. Vast nature, formerly so filled with forms, lights, voices,

counsels, perspectives, horizons, teachings, now lay empty before him.

It seemed to him that everything had disappeared.

He thought incessantly, for he could not do otherwise; but he no longer

took pleasure in his thoughts. To everything that they proposed to him

in a whisper, he replied in his darkness: “What is the use?”

He heaped a hundred reproaches on himself. “Why did I follow her? I was

so happy at the mere sight of her! She looked at me; was not that

immense? She had the air of loving me. Was not that everything? I

wished to have, what? There was nothing after that. I have been absurd.

It is my own fault,” etc., etc. Courfeyrac, to whom he confided

nothing,—it was his nature,—but who made some little guess at

everything,—that was his nature,—had begun by congratulating him on

being in love, though he was amazed at it; then, seeing Marius fall

into this melancholy state, he ended by saying to him: “I see that you

have been simply an animal. Here, come to the Chaumière.”

Once, having confidence in a fine September sun, Marius had allowed

himself to be taken to the ball at Sceaux by Courfeyrac, Bossuet, and

Grantaire, hoping, what a dream! that he might, perhaps, find her

there. Of course he did not see the one he sought.—“But this is the

place, all the same, where all lost women are found,” grumbled

Grantaire in an aside. Marius left his friends at the ball and returned

home on foot, alone, through the night, weary, feverish, with sad and

troubled eyes, stunned by the noise and dust of the merry wagons filled

with singing creatures on their way home from the feast, which passed

close to him, as he, in his discouragement, breathed in the acrid scent

of the walnut-trees, along the road, in order to refresh his head.

He took to living more and more alone, utterly overwhelmed, wholly

given up to his inward anguish, going and coming in his pain like the

wolf in the trap, seeking the absent one everywhere, stupefied by love.

On another occasion, he had an encounter which produced on him a

singular effect. He met, in the narrow streets in the vicinity of the

Boulevard des Invalides, a man dressed like a workingman and wearing a

cap with a long visor, which allowed a glimpse of locks of very white

hair. Marius was struck with the beauty of this white hair, and

scrutinized the man, who was walking slowly and as though absorbed in

painful meditation. Strange to say, he thought that he recognized M.

Leblanc. The hair was the same, also the profile, so far as the cap

permitted a view of it, the mien identical, only more depressed. But

why these workingman’s clothes? What was the meaning of this? What

signified that disguise? Marius was greatly astonished. When he

recovered himself, his first impulse was to follow the man; who knows

whether he did not hold at last the clue which he was seeking? In any

case, he must see the man near at hand, and clear up the mystery. But

the idea occurred to him too late, the man was no longer there. He had

turned into some little side street, and Marius could not find him.

This encounter occupied his mind for three days and then was effaced.

“After all,” he said to himself, “it was probably only a resemblance.”

CHAPTER II—TREASURE TROVE

Marius had not left the Gorbeau house. He paid no attention to any one

there.

At that epoch, to tell the truth, there were no other inhabitants in

the house, except himself and those Jondrettes whose rent he had once

paid, without, moreover, ever having spoken to either father, mother,

or daughters. The other lodgers had moved away or had died, or had been

turned out in default of payment.

One day during that winter, the sun had shown itself a little in the

afternoon, but it was the 2d of February, that ancient Candlemas day

whose treacherous sun, the precursor of a six weeks’ cold spell,

inspired Mathieu Laensberg with these two lines, which have with

justice remained classic:—

Qu’il luise ou qu’il luiserne,

L’ours rentre dans en sa caverne.26

Marius had just emerged from his: night was falling. It was the hour

for his dinner; for he had been obliged to take to dining again, alas!

oh, infirmities of ideal passions!

He had just crossed his threshold, where Ma’am Bougon was sweeping at

the moment, as she uttered this memorable monologue:—

“What is there that is cheap now? Everything is dear. There is nothing

in the world that is cheap except trouble; you can get that for

nothing, the trouble of the world!”

Marius slowly ascended the boulevard towards the barrier, in order to

reach the Rue Saint-Jacques. He was walking along with drooping head.

All at once, he felt some one elbow him in the dusk; he wheeled round,

and saw two young girls clad in rags, the one tall and slim, the other

a little shorter, who were passing rapidly, all out of breath, in

terror, and with the appearance of fleeing; they had been coming to

meet him, had not seen him, and had jostled him as they passed. Through

the twilight, Marius could distinguish their livid faces, their wild

heads, their dishevelled hair, their hideous bonnets, their ragged

petticoats, and their bare feet. They were talking as they ran. The

taller said in a very low voice:—

“The bobbies have come. They came near nabbing me at the half-circle.”

The other answered: “I saw them. I bolted, bolted, bolted!”

Through this repulsive slang, Marius understood that gendarmes or the

police had come near apprehending these two children, and that the

latter had escaped.

They plunged among the trees of the boulevard behind him, and there

created, for a few minutes, in the gloom, a sort of vague white spot,

then disappeared.

Marius had halted for a moment.

He was about to pursue his way, when his eye lighted on a little

grayish package lying on the ground at his feet. He stooped and picked

it up. It was a sort of envelope which appeared to contain papers.

“Good,” he said to himself, “those unhappy girls dropped it.”

He retraced his steps, he called, he did not find them; he reflected

that they must already be far away, put the package in his pocket, and

went off to dine.

On the way, he saw in an alley of the Rue Mouffetard, a child’s coffin,

covered with a black cloth resting on three chairs, and illuminated by

a candle. The two girls of the twilight recurred to his mind.

“Poor mothers!” he thought. “There is one thing sadder than to see

one’s children die; it is to see them leading an evil life.”

Then those shadows which had varied his melancholy vanished from his

thoughts, and he fell back once more into his habitual preoccupations.

He fell to thinking once more of his six months of love and happiness

in the open air and the broad daylight, beneath the beautiful trees of

Luxembourg.

“How gloomy my life has become!” he said to himself. “Young girls are

always appearing to me, only formerly they were angels and now they are

ghouls.”

CHAPTER III—QUADRIFRONS

That evening, as he was undressing preparatory to going to bed, his

hand came in contact, in the pocket of his coat, with the packet which

he had picked up on the boulevard. He had forgotten it. He thought that

it would be well to open it, and that this package might possibly

contain the address of the young girls, if it really belonged to them,

and, in any case, the information necessary to a restitution to the

person who had lost it.

He opened the envelope.

It was not sealed and contained four letters, also unsealed.

They bore addresses.

All four exhaled a horrible odor of tobacco.

The first was addressed: \_“To Madame, Madame la Marquise de Grucheray,

the place opposite the Chamber of Deputies, No.—”\_

Marius said to himself, that he should probably find in it the

information which he sought, and that, moreover, the letter being open,

it was probable that it could be read without impropriety.

It was conceived as follows:—

Madame la Marquise: The virtue of clemency and piety is that which most

closely unites sosiety. Turn your Christian spirit and cast a look of

compassion on this unfortunate Spanish victim of loyalty and attachment

to the sacred cause of legitimacy, who has given with his blood,

consecrated his fortune, evverything, to defend that cause, and to-day

finds himself in the greatest missery. He doubts not that your

honorable person will grant succor to preserve an existence exteremely

painful for a military man of education and honor full of wounds,

counts in advance on the humanity which animates you and on the

interest which Madame la Marquise bears to a nation so unfortunate.

Their prayer will not be in vain, and their gratitude will preserve

theirs charming souvenir.

My respectful sentiments, with which I have the honor to be

Madame,

DON ALVARÈS, Spanish Captain of Cavalry, a royalist who has take

refuge in France, who finds himself on travells for his country,

and the resources are lacking him to continue his travells.

No address was joined to the signature. Marius hoped to find the

address in the second letter, whose superscription read: \_À Madame,

Madame la Comtesse de Montvernet, Rue Cassette, No. 9\_. This is what

Marius read in it:—

MADAME LA COMTESSE: It is an unhappy mother of a family of six

children the last of which is only eight months old. I sick since

my last confinement, abandoned by my husband five months ago,

haveing no resources in the world the most frightful indigance.

In the hope of Madame la Comtesse, she has the honor to be, Madame,

with profound respect,

MISTRESS BALIZARD.

Marius turned to the third letter, which was a petition like the

preceding; he read:—

Monsieur PABOURGEOT, Elector, wholesale stocking merchant, Rue

Saint-Denis on the corner of the Rue aux Fers.

I permit myself to address you this letter to beg you to grant me

the pretious favor of your simpaties and to interest yourself in a

man of letters who has just sent a drama to the Théâtre-Français.

The subject is historical, and the action takes place in Auvergne

in the time of the Empire; the style, I think, is natural, laconic,

and may have some merit. There are couplets to be sung in four

places. The comic, the serious, the unexpected, are mingled in a

variety of characters, and a tinge of romanticism lightly spread

through all the intrigue which proceeds misteriously, and ends,

after striking altarations, in the midst of many beautiful strokes

of brilliant scenes.

My principal object is to satisfi the desire which progressively

animates the man of our century, that is to say, the fashion, that

capritious and bizarre weathervane which changes at almost every

new wind.

In spite of these qualities I have reason to fear that jealousy,

the egotism of priviliged authors, may obtaine my exclusion from

the theatre, for I am not ignorant of the mortifications with which

newcomers are treated.

Monsiuer Pabourgeot, your just reputation as an enlightened

protector of men of litters emboldens me to send you my daughter

who will explain our indigant situation to you, lacking bread and

fire in this wynter season. When I say to you that I beg you to

accept the dedication of my drama which I desire to make to you and

of all those that I shall make, is to prove to you how great is my

ambition to have the honor of sheltering myself under your

protection, and of adorning my writings with your name. If you

deign to honor me with the most modest offering, I shall

immediately occupy myself in making a piesse of verse to pay you my

tribute of gratitude. Which I shall endeavor to render this piesse

as perfect as possible, will be sent to you before it is inserted

at the beginning of the drama and delivered on the stage.

To Monsieur

and Madame Pabourgeot,

My most respectful complements,

GENFLOT, man of letters.

P. S. Even if it is only forty sous.

Excuse me for sending my daughter and not presenting myself, but

sad motives connected with the toilet do not permit me, alas! to go

out.

Finally, Marius opened the fourth letter. The address ran: \_To the

benevolent Gentleman of the church of Saint-Jacques-du-haut-Pas\_. It

contained the following lines:—

BENEVOLENT MAN: If you deign to accompany my daughter, you will

behold a misserable calamity, and I will show you my certificates.

At the aspect of these writings your generous soul will be moved

with a sentiment of obvious benevolence, for true philosophers

always feel lively emotions.

Admit, compassionate man, that it is necessary to suffer the most

cruel need, and that it is very painful, for the sake of obtaining

a little relief, to get oneself attested by the authorities as

though one were not free to suffer and to die of inanition while

waiting to have our misery relieved. Destinies are very fatal for

several and too prodigal or too protecting for others.

I await your presence or your offering, if you deign to make one,

and I beseech you to accept the respectful sentiments with which I

have the honor to be,

truly magnanimous man,

your very humble

and very obedient servant,

P. FABANTOU, dramatic artist.

After perusing these four letters, Marius did not find himself much

further advanced than before.

In the first place, not one of the signers gave his address.

Then, they seemed to come from four different individuals, Don Alvarès,

Mistress Balizard, the poet Genflot, and dramatic artist Fabantou; but

the singular thing about these letters was, that all four were written

by the same hand.

What conclusion was to be drawn from this, except that they all come

from the same person?

Moreover, and this rendered the conjecture all the more probable, the

coarse and yellow paper was the same in all four, the odor of tobacco

was the same, and, although an attempt had been made to vary the style,

the same orthographical faults were reproduced with the greatest

tranquillity, and the man of letters Genflot was no more exempt from

them than the Spanish captain.

It was waste of trouble to try to solve this petty mystery. Had it not

been a chance find, it would have borne the air of a mystification.

Marius was too melancholy to take even a chance pleasantry well, and to

lend himself to a game which the pavement of the street seemed desirous

of playing with him. It seemed to him that he was playing the part of

the blind man in blind man’s buff between the four letters, and that

they were making sport of him.

Nothing, however, indicated that these letters belonged to the two

young girls whom Marius had met on the boulevard. After all, they were

evidently papers of no value. Marius replaced them in their envelope,

flung the whole into a corner and went to bed. About seven o’clock in

the morning, he had just risen and breakfasted, and was trying to

settle down to work, when there came a soft knock at his door.

As he owned nothing, he never locked his door, unless occasionally,

though very rarely, when he was engaged in some pressing work. Even

when absent he left his key in the lock. “You will be robbed,” said

Ma’am Bougon. “Of what?” said Marius. The truth is, however, that he

had, one day, been robbed of an old pair of boots, to the great triumph

of Ma’am Bougon.

There came a second knock, as gentle as the first.

“Come in,” said Marius.

The door opened.

“What do you want, Ma’am Bougon?” asked Marius, without raising his

eyes from the books and manuscripts on his table.

A voice which did not belong to Ma’am Bougon replied:—

“Excuse me, sir—”

It was a dull, broken, hoarse, strangled voice, the voice of an old

man, roughened with brandy and liquor.

Marius turned round hastily, and beheld a young girl.

CHAPTER IV—A ROSE IN MISERY

[Illustration: Rose in Misery]

A very young girl was standing in the half-open door. The dormer window

of the garret, through which the light fell, was precisely opposite the

door, and illuminated the figure with a wan light. She was a frail,

emaciated, slender creature; there was nothing but a chemise and a

petticoat upon that chilled and shivering nakedness. Her girdle was a

string, her head ribbon a string, her pointed shoulders emerged from

her chemise, a blond and lymphatic pallor, earth-colored collar-bones,

red hands, a half-open and degraded mouth, missing teeth, dull, bold,

base eyes; she had the form of a young girl who has missed her youth,

and the look of a corrupt old woman; fifty years mingled with fifteen;

one of those beings which are both feeble and horrible, and which cause

those to shudder whom they do not cause to weep.

Marius had risen, and was staring in a sort of stupor at this being,

who was almost like the forms of the shadows which traverse dreams.

The most heart-breaking thing of all was, that this young girl had not

come into the world to be homely. In her early childhood she must even

have been pretty. The grace of her age was still struggling against the

hideous, premature decrepitude of debauchery and poverty. The remains

of beauty were dying away in that face of sixteen, like the pale

sunlight which is extinguished under hideous clouds at dawn on a

winter’s day.

That face was not wholly unknown to Marius. He thought he remembered

having seen it somewhere.

“What do you wish, Mademoiselle?” he asked.

The young girl replied in her voice of a drunken convict:—

“Here is a letter for you, Monsieur Marius.”

She called Marius by his name; he could not doubt that he was the

person whom she wanted; but who was this girl? How did she know his

name?

Without waiting for him to tell her to advance, she entered. She

entered resolutely, staring, with a sort of assurance that made the

heart bleed, at the whole room and the unmade bed. Her feet were bare.

Large holes in her petticoat permitted glimpses of her long legs and

her thin knees. She was shivering.

She held a letter in her hand, which she presented to Marius.

Marius, as he opened the letter, noticed that the enormous wafer which

sealed it was still moist. The message could not have come from a

distance. He read:—

MY AMIABLE NEIGHBOR, YOUNG MAN: I have learned of your goodness to

me, that you paid my rent six months ago. I bless you, young man.

My eldest daughter will tell you that we have been without a morsel

of bread for two days, four persons and my spouse ill. If I am not

deseaved in my opinion, I think I may hope that your generous heart

will melt at this statement and the desire will subjugate you to be

propitious to me by daigning to lavish on me a slight favor.

I am with the distinguished consideration which is due to the

benefactors of humanity,—

JONDRETTE.

P.S. My eldest daughter will await your orders, dear Monsieur Marius.

This letter, coming in the very midst of the mysterious adventure which

had occupied Marius’ thoughts ever since the preceding evening, was

like a candle in a cellar. All was suddenly illuminated.

This letter came from the same place as the other four. There was the

same writing, the same style, the same orthography, the same paper, the

same odor of tobacco.

There were five missives, five histories, five signatures, and a single

signer. The Spanish Captain Don Alvarès, the unhappy Mistress Balizard,

the dramatic poet Genflot, the old comedian Fabantou, were all four

named Jondrette, if, indeed, Jondrette himself were named Jondrette.

Marius had lived in the house for a tolerably long time, and he had

had, as we have said, but very rare occasion to see, to even catch a

glimpse of, his extremely mean neighbors. His mind was elsewhere, and

where the mind is, there the eyes are also. He had been obliged more

than once to pass the Jondrettes in the corridor or on the stairs; but

they were mere forms to him; he had paid so little heed to them, that,

on the preceding evening, he had jostled the Jondrette girls on the

boulevard, without recognizing them, for it had evidently been they,

and it was with great difficulty that the one who had just entered his

room had awakened in him, in spite of disgust and pity, a vague

recollection of having met her elsewhere.

Now he saw everything clearly. He understood that his neighbor

Jondrette, in his distress, exercised the industry of speculating on

the charity of benevolent persons, that he procured addresses, and that

he wrote under feigned names to people whom he judged to be wealthy and

compassionate, letters which his daughters delivered at their risk and

peril, for this father had come to such a pass, that he risked his

daughters; he was playing a game with fate, and he used them as the

stake. Marius understood that probably, judging from their flight on

the evening before, from their breathless condition, from their terror

and from the words of slang which he had overheard, these unfortunate

creatures were plying some inexplicably sad profession, and that the

result of the whole was, in the midst of human society, as it is now

constituted, two miserable beings who were neither girls nor women, a

species of impure and innocent monsters produced by misery.

Sad creatures, without name, or sex, or age, to whom neither good nor

evil were any longer possible, and who, on emerging from childhood,

have already nothing in this world, neither liberty, nor virtue, nor

responsibility. Souls which blossomed out yesterday, and are faded

to-day, like those flowers let fall in the streets, which are soiled

with every sort of mire, while waiting for some wheel to crush them.

Nevertheless, while Marius bent a pained and astonished gaze on her,

the young girl was wandering back and forth in the garret with the

audacity of a spectre. She kicked about, without troubling herself as

to her nakedness. Occasionally her chemise, which was untied and torn,

fell almost to her waist. She moved the chairs about, she disarranged

the toilet articles which stood on the commode, she handled Marius’

clothes, she rummaged about to see what there was in the corners.

“Hullo!” said she, “you have a mirror!”

And she hummed scraps of vaudevilles, as though she had been alone,

frolicsome refrains which her hoarse and guttural voice rendered

lugubrious.

An indescribable constraint, weariness, and humiliation were

perceptible beneath this hardihood. Effrontery is a disgrace.

Nothing could be more melancholy than to see her sport about the room,

and, so to speak, flit with the movements of a bird which is frightened

by the daylight, or which has broken its wing. One felt that under

other conditions of education and destiny, the gay and over-free mien

of this young girl might have turned out sweet and charming. Never,

even among animals, does the creature born to be a dove change into an

osprey. That is only to be seen among men.

Marius reflected, and allowed her to have her way.

She approached the table.

“Ah!” said she, “books!”

A flash pierced her glassy eye. She resumed, and her accent expressed

the happiness which she felt in boasting of something, to which no

human creature is insensible:—

“I know how to read, I do!”

She eagerly seized a book which lay open on the table, and read with

tolerable fluency:—

“—General Bauduin received orders to take the château of Hougomont

which stands in the middle of the plain of Waterloo, with five

battalions of his brigade.”

She paused.

“Ah! Waterloo! I know about that. It was a battle long ago. My father

was there. My father has served in the armies. We are fine Bonapartists

in our house, that we are! Waterloo was against the English.”

She laid down the book, caught up a pen, and exclaimed:—

“And I know how to write, too!”

She dipped her pen in the ink, and turning to Marius:—

“Do you want to see? Look here, I’m going to write a word to show you.”

And before he had time to answer, she wrote on a sheet of white paper,

which lay in the middle of the table: “The bobbies are here.”

Then throwing down the pen:—

“There are no faults of orthography. You can look. We have received an

education, my sister and I. We have not always been as we are now. We

were not made—”

Here she paused, fixed her dull eyes on Marius, and burst out laughing,

saying, with an intonation which contained every form of anguish,

stifled by every form of cynicism:—

“Bah!”

And she began to hum these words to a gay air:—

“J’ai faim, mon père.”

Pas de fricot.

J’ai froid, ma mère.

Pas de tricot.

Grelotte,

Lolotte!

Sanglote,

Jacquot!”

I am hungry, father.

I have no food.

I am cold, mother.

I have no clothes.

Lolotte!

Shiver,

Sob,

Jacquot!”

She had hardly finished this couplet, when she exclaimed:—

“Do you ever go to the play, Monsieur Marius? I do. I have a little

brother who is a friend of the artists, and who gives me tickets

sometimes. But I don’t like the benches in the galleries. One is

cramped and uncomfortable there. There are rough people there

sometimes; and people who smell bad.”

Then she scrutinized Marius, assumed a singular air and said:—

“Do you know, Mr. Marius, that you are a very handsome fellow?”

And at the same moment the same idea occurred to them both, and made

her smile and him blush. She stepped up to him, and laid her hand on

his shoulder: “You pay no heed to me, but I know you, Mr. Marius. I

meet you here on the staircase, and then I often see you going to a

person named Father Mabeuf who lives in the direction of Austerlitz,

sometimes when I have been strolling in that quarter. It is very

becoming to you to have your hair tumbled thus.”

She tried to render her voice soft, but only succeeded in making it

very deep. A portion of her words was lost in the transit from her

larynx to her lips, as though on a piano where some notes are missing.

Marius had retreated gently.

“Mademoiselle,” said he, with his cool gravity, “I have here a package

which belongs to you, I think. Permit me to return it to you.”

And he held out the envelope containing the four letters.

She clapped her hands and exclaimed:—

“We have been looking everywhere for that!”

Then she eagerly seized the package and opened the envelope, saying as

she did so:—

“Dieu de Dieu! how my sister and I have hunted! And it was you who

found it! On the boulevard, was it not? It must have been on the

boulevard? You see, we let it fall when we were running. It was that

brat of a sister of mine who was so stupid. When we got home, we could

not find it anywhere. As we did not wish to be beaten, as that is

useless, as that is entirely useless, as that is absolutely useless, we

said that we had carried the letters to the proper persons, and that

they had said to us: ‘Nix.’ So here they are, those poor letters! And

how did you find out that they belonged to me? Ah! yes, the writing. So

it was you that we jostled as we passed last night. We couldn’t see. I

said to my sister: ‘Is it a gentleman?’ My sister said to me: ‘I think

it is a gentleman.’”

In the meanwhile she had unfolded the petition addressed to “the

benevolent gentleman of the church of Saint-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas.”

“Here!” said she, “this is for that old fellow who goes to mass. By the

way, this is his hour. I’ll go and carry it to him. Perhaps he will

give us something to breakfast on.”

Then she began to laugh again, and added:—

“Do you know what it will mean if we get a breakfast today? It will

mean that we shall have had our breakfast of the day before yesterday,

our breakfast of yesterday, our dinner of to-day, and all that at once,

and this morning. Come! Parbleu! if you are not satisfied, dogs,

burst!”

This reminded Marius of the wretched girl’s errand to himself. He

fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, and found nothing there.

The young girl went on, and seemed to have no consciousness of Marius’

presence.

“I often go off in the evening. Sometimes I don’t come home again. Last

winter, before we came here, we lived under the arches of the bridges.

We huddled together to keep from freezing. My little sister cried. How

melancholy the water is! When I thought of drowning myself, I said to

myself: ‘No, it’s too cold.’ I go out alone, whenever I choose, I

sometimes sleep in the ditches. Do you know, at night, when I walk

along the boulevard, I see the trees like forks, I see houses, all

black and as big as Notre Dame, I fancy that the white walls are the

river, I say to myself: ‘Why, there’s water there!’ The stars are like

the lamps in illuminations, one would say that they smoked and that the

wind blew them out, I am bewildered, as though horses were breathing in

my ears; although it is night, I hear hand-organs and

spinning-machines, and I don’t know what all. I think people are

flinging stones at me, I flee without knowing whither, everything

whirls and whirls. You feel very queer when you have had no food.”

And then she stared at him with a bewildered air.

By dint of searching and ransacking his pockets, Marius had finally

collected five francs sixteen sous. This was all he owned in the world

for the moment. “At all events,” he thought, “there is my dinner for

to-day, and to-morrow we will see.” He kept the sixteen sous, and

handed the five francs to the young girl.

She seized the coin.

“Good!” said she, “the sun is shining!”

And, as though the sun had possessed the property of melting the

avalanches of slang in her brain, she went on:—

“Five francs! the shiner! a monarch! in this hole! Ain’t this fine!

You’re a jolly thief! I’m your humble servant! Bravo for the good

fellows! Two days’ wine! and meat! and stew! we’ll have a royal feast!

and a good fill!”

She pulled her chemise up on her shoulders, made a low bow to Marius,

then a familiar sign with her hand, and went towards the door, saying:—

“Good morning, sir. It’s all right. I’ll go and find my old man.”

As she passed, she caught sight of a dry crust of bread on the commode,

which was moulding there amid the dust; she flung herself upon it and

bit into it, muttering:—

“That’s good! it’s hard! it breaks my teeth!”

Then she departed.

CHAPTER V—A PROVIDENTIAL PEEP-HOLE

Marius had lived for five years in poverty, in destitution, even in

distress, but he now perceived that he had not known real misery. True

misery he had but just had a view of. It was its spectre which had just

passed before his eyes. In fact, he who has only beheld the misery of

man has seen nothing; the misery of woman is what he must see; he who

has seen only the misery of woman has seen nothing; he must see the

misery of the child.

When a man has reached his last extremity, he has reached his last

resources at the same time. Woe to the defenceless beings who surround

him! Work, wages, bread, fire, courage, good will, all fail him

simultaneously. The light of day seems extinguished without, the moral

light within; in these shadows man encounters the feebleness of the

woman and the child, and bends them violently to ignominy.

Then all horrors become possible. Despair is surrounded with fragile

partitions which all open on either vice or crime.

Health, youth, honor, all the shy delicacies of the young body, the

heart, virginity, modesty, that epidermis of the soul, are manipulated

in sinister wise by that fumbling which seeks resources, which

encounters opprobrium, and which accommodates itself to it. Fathers,

mothers, children, brothers, sisters, men, women, daughters, adhere and

become incorporated, almost like a mineral formation, in that dusky

promiscuousness of sexes, relationships, ages, infamies, and

innocences. They crouch, back to back, in a sort of hut of fate. They

exchange woe-begone glances. Oh, the unfortunate wretches! How pale

they are! How cold they are! It seems as though they dwelt in a planet

much further from the sun than ours.

This young girl was to Marius a sort of messenger from the realm of sad

shadows. She revealed to him a hideous side of the night.

Marius almost reproached himself for the preoccupations of reverie and

passion which had prevented his bestowing a glance on his neighbors up

to that day. The payment of their rent had been a mechanical movement,

which any one would have yielded to; but he, Marius, should have done

better than that. What! only a wall separated him from those abandoned

beings who lived gropingly in the dark outside the pale of the rest of

the world, he was elbow to elbow with them, he was, in some sort, the

last link of the human race which they touched, he heard them live, or

rather, rattle in the death agony beside him, and he paid no heed to

them! Every day, every instant, he heard them walking on the other side

of the wall, he heard them go, and come, and speak, and he did not even

lend an ear! And groans lay in those words, and he did not even listen

to them, his thoughts were elsewhere, given up to dreams, to impossible

radiances, to loves in the air, to follies; and all the while, human

creatures, his brothers in Jesus Christ, his brothers in the people,

were agonizing in vain beside him! He even formed a part of their

misfortune, and he aggravated it. For if they had had another neighbor

who was less chimerical and more attentive, any ordinary and charitable

man, evidently their indigence would have been noticed, their signals

of distress would have been perceived, and they would have been taken

hold of and rescued! They appeared very corrupt and very depraved, no

doubt, very vile, very odious even; but those who fall without becoming

degraded are rare; besides, there is a point where the unfortunate and

the infamous unite and are confounded in a single word, a fatal word,

\_the miserable\_; whose fault is this? And then should not the charity

be all the more profound, in proportion as the fall is great?

While reading himself this moral lesson, for there were occasions on

which Marius, like all truly honest hearts, was his own pedagogue and

scolded himself more than he deserved, he stared at the wall which

separated him from the Jondrettes, as though he were able to make his

gaze, full of pity, penetrate that partition and warm these wretched

people. The wall was a thin layer of plaster upheld by lathes and

beams, and, as the reader had just learned, it allowed the sound of

voices and words to be clearly distinguished. Only a man as dreamy as

Marius could have failed to perceive this long before. There was no

paper pasted on the wall, either on the side of the Jondrettes or on

that of Marius; the coarse construction was visible in its nakedness.

Marius examined the partition, almost unconsciously; sometimes reverie

examines, observes, and scrutinizes as thought would. All at once he

sprang up; he had just perceived, near the top, close to the ceiling, a

triangular hole, which resulted from the space between three lathes.

The plaster which should have filled this cavity was missing, and by

mounting on the commode, a view could be had through this aperture into

the Jondrettes’ attic. Commiseration has, and should have, its

curiosity. This aperture formed a sort of peep-hole. It is permissible

to gaze at misfortune like a traitor in order to succor it.27

“Let us get some little idea of what these people are like,” thought

Marius, “and in what condition they are.”

He climbed upon the commode, put his eye to the crevice, and looked.

CHAPTER VI—THE WILD MAN IN HIS LAIR

Cities, like forests, have their caverns in which all the most wicked

and formidable creatures which they contain conceal themselves. Only,

in cities, that which thus conceals itself is ferocious, unclean, and

petty, that is to say, ugly; in forests, that which conceals itself is

ferocious, savage, and grand, that is to say, beautiful. Taking one

lair with another, the beast’s is preferable to the man’s. Caverns are

better than hovels.

What Marius now beheld was a hovel.

Marius was poor, and his chamber was poverty-stricken, but as his

poverty was noble, his garret was neat. The den upon which his eye now

rested was abject, dirty, fetid, pestiferous, mean, sordid. The only

furniture consisted of a straw chair, an infirm table, some old bits of

crockery, and in two of the corners, two indescribable pallets; all the

light was furnished by a dormer window of four panes, draped with

spiders’ webs. Through this aperture there penetrated just enough light

to make the face of a man appear like the face of a phantom. The walls

had a leprous aspect, and were covered with seams and scars, like a

visage disfigured by some horrible malady; a repulsive moisture exuded

from them. Obscene sketches roughly sketched with charcoal could be

distinguished upon them.

The chamber which Marius occupied had a dilapidated brick pavement;

this one was neither tiled nor planked; its inhabitants stepped

directly on the antique plaster of the hovel, which had grown black

under the long-continued pressure of feet. Upon this uneven floor,

where the dirt seemed to be fairly incrusted, and which possessed but

one virginity, that of the broom, were capriciously grouped

constellations of old shoes, socks, and repulsive rags; however, this

room had a fireplace, so it was let for forty francs a year. There was

every sort of thing in that fireplace, a brazier, a pot, broken boards,

rags suspended from nails, a bird-cage, ashes, and even a little fire.

Two brands were smouldering there in a melancholy way.

One thing which added still more to the horrors of this garret was,

that it was large. It had projections and angles and black holes, the

lower sides of roofs, bays, and promontories. Hence horrible,

unfathomable nooks where it seemed as though spiders as big as one’s

fist, wood-lice as large as one’s foot, and perhaps even—who

knows?—some monstrous human beings, must be hiding.

One of the pallets was near the door, the other near the window. One

end of each touched the fireplace and faced Marius. In a corner near

the aperture through which Marius was gazing, a colored engraving in a

black frame was suspended to a nail on the wall, and at its bottom, in

large letters, was the inscription: THE DREAM. This represented a

sleeping woman, and a child, also asleep, the child on the woman’s lap,

an eagle in a cloud, with a crown in his beak, and the woman thrusting

the crown away from the child’s head, without awaking the latter; in

the background, Napoleon in a glory, leaning on a very blue column with

a yellow capital ornamented with this inscription:

MARINGO

AUSTERLITS

IENA

WAGRAMME

ELOT

Beneath this frame, a sort of wooden panel, which was no longer than it

was broad, stood on the ground and rested in a sloping attitude against

the wall. It had the appearance of a picture with its face turned to

the wall, of a frame probably showing a daub on the other side, of some

pier-glass detached from a wall and lying forgotten there while waiting

to be rehung.

Near the table, upon which Marius descried a pen, ink, and paper, sat a

man about sixty years of age, small, thin, livid, haggard, with a

cunning, cruel, and uneasy air; a hideous scoundrel.

If Lavater had studied this visage, he would have found the vulture

mingled with the attorney there, the bird of prey and the pettifogger

rendering each other mutually hideous and complementing each other; the

pettifogger making the bird of prey ignoble, the bird of prey making

the pettifogger horrible.

This man had a long gray beard. He was clad in a woman’s chemise, which

allowed his hairy breast and his bare arms, bristling with gray hair,

to be seen. Beneath this chemise, muddy trousers and boots through

which his toes projected were visible.

He had a pipe in his mouth and was smoking. There was no bread in the

hovel, but there was still tobacco.

He was writing probably some more letters like those which Marius had

read.

On the corner of the table lay an ancient, dilapidated, reddish volume,

and the size, which was the antique 12mo of reading-rooms, betrayed a

romance. On the cover sprawled the following title, printed in large

capitals:

GOD; THE KING; HONOR AND THE LADIES;

by

DUCRAY DUMINIL,

1814.

As the man wrote, he talked aloud, and Marius heard his words:—

“The idea that there is no equality, even when you are dead! Just look

at Père-Lachaise! The great, those who are rich, are up above, in the

acacia alley, which is paved. They can reach it in a carriage. The

little people, the poor, the unhappy, well, what of them? they are put

down below, where the mud is up to your knees, in the damp places. They

are put there so that they will decay the sooner! You cannot go to see

them without sinking into the earth.”

He paused, smote the table with his fist, and added, as he ground his

teeth:—

“Oh! I could eat the whole world!”

A big woman, who might be forty years of age, or a hundred, was

crouching near the fireplace on her bare heels.

She, too, was clad only in a chemise and a knitted petticoat patched

with bits of old cloth. A coarse linen apron concealed the half of her

petticoat. Although this woman was doubled up and bent together, it

could be seen that she was of very lofty stature. She was a sort of

giant, beside her husband. She had hideous hair, of a reddish blond

which was turning gray, and which she thrust back from time to time,

with her enormous shining hands, with their flat nails.

Beside her, on the floor, wide open, lay a book of the same form as the

other, and probably a volume of the same romance.

On one of the pallets, Marius caught a glimpse of a sort of tall pale

young girl, who sat there half naked and with pendant feet, and who did

not seem to be listening or seeing or living.

No doubt the younger sister of the one who had come to his room.

She seemed to be eleven or twelve years of age. On closer scrutiny it

was evident that she really was fourteen. She was the child who had

said, on the boulevard the evening before: “I bolted, bolted, bolted!”

She was of that puny sort which remains backward for a long time, then

suddenly starts up rapidly. It is indigence which produces these

melancholy human plants. These creatures have neither childhood nor

youth. At fifteen years of age they appear to be twelve, at sixteen

they seem twenty. To-day a little girl, to-morrow a woman. One might

say that they stride through life, in order to get through with it the

more speedily.

At this moment, this being had the air of a child.

Moreover, no trace of work was revealed in that dwelling; no

handicraft, no spinning-wheel, not a tool. In one corner lay some

ironmongery of dubious aspect. It was the dull listlessness which

follows despair and precedes the death agony.

Marius gazed for a while at this gloomy interior, more terrifying than

the interior of a tomb, for the human soul could be felt fluttering

there, and life was palpitating there. The garret, the cellar, the

lowly ditch where certain indigent wretches crawl at the very bottom of

the social edifice, is not exactly the sepulchre, but only its

antechamber; but, as the wealthy display their greatest magnificence at

the entrance of their palaces, it seems that death, which stands

directly side by side with them, places its greatest miseries in that

vestibule.

The man held his peace, the woman spoke no word, the young girl did not

even seem to breathe. The scratching of the pen on the paper was

audible.

The man grumbled, without pausing in his writing. “Canaille! canaille!

everybody is canaille!”

This variation to Solomon’s exclamation elicited a sigh from the woman.

“Calm yourself, my little friend,” she said. “Don’t hurt yourself, my

dear. You are too good to write to all those people, husband.”

Bodies press close to each other in misery, as in cold, but hearts draw

apart. This woman must have loved this man, to all appearance, judging

from the amount of love within her; but probably, in the daily and

reciprocal reproaches of the horrible distress which weighed on the

whole group, this had become extinct. There no longer existed in her

anything more than the ashes of affection for her husband.

Nevertheless, caressing appellations had survived, as is often the

case. She called him: \_My dear, my little friend, my good man\_, etc.,

with her mouth while her heart was silent.

The man resumed his writing.

CHAPTER VII—STRATEGY AND TACTICS

Marius, with a load upon his breast, was on the point of descending

from the species of observatory which he had improvised, when a sound

attracted his attention and caused him to remain at his post.

The door of the attic had just burst open abruptly. The eldest girl

made her appearance on the threshold. On her feet, she had large,

coarse, men’s shoes, bespattered with mud, which had splashed even to

her red ankles, and she was wrapped in an old mantle which hung in

tatters. Marius had not seen it on her an hour previously, but she had

probably deposited it at his door, in order that she might inspire the

more pity, and had picked it up again on emerging. She entered, pushed

the door to behind her, paused to take breath, for she was completely

breathless, then exclaimed with an expression of triumph and joy:—

“He is coming!”

The father turned his eyes towards her, the woman turned her head, the

little sister did not stir.

“Who?” demanded her father.

“The gentleman!”

“The philanthropist?”

“Yes.”

“From the church of Saint-Jacques?”

“Yes.”

“That old fellow?”

“Yes.”

“And he is coming?”

“He is following me.”

“You are sure?”

“I am sure.”

“There, truly, he is coming?”

“He is coming in a fiacre.”

“In a fiacre. He is Rothschild.”

The father rose.

“How are you sure? If he is coming in a fiacre, how is it that you

arrive before him? You gave him our address at least? Did you tell him

that it was the last door at the end of the corridor, on the right? If

he only does not make a mistake! So you found him at the church? Did he

read my letter? What did he say to you?”

“Ta, ta, ta,” said the girl, “how you do gallop on, my good man! See

here: I entered the church, he was in his usual place, I made him a

reverence, and I handed him the letter; he read it and said to me:

‘Where do you live, my child?’ I said: ‘Monsieur, I will show you.’ He

said to me: ‘No, give me your address, my daughter has some purchases

to make, I will take a carriage and reach your house at the same time

that you do.’ I gave him the address. When I mentioned the house, he

seemed surprised and hesitated for an instant, then he said: ‘Never

mind, I will come.’ When the mass was finished, I watched him leave the

church with his daughter, and I saw them enter a carriage. I certainly

did tell him the last door in the corridor, on the right.”

“And what makes you think that he will come?”

“I have just seen the fiacre turn into the Rue Petit-Banquier. That is

what made me run so.”

“How do you know that it was the same fiacre?”

“Because I took notice of the number, so there!”

“What was the number?”

“440.”

“Good, you are a clever girl.”

The girl stared boldly at her father, and showing the shoes which she

had on her feet:—

“A clever girl, possibly; but I tell you I won’t put these shoes on

again, and that I won’t, for the sake of my health, in the first place,

and for the sake of cleanliness, in the next. I don’t know anything

more irritating than shoes that squelch, and go \_ghi, ghi, ghi,\_ the

whole time. I prefer to go barefoot.”

“You are right,” said her father, in a sweet tone which contrasted with

the young girl’s rudeness, “but then, you will not be allowed to enter

churches, for poor people must have shoes to do that. One cannot go

barefoot to the good God,” he added bitterly.

Then, returning to the subject which absorbed him:—

“So you are sure that he will come?”

“He is following on my heels,” said she.

The man started up. A sort of illumination appeared on his countenance.

“Wife!” he exclaimed, “you hear. Here is the philanthropist. Extinguish

the fire.”

The stupefied mother did not stir.

The father, with the agility of an acrobat, seized a broken-nosed jug

which stood on the chimney, and flung the water on the brands.

Then, addressing his eldest daughter:—

“Here you! Pull the straw off that chair!”

His daughter did not understand.

He seized the chair, and with one kick he rendered it seatless. His leg

passed through it.

As he withdrew his leg, he asked his daughter:—

“Is it cold?”

“Very cold. It is snowing.”

The father turned towards the younger girl who sat on the bed near the

window, and shouted to her in a thundering voice:—

“Quick! get off that bed, you lazy thing! will you never do anything?

Break a pane of glass!”

The little girl jumped off the bed with a shiver.

“Break a pane!” he repeated.

The child stood still in bewilderment.

“Do you hear me?” repeated her father, “I tell you to break a pane!”

The child, with a sort of terrified obedience, rose on tiptoe, and

struck a pane with her fist. The glass broke and fell with a loud

clatter.

“Good,” said the father.

He was grave and abrupt. His glance swept rapidly over all the crannies

of the garret. One would have said that he was a general making the

final preparation at the moment when the battle is on the point of

beginning.

The mother, who had not said a word so far, now rose and demanded in a

dull, slow, languid voice, whence her words seemed to emerge in a

congealed state:—

“What do you mean to do, my dear?”

“Get into bed,” replied the man.

His intonation admitted of no deliberation. The mother obeyed, and

threw herself heavily on one of the pallets.

In the meantime, a sob became audible in one corner.

“What’s that?” cried the father.

The younger daughter exhibited her bleeding fist, without quitting the

corner in which she was cowering. She had wounded herself while

breaking the window; she went off, near her mother’s pallet and wept

silently.

It was now the mother’s turn to start up and exclaim:—

“Just see there! What follies you commit! She has cut herself breaking

that pane for you!”

“So much the better!” said the man. “I foresaw that.”

“What? So much the better?” retorted his wife.

“Peace!” replied the father, “I suppress the liberty of the press.”

Then tearing the woman’s chemise which he was wearing, he made a strip

of cloth with which he hastily swathed the little girl’s bleeding

wrist.

That done, his eye fell with a satisfied expression on his torn

chemise.

“And the chemise too,” said he, “this has a good appearance.”

An icy breeze whistled through the window and entered the room. The

outer mist penetrated thither and diffused itself like a whitish sheet

of wadding vaguely spread by invisible fingers. Through the broken pane

the snow could be seen falling. The snow promised by the Candlemas sun

of the preceding day had actually come.

The father cast a glance about him as though to make sure that he had

forgotten nothing. He seized an old shovel and spread ashes over the

wet brands in such a manner as to entirely conceal them.

Then drawing himself up and leaning against the chimney-piece:—

“Now,” said he, “we can receive the philanthropist.”

CHAPTER VIII—THE RAY OF LIGHT IN THE HOVEL

The big girl approached and laid her hand in her father’s.

“Feel how cold I am,” said she.

“Bah!” replied the father, “I am much colder than that.”

The mother exclaimed impetuously:—

“You always have something better than any one else, so you do! even

bad things.”

“Down with you!” said the man.

The mother, being eyed after a certain fashion, held her tongue.

Silence reigned for a moment in the hovel. The elder girl was removing

the mud from the bottom of her mantle, with a careless air; her younger

sister continued to sob; the mother had taken the latter’s head between

her hands, and was covering it with kisses, whispering to her the

while:—

“My treasure, I entreat you, it is nothing of consequence, don’t cry,

you will anger your father.”

“No!” exclaimed the father, “quite the contrary! sob! sob! that’s

right.”

Then turning to the elder:—

“There now! He is not coming! What if he were not to come! I shall have

extinguished my fire, wrecked my chair, torn my shirt, and broken my

pane all for nothing.”

“And wounded the child!” murmured the mother.

“Do you know,” went on the father, “that it’s beastly cold in this

devil’s garret! What if that man should not come! Oh! See there, you!

He makes us wait! He says to himself: ‘Well! they will wait for me!

That’s what they’re there for.’ Oh! how I hate them, and with what joy,

jubilation, enthusiasm, and satisfaction I could strangle all those

rich folks! all those rich folks! These men who pretend to be

charitable, who put on airs, who go to mass, who make presents to the

priesthood, \_preachy, preachy\_, in their skullcaps, and who think

themselves above us, and who come for the purpose of humiliating us,

and to bring us ‘clothes,’ as they say! old duds that are not worth

four sous! And bread! That’s not what I want, pack of rascals that they

are, it’s money! Ah! money! Never! Because they say that we would go

off and drink it up, and that we are drunkards and idlers! And they!

What are they, then, and what have they been in their time! Thieves!

They never could have become rich otherwise! Oh! Society ought to be

grasped by the four corners of the cloth and tossed into the air, all

of it! It would all be smashed, very likely, but at least, no one would

have anything, and there would be that much gained! But what is that

blockhead of a benevolent gentleman doing? Will he come? Perhaps the

animal has forgotten the address! I’ll bet that that old beast—”

At that moment there came a light tap at the door, the man rushed to it

and opened it, exclaiming, amid profound bows and smiles of adoration:—

“Enter, sir! Deign to enter, most respected benefactor, and your

charming young lady, also.”

A man of ripe age and a young girl made their appearance on the

threshold of the attic.

Marius had not quitted his post. His feelings for the moment surpassed

the powers of the human tongue.

It was She!

Whoever has loved knows all the radiant meanings contained in those

three letters of that word: She.

It was certainly she. Marius could hardly distinguish her through the

luminous vapor which had suddenly spread before his eyes. It was that

sweet, absent being, that star which had beamed upon him for six

months; it was those eyes, that brow, that mouth, that lovely vanished

face which had created night by its departure. The vision had been

eclipsed, now it reappeared.

It reappeared in that gloom, in that garret, in that misshapen attic,

in all that horror.

Marius shuddered in dismay. What! It was she! The palpitations of his

heart troubled his sight. He felt that he was on the brink of bursting

into tears! What! He beheld her again at last, after having sought her

so long! It seemed to him that he had lost his soul, and that he had

just found it again.

She was the same as ever, only a little pale; her delicate face was

framed in a bonnet of violet velvet, her figure was concealed beneath a

pelisse of black satin. Beneath her long dress, a glimpse could be

caught of her tiny foot shod in a silken boot.

She was still accompanied by M. Leblanc.

She had taken a few steps into the room, and had deposited a tolerably

bulky parcel on the table.

The eldest Jondrette girl had retired behind the door, and was staring

with sombre eyes at that velvet bonnet, that silk mantle, and that

charming, happy face.

CHAPTER IX—JONDRETTE COMES NEAR WEEPING

The hovel was so dark, that people coming from without felt on entering

it the effect produced on entering a cellar. The two newcomers

advanced, therefore, with a certain hesitation, being hardly able to

distinguish the vague forms surrounding them, while they could be

clearly seen and scrutinized by the eyes of the inhabitants of the

garret, who were accustomed to this twilight.

M. Leblanc approached, with his sad but kindly look, and said to

Jondrette the father:—

“Monsieur, in this package you will find some new clothes and some

woollen stockings and blankets.”

“Our angelic benefactor overwhelms us,” said Jondrette, bowing to the

very earth.

Then, bending down to the ear of his eldest daughter, while the two

visitors were engaged in examining this lamentable interior, he added

in a low and rapid voice:—

“Hey? What did I say? Duds! No money! They are all alike! By the way,

how was the letter to that old blockhead signed?”

“Fabantou,” replied the girl.

“The dramatic artist, good!”

It was lucky for Jondrette, that this had occurred to him, for at the

very moment, M. Leblanc turned to him, and said to him with the air of

a person who is seeking to recall a name:—

“I see that you are greatly to be pitied, Monsieur—”

“Fabantou,” replied Jondrette quickly.

“Monsieur Fabantou, yes, that is it. I remember.”

“Dramatic artist, sir, and one who has had some success.”

Here Jondrette evidently judged the moment propitious for capturing the

“philanthropist.” He exclaimed with an accent which smacked at the same

time of the vainglory of the mountebank at fairs, and the humility of

the mendicant on the highway:—

“A pupil of Talma! Sir! I am a pupil of Talma! Fortune formerly smiled

on me—Alas! Now it is misfortune’s turn. You see, my benefactor, no

bread, no fire. My poor babes have no fire! My only chair has no seat!

A broken pane! And in such weather! My spouse in bed! Ill!”

“Poor woman!” said M. Leblanc.

“My child wounded!” added Jondrette.

The child, diverted by the arrival of the strangers, had fallen to

contemplating “the young lady,” and had ceased to sob.

“Cry! bawl!” said Jondrette to her in a low voice.

At the same time he pinched her sore hand. All this was done with the

talent of a juggler.

The little girl gave vent to loud shrieks.

The adorable young girl, whom Marius, in his heart, called “his

Ursule,” approached her hastily.

“Poor, dear child!” said she.

“You see, my beautiful young lady,” pursued Jondrette “her bleeding

wrist! It came through an accident while working at a machine to earn

six sous a day. It may be necessary to cut off her arm.”

“Really?” said the old gentleman, in alarm.

The little girl, taking this seriously, fell to sobbing more violently

than ever.

“Alas! yes, my benefactor!” replied the father.

For several minutes, Jondrette had been scrutinizing “the benefactor”

in a singular fashion. As he spoke, he seemed to be examining the other

attentively, as though seeking to summon up his recollections. All at

once, profiting by a moment when the newcomers were questioning the

child with interest as to her injured hand, he passed near his wife,

who lay in her bed with a stupid and dejected air, and said to her in a

rapid but very low tone:—

“Take a look at that man!”

Then, turning to M. Leblanc, and continuing his lamentations:—

“You see, sir! All the clothing that I have is my wife’s chemise! And

all torn at that! In the depths of winter! I can’t go out for lack of a

coat. If I had a coat of any sort, I would go and see Mademoiselle

Mars, who knows me and is very fond of me. Does she not still reside in

the Rue de la Tour-des-Dames? Do you know, sir? We played together in

the provinces. I shared her laurels. Célimène would come to my succor,

sir! Elmire would bestow alms on Bélisaire! But no, nothing! And not a

sou in the house! My wife ill, and not a sou! My daughter dangerously

injured, not a sou! My wife suffers from fits of suffocation. It comes

from her age, and besides, her nervous system is affected. She ought to

have assistance, and my daughter also! But the doctor! But the

apothecary! How am I to pay them? I would kneel to a penny, sir! Such

is the condition to which the arts are reduced. And do you know, my

charming young lady, and you, my generous protector, do you know, you

who breathe forth virtue and goodness, and who perfume that church

where my daughter sees you every day when she says her prayers?—For I

have brought up my children religiously, sir. I did not want them to

take to the theatre. Ah! the hussies! If I catch them tripping! I do

not jest, that I don’t! I read them lessons on honor, on morality, on

virtue! Ask them! They have got to walk straight. They are none of your

unhappy wretches who begin by having no family, and end by espousing

the public. One is Mamselle Nobody, and one becomes Madame Everybody.

Deuce take it! None of that in the Fabantou family! I mean to bring

them up virtuously, and they shall be honest, and nice, and believe in

God, by the sacred name! Well, sir, my worthy sir, do you know what is

going to happen to-morrow? To-morrow is the fourth day of February, the

fatal day, the last day of grace allowed me by my landlord; if by this

evening I have not paid my rent, to-morrow my oldest daughter, my

spouse with her fever, my child with her wound,—we shall all four be

turned out of here and thrown into the street, on the boulevard,

without shelter, in the rain, in the snow. There, sir. I owe for four

quarters—a whole year! that is to say, sixty francs.”

Jondrette lied. Four quarters would have amounted to only forty francs,

and he could not owe four, because six months had not elapsed since

Marius had paid for two.

M. Leblanc drew five francs from his pocket and threw them on the

table.

Jondrette found time to mutter in the ear of his eldest daughter:—

“The scoundrel! What does he think I can do with his five francs? That

won’t pay me for my chair and pane of glass! That’s what comes of

incurring expenses!”

In the meanwhile, M. Leblanc had removed the large brown great-coat

which he wore over his blue coat, and had thrown it over the back of

the chair.

“Monsieur Fabantou,” he said, “these five francs are all that I have

about me, but I shall now take my daughter home, and I will return this

evening,—it is this evening that you must pay, is it not?”

Jondrette’s face lighted up with a strange expression. He replied

vivaciously:—

“Yes, respected sir. At eight o’clock, I must be at my landlord’s.”

“I will be here at six, and I will fetch you the sixty francs.”

“My benefactor!” exclaimed Jondrette, overwhelmed. And he added, in a

low tone: “Take a good look at him, wife!”

M. Leblanc had taken the arm of the young girl, once more, and had

turned towards the door.

“Farewell until this evening, my friends!” said he.

“Six o’clock?” said Jondrette.

“Six o’clock precisely.”

At that moment, the overcoat lying on the chair caught the eye of the

elder Jondrette girl.

“You are forgetting your coat, sir,” said she.

Jondrette darted an annihilating look at his daughter, accompanied by a

formidable shrug of the shoulders.

M. Leblanc turned back and said, with a smile:—

“I have not forgotten it, I am leaving it.”

“O my protector!” said Jondrette, “my august benefactor, I melt into

tears! Permit me to accompany you to your carriage.”

“If you come out,” answered M. Leblanc, “put on this coat. It really is

very cold.”

Jondrette did not need to be told twice. He hastily donned the brown

great-coat. And all three went out, Jondrette preceding the two

strangers.

CHAPTER X—TARIFF OF LICENSED CABS: TWO FRANCS AN HOUR

Marius had lost nothing of this entire scene, and yet, in reality, had

seen nothing. His eyes had remained fixed on the young girl, his heart

had, so to speak, seized her and wholly enveloped her from the moment

of her very first step in that garret. During her entire stay there, he

had lived that life of ecstasy which suspends material perceptions and

precipitates the whole soul on a single point. He contemplated, not

that girl, but that light which wore a satin pelisse and a velvet

bonnet. The star Sirius might have entered the room, and he would not

have been any more dazzled.

While the young girl was engaged in opening the package, unfolding the

clothing and the blankets, questioning the sick mother kindly, and the

little injured girl tenderly, he watched her every movement, he sought

to catch her words. He knew her eyes, her brow, her beauty, her form,

her walk, he did not know the sound of her voice. He had once fancied

that he had caught a few words at the Luxembourg, but he was not

absolutely sure of the fact. He would have given ten years of his life

to hear it, in order that he might bear away in his soul a little of

that music. But everything was drowned in the lamentable exclamations

and trumpet bursts of Jondrette. This added a touch of genuine wrath to

Marius’ ecstasy. He devoured her with his eyes. He could not believe

that it really was that divine creature whom he saw in the midst of

those vile creatures in that monstrous lair. It seemed to him that he

beheld a humming-bird in the midst of toads.

When she took her departure, he had but one thought, to follow her, to

cling to her trace, not to quit her until he learned where she lived,

not to lose her again, at least, after having so miraculously

re-discovered her. He leaped down from the commode and seized his hat.

As he laid his hand on the lock of the door, and was on the point of

opening it, a sudden reflection caused him to pause. The corridor was

long, the staircase steep, Jondrette was talkative, M. Leblanc had, no

doubt, not yet regained his carriage; if, on turning round in the

corridor, or on the staircase, he were to catch sight of him, Marius,

in that house, he would, evidently, take the alarm, and find means to

escape from him again, and this time it would be final. What was he to

do? Should he wait a little? But while he was waiting, the carriage

might drive off. Marius was perplexed. At last he accepted the risk and

quitted his room.

There was no one in the corridor. He hastened to the stairs. There was

no one on the staircase. He descended in all haste, and reached the

boulevard in time to see a fiacre turning the corner of the Rue du

Petit-Banquier, on its way back to Paris.

Marius rushed headlong in that direction. On arriving at the angle of

the boulevard, he caught sight of the fiacre again, rapidly descending

the Rue Mouffetard; the carriage was already a long way off, and there

was no means of overtaking it; what! run after it? Impossible; and

besides, the people in the carriage would assuredly notice an

individual running at full speed in pursuit of a fiacre, and the father

would recognize him. At that moment, wonderful and unprecedented good

luck, Marius perceived an empty cab passing along the boulevard. There

was but one thing to be done, to jump into this cab and follow the

fiacre. That was sure, efficacious, and free from danger.

Marius made the driver a sign to halt, and called to him:—

“By the hour?”

Marius wore no cravat, he had on his working-coat, which was destitute

of buttons, his shirt was torn along one of the plaits on the bosom.

The driver halted, winked, and held out his left hand to Marius,

rubbing his forefinger gently with his thumb.

“What is it?” said Marius.

“Pay in advance,” said the coachman.

Marius recollected that he had but sixteen sous about him.

“How much?” he demanded.

“Forty sous.”

“I will pay on my return.”

The driver’s only reply was to whistle the air of La Palisse and to

whip up his horse.

Marius stared at the retreating cabriolet with a bewildered air. For

the lack of four and twenty sous, he was losing his joy, his happiness,

his love! He had seen, and he was becoming blind again. He reflected

bitterly, and it must be confessed, with profound regret, on the five

francs which he had bestowed, that very morning, on that miserable

girl. If he had had those five francs, he would have been saved, he

would have been born again, he would have emerged from the limbo and

darkness, he would have made his escape from isolation and spleen, from

his widowed state; he might have re-knotted the black thread of his

destiny to that beautiful golden thread, which had just floated before

his eyes and had broken at the same instant, once more! He returned to

his hovel in despair.

He might have told himself that M. Leblanc had promised to return in

the evening, and that all he had to do was to set about the matter more

skilfully, so that he might follow him on that occasion; but, in his

contemplation, it is doubtful whether he had heard this.

As he was on the point of mounting the staircase, he perceived, on the

other side of the boulevard, near the deserted wall skirting the Rue De

la Barrière-des-Gobelins, Jondrette, wrapped in the “philanthropist’s”

great-coat, engaged in conversation with one of those men of

disquieting aspect who have been dubbed by common consent, \_prowlers of

the barriers\_; people of equivocal face, of suspicious monologues, who

present the air of having evil minds, and who generally sleep in the

daytime, which suggests the supposition that they work by night.

These two men, standing there motionless and in conversation, in the

snow which was falling in whirlwinds, formed a group that a policeman

would surely have observed, but which Marius hardly noticed.

Still, in spite of his mournful preoccupation, he could not refrain

from saying to himself that this prowler of the barriers with whom

Jondrette was talking resembled a certain Panchaud, alias Printanier,

alias Bigrenaille, whom Courfeyrac had once pointed out to him as a

very dangerous nocturnal roamer. This man’s name the reader has learned

in the preceding book. This Panchaud, alias Printanier, alias

Bigrenaille, figured later on in many criminal trials, and became a

notorious rascal. He was at that time only a famous rascal. To-day he

exists in the state of tradition among ruffians and assassins. He was

at the head of a school towards the end of the last reign. And in the

evening, at nightfall, at the hour when groups form and talk in

whispers, he was discussed at La Force in the Fosse-aux-Lions. One

might even, in that prison, precisely at the spot where the sewer which

served the unprecedented escape, in broad daylight, of thirty

prisoners, in 1843, passes under the culvert, read his name, PANCHAUD,

audaciously carved by his own hand on the wall of the sewer, during one

of his attempts at flight. In 1832, the police already had their eye on

him, but he had not as yet made a serious beginning.

CHAPTER XI—OFFERS OF SERVICE FROM MISERY TO WRETCHEDNESS

Marius ascended the stairs of the hovel with slow steps; at the moment

when he was about to re-enter his cell, he caught sight of the elder

Jondrette girl following him through the corridor. The very sight of

this girl was odious to him; it was she who had his five francs, it was

too late to demand them back, the cab was no longer there, the fiacre

was far away. Moreover, she would not have given them back. As for

questioning her about the residence of the persons who had just been

there, that was useless; it was evident that she did not know, since

the letter signed Fabantou had been addressed “to the benevolent

gentleman of the church of Saint-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas.”

Marius entered his room and pushed the door to after him.

It did not close; he turned round and beheld a hand which held the door

half open.

“What is it?” he asked, “who is there?”

It was the Jondrette girl.

“Is it you?” resumed Marius almost harshly, “still you! What do you

want with me?”

She appeared to be thoughtful and did not look at him. She no longer

had the air of assurance which had characterized her that morning. She

did not enter, but held back in the darkness of the corridor, where

Marius could see her through the half-open door.

“Come now, will you answer?” cried Marius. “What do you want with me?”

She raised her dull eyes, in which a sort of gleam seemed to flicker

vaguely, and said:—

“Monsieur Marius, you look sad. What is the matter with you?”

“With me!” said Marius.

“Yes, you.”

“There is nothing the matter with me.”

“Yes, there is!”

“No.”

“I tell you there is!”

“Let me alone!”

Marius gave the door another push, but she retained her hold on it.

“Stop,” said she, “you are in the wrong. Although you are not rich, you

were kind this morning. Be so again now. You gave me something to eat,

now tell me what ails you. You are grieved, that is plain. I do not

want you to be grieved. What can be done for it? Can I be of any

service? Employ me. I do not ask for your secrets, you need not tell

them to me, but I may be of use, nevertheless. I may be able to help

you, since I help my father. When it is necessary to carry letters, to

go to houses, to inquire from door to door, to find out an address, to

follow any one, I am of service. Well, you may assuredly tell me what

is the matter with you, and I will go and speak to the persons;

sometimes it is enough if some one speaks to the persons, that suffices

to let them understand matters, and everything comes right. Make use of

me.”

An idea flashed across Marius’ mind. What branch does one disdain when

one feels that one is falling?

He drew near to the Jondrette girl.

“Listen—” he said to her.

She interrupted him with a gleam of joy in her eyes.

“Oh yes, do call me \_thou!\_ I like that better.”

“Well,” he resumed, “thou hast brought hither that old gentleman and

his daughter!”

“Yes.”

“Dost thou know their address?”

“No.”

“Find it for me.”

The Jondrette’s dull eyes had grown joyous, and they now became gloomy.

“Is that what you want?” she demanded.

“Yes.”

“Do you know them?”

“No.”

“That is to say,” she resumed quickly, “you do not know her, but you

wish to know her.”

This \_them\_ which had turned into \_her\_ had something indescribably

significant and bitter about it.

“Well, can you do it?” said Marius.

“You shall have the beautiful lady’s address.”

There was still a shade in the words “the beautiful lady” which

troubled Marius. He resumed:—

“Never mind, after all, the address of the father and daughter. Their

address, indeed!”

She gazed fixedly at him.

“What will you give me?”

“Anything you like.”

“Anything I like?”

“Yes.”

“You shall have the address.”

She dropped her head; then, with a brusque movement, she pulled to the

door, which closed behind her.

Marius found himself alone.

He dropped into a chair, with his head and both elbows on his bed,

absorbed in thoughts which he could not grasp, and as though a prey to

vertigo. All that had taken place since the morning, the appearance of

the angel, her disappearance, what that creature had just said to him,

a gleam of hope floating in an immense despair,—this was what filled

his brain confusedly.

All at once he was violently aroused from his reverie.

He heard the shrill, hard voice of Jondrette utter these words, which

were fraught with a strange interest for him:—

“I tell you that I am sure of it, and that I recognized him.”

Of whom was Jondrette speaking? Whom had he recognized? M. Leblanc? The

father of “his Ursule”? What! Did Jondrette know him? Was Marius about

to obtain in this abrupt and unexpected fashion all the information

without which his life was so dark to him? Was he about to learn at

last who it was that he loved, who that young girl was? Who her father

was? Was the dense shadow which enwrapped them on the point of being

dispelled? Was the veil about to be rent? Ah! Heavens!

He bounded rather than climbed upon his commode, and resumed his post

near the little peep-hole in the partition wall.

Again he beheld the interior of Jondrette’s hovel.

CHAPTER XII—THE USE MADE OF M. LEBLANC’S FIVE-FRANC PIECE

Nothing in the aspect of the family was altered, except that the wife

and daughters had levied on the package and put on woollen stockings

and jackets. Two new blankets were thrown across the two beds.

Jondrette had evidently just returned. He still had the breathlessness

of out of doors. His daughters were seated on the floor near the

fireplace, the elder engaged in dressing the younger’s wounded hand.

His wife had sunk back on the bed near the fireplace, with a face

indicative of astonishment. Jondrette was pacing up and down the garret

with long strides. His eyes were extraordinary.

The woman, who seemed timid and overwhelmed with stupor in the presence

of her husband, turned to say:—

“What, really? You are sure?”

“Sure! Eight years have passed! But I recognize him! Ah! I recognize

him. I knew him at once! What! Didn’t it force itself on you?”

“No.”

“But I told you: ‘Pay attention!’ Why, it is his figure, it is his

face, only older,—there are people who do not grow old, I don’t know

how they manage it,—it is the very sound of his voice. He is better

dressed, that is all! Ah! you mysterious old devil, I’ve got you, that

I have!”

He paused, and said to his daughters:—

“Get out of here, you!—It’s queer that it didn’t strike you!”

They arose to obey.

The mother stammered:—

“With her injured hand.”

“The air will do it good,” said Jondrette. “Be off.”

It was plain that this man was of the sort to whom no one offers to

reply. The two girls departed.

At the moment when they were about to pass through the door, the father

detained the elder by the arm, and said to her with a peculiar accent:—

“You will be here at five o’clock precisely. Both of you. I shall need

you.”

Marius redoubled his attention.

On being left alone with his wife, Jondrette began to pace the room

again, and made the tour of it two or three times in silence. Then he

spent several minutes in tucking the lower part of the woman’s chemise

which he wore into his trousers.

All at once, he turned to the female Jondrette, folded his arms and

exclaimed:—

“And would you like to have me tell you something? The young lady—”

“Well, what?” retorted his wife, “the young lady?”

Marius could not doubt that it was really she of whom they were

speaking. He listened with ardent anxiety. His whole life was in his

ears.

But Jondrette had bent over and spoke to his wife in a whisper. Then he

straightened himself up and concluded aloud:—

“It is she!”

“That one?” said his wife.

“That very one,” said the husband.

No expression can reproduce the significance of the mother’s words.

Surprise, rage, hate, wrath, were mingled and combined in one monstrous

intonation. The pronunciation of a few words, the name, no doubt, which

her husband had whispered in her ear, had sufficed to rouse this huge,

somnolent woman, and from being repulsive she became terrible.

“It is not possible!” she cried. “When I think that my daughters are

going barefoot, and have not a gown to their backs! What! A satin

pelisse, a velvet bonnet, boots, and everything; more than two hundred

francs’ worth of clothes! so that one would think she was a lady! No,

you are mistaken! Why, in the first place, the other was hideous, and

this one is not so bad-looking! She really is not bad-looking! It can’t

be she!”

“I tell you that it is she. You will see.”

At this absolute assertion, the Jondrette woman raised her large, red,

blonde face and stared at the ceiling with a horrible expression. At

that moment, she seemed to Marius even more to be feared than her

husband. She was a sow with the look of a tigress.

“What!” she resumed, “that horrible, beautiful young lady, who gazed at

my daughters with an air of pity,—she is that beggar brat! Oh! I should

like to kick her stomach in for her!”

She sprang off of the bed, and remained standing for a moment, her hair

in disorder, her nostrils dilating, her mouth half open, her fists

clenched and drawn back. Then she fell back on the bed once more. The

man paced to and fro and paid no attention to his female.

After a silence lasting several minutes, he approached the female

Jondrette, and halted in front of her, with folded arms, as he had done

a moment before:—

“And shall I tell you another thing?”

“What is it?” she asked.

He answered in a low, curt voice:—

“My fortune is made.”

The woman stared at him with the look that signifies: “Is the person

who is addressing me on the point of going mad?”

He went on:—

“Thunder! It was not so very long ago that I was a parishioner of the

parish of

die-of-hunger-if-you-have-a-fire,-die-of-cold-if-you-have-bread! I have

had enough of misery! my share and other people’s share! I am not

joking any longer, I don’t find it comic any more, I’ve had enough of

puns, good God! no more farces, Eternal Father! I want to eat till I am

full, I want to drink my fill! to gormandize! to sleep! to do nothing!

I want to have my turn, so I do, come now! before I die! I want to be a

bit of a millionnaire!”

He took a turn round the hovel, and added:—

“Like other people.”

“What do you mean by that?” asked the woman.

He shook his head, winked, screwed up one eye, and raised his voice

like a medical professor who is about to make a demonstration:—

“What do I mean by that? Listen!”

“Hush!” muttered the woman, “not so loud! These are matters which must

not be overheard.”

“Bah! Who’s here? Our neighbor? I saw him go out a little while ago.

Besides, he doesn’t listen, the big booby. And I tell you that I saw

him go out.”

Nevertheless, by a sort of instinct, Jondrette lowered his voice,

although not sufficiently to prevent Marius hearing his words. One

favorable circumstance, which enabled Marius not to lose a word of this

conversation was the falling snow which deadened the sound of vehicles

on the boulevard.

This is what Marius heard:—

“Listen carefully. The Crœsus is caught, or as good as caught! That’s

all settled already. Everything is arranged. I have seen some people.

He will come here this evening at six o’clock. To bring sixty francs,

the rascal! Did you notice how I played that game on him, my sixty

francs, my landlord, my fourth of February? I don’t even owe for one

quarter! Isn’t he a fool! So he will come at six o’clock! That’s the

hour when our neighbor goes to his dinner. Mother Bougon is off washing

dishes in the city. There’s not a soul in the house. The neighbor never

comes home until eleven o’clock. The children shall stand on watch. You

shall help us. He will give in.”

“And what if he does not give in?” demanded his wife.

Jondrette made a sinister gesture, and said:—

“We’ll fix him.”

And he burst out laughing.

This was the first time Marius had seen him laugh. The laugh was cold

and sweet, and provoked a shudder.

Jondrette opened a cupboard near the fireplace, and drew from it an old

cap, which he placed on his head, after brushing it with his sleeve.

“Now,” said he, “I’m going out. I have some more people that I must

see. Good ones. You’ll see how well the whole thing will work. I shall

be away as short a time as possible, it’s a fine stroke of business, do

you look after the house.”

And with both fists thrust into the pockets of his trousers, he stood

for a moment in thought, then exclaimed:—

“Do you know, it’s mighty lucky, by the way, that he didn’t recognize

me! If he had recognized me on his side, he would not have come back

again. He would have slipped through our fingers! It was my beard that

saved us! my romantic beard! my pretty little romantic beard!”

And again he broke into a laugh.

He stepped to the window. The snow was still falling, and streaking the

gray of the sky.

“What beastly weather!” said he.

Then lapping his overcoat across his breast:—

“This rind is too large for me. Never mind,” he added, “he did a

devilish good thing in leaving it for me, the old scoundrel! If it

hadn’t been for that, I couldn’t have gone out, and everything would

have gone wrong! What small points things hang on, anyway!”

And pulling his cap down over his eyes, he quitted the room.

He had barely had time to take half a dozen steps from the door, when

the door opened again, and his savage but intelligent face made its

appearance once more in the opening.

“I came near forgetting,” said he. “You are to have a brazier of

charcoal ready.”

And he flung into his wife’s apron the five-franc piece which the

“philanthropist” had left with him.

“A brazier of charcoal?” asked his wife.

“Yes.”

“How many bushels?”

“Two good ones.”

“That will come to thirty sous. With the rest I will buy something for

dinner.”

“The devil, no.”

“Why?”

“Don’t go and spend the hundred-sou piece.”

“Why?”

“Because I shall have to buy something, too.”

“What?”

“Something.”

“How much shall you need?”

“Whereabouts in the neighborhood is there an ironmonger’s shop?”

“Rue Mouffetard.”

“Ah! yes, at the corner of a street; I can see the shop.”

“But tell me how much you will need for what you have to purchase?”

“Fifty sous—three francs.”

“There won’t be much left for dinner.”

“Eating is not the point to-day. There’s something better to be done.”

“That’s enough, my jewel.”

At this word from his wife, Jondrette closed the door again, and this

time, Marius heard his step die away in the corridor of the hovel, and

descend the staircase rapidly.

At that moment, one o’clock struck from the church of Saint-Médard.

CHAPTER XIII—SOLUS CUM SOLO, IN LOCO REMOTO, NON COGITABUNTUR ORARE

PATER NOSTER

Marius, dreamer as he was, was, as we have said, firm and energetic by

nature. His habits of solitary meditation, while they had developed in

him sympathy and compassion, had, perhaps, diminished the faculty for

irritation, but had left intact the power of waxing indignant; he had

the kindliness of a brahmin, and the severity of a judge; he took pity

upon a toad, but he crushed a viper. Now, it was into a hole of vipers

that his glance had just been directed, it was a nest of monsters that

he had beneath his eyes.

“These wretches must be stamped upon,” said he.

Not one of the enigmas which he had hoped to see solved had been

elucidated; on the contrary, all of them had been rendered more dense,

if anything; he knew nothing more about the beautiful maiden of the

Luxembourg and the man whom he called M. Leblanc, except that Jondrette

was acquainted with them. Athwart the mysterious words which had been

uttered, the only thing of which he caught a distinct glimpse was the

fact that an ambush was in course of preparation, a dark but terrible

trap; that both of them were incurring great danger, she probably, her

father certainly; that they must be saved; that the hideous plots of

the Jondrettes must be thwarted, and the web of these spiders broken.

He scanned the female Jondrette for a moment. She had pulled an old

sheet-iron stove from a corner, and she was rummaging among the old

heap of iron.

He descended from the commode as softly as possible, taking care not to

make the least noise. Amid his terror as to what was in preparation,

and in the horror with which the Jondrettes had inspired him, he

experienced a sort of joy at the idea that it might be granted to him

perhaps to render a service to the one whom he loved.

But how was it to be done? How warn the persons threatened? He did not

know their address. They had reappeared for an instant before his eyes,

and had then plunged back again into the immense depths of Paris.

Should he wait for M. Leblanc at the door that evening at six o’clock,

at the moment of his arrival, and warn him of the trap? But Jondrette

and his men would see him on the watch, the spot was lonely, they were

stronger than he, they would devise means to seize him or to get him

away, and the man whom Marius was anxious to save would be lost. One

o’clock had just struck, the trap was to be sprung at six. Marius had

five hours before him.

There was but one thing to be done.

He put on his decent coat, knotted a silk handkerchief round his neck,

took his hat, and went out, without making any more noise than if he

had been treading on moss with bare feet.

Moreover, the Jondrette woman continued to rummage among her old iron.

Once outside of the house, he made for the Rue du Petit-Banquier.

He had almost reached the middle of this street, near a very low wall

which a man can easily step over at certain points, and which abuts on

a waste space, and was walking slowly, in consequence of his

preoccupied condition, and the snow deadened the sound of his steps;

all at once he heard voices talking very close by. He turned his head,

the street was deserted, there was not a soul in it, it was broad

daylight, and yet he distinctly heard voices.

It occurred to him to glance over the wall which he was skirting.

There, in fact, sat two men, flat on the snow, with their backs against

the wall, talking together in subdued tones.

These two persons were strangers to him; one was a bearded man in a

blouse, and the other a long-haired individual in rags. The bearded man

had on a fez, the other’s head was bare, and the snow had lodged in his

hair.

By thrusting his head over the wall, Marius could hear their remarks.

The hairy one jogged the other man’s elbow and said:—

“—With the assistance of Patron-Minette, it can’t fail.”

“Do you think so?” said the bearded man.

And the long-haired one began again:—

“It’s as good as a warrant for each one, of five hundred balls, and the

worst that can happen is five years, six years, ten years at the most!”

The other replied with some hesitation, and shivering beneath his fez:—

“That’s a real thing. You can’t go against such things.”

“I tell you that the affair can’t go wrong,” resumed the long-haired

man. “Father What’s-his-name’s team will be already harnessed.”

Then they began to discuss a melodrama that they had seen on the

preceding evening at the Gaîté Theatre.

Marius went his way.

It seemed to him that the mysterious words of these men, so strangely

hidden behind that wall, and crouching in the snow, could not but bear

some relation to Jondrette’s abominable projects. That must be \_the

affair\_.

He directed his course towards the faubourg Saint-Marceau and asked at

the first shop he came to where he could find a commissary of police.

He was directed to Rue de Pontoise, No. 14.

Thither Marius betook himself.

As he passed a baker’s shop, he bought a two-penny roll, and ate it,

foreseeing that he should not dine.

On the way, he rendered justice to Providence. He reflected that had he

not given his five francs to the Jondrette girl in the morning, he

would have followed M. Leblanc’s fiacre, and consequently have remained

ignorant of everything, and that there would have been no obstacle to

the trap of the Jondrettes and that M. Leblanc would have been lost,

and his daughter with him, no doubt.

CHAPTER XIV—IN WHICH A POLICE AGENT BESTOWS TWO FISTFULS ON A LAWYER

On arriving at No. 14, Rue de Pontoise, he ascended to the first floor

and inquired for the commissary of police.

“The commissary of police is not here,” said a clerk; “but there is an

inspector who takes his place. Would you like to speak to him? Are you

in haste?”

“Yes,” said Marius.

The clerk introduced him into the commissary’s office. There stood a

tall man behind a grating, leaning against a stove, and holding up with

both hands the tails of a vast topcoat, with three collars. His face

was square, with a thin, firm mouth, thick, gray, and very ferocious

whiskers, and a look that was enough to turn your pockets inside out.

Of that glance it might have been well said, not that it penetrated,

but that it searched.

This man’s air was not much less ferocious nor less terrible than

Jondrette’s; the dog is, at times, no less terrible to meet than the

wolf.

“What do you want?” he said to Marius, without adding “monsieur.”

“Is this Monsieur le Commissaire de Police?”

“He is absent. I am here in his stead.”

“The matter is very private.”

“Then speak.”

“And great haste is required.”

“Then speak quick.”

This calm, abrupt man was both terrifying and reassuring at one and the

same time. He inspired fear and confidence. Marius related the

adventure to him: That a person with whom he was not acquainted

otherwise than by sight, was to be inveigled into a trap that very

evening; that, as he occupied the room adjoining the den, he, Marius

Pontmercy, a lawyer, had heard the whole plot through the partition;

that the wretch who had planned the trap was a certain Jondrette; that

there would be accomplices, probably some prowlers of the barriers,

among others a certain Panchaud, alias Printanier, alias Bigrenaille;

that Jondrette’s daughters were to lie in wait; that there was no way

of warning the threatened man, since he did not even know his name; and

that, finally, all this was to be carried out at six o’clock that

evening, at the most deserted point of the Boulevard de l’Hôpital, in

house No. 50-52.

At the sound of this number, the inspector raised his head, and said

coldly:—

“So it is in the room at the end of the corridor?”

“Precisely,” answered Marius, and he added: “Are you acquainted with

that house?”

The inspector remained silent for a moment, then replied, as he warmed

the heel of his boot at the door of the stove:—

“Apparently.”

He went on, muttering between his teeth, and not addressing Marius so

much as his cravat:—

“Patron-Minette must have had a hand in this.”

This word struck Marius.

“Patron-Minette,” said he, “I did hear that word pronounced, in fact.”

And he repeated to the inspector the dialogue between the long-haired

man and the bearded man in the snow behind the wall of the Rue du

Petit-Banquier.

The inspector muttered:—

“The long-haired man must be Brujon, and the bearded one Demi-Liard,

alias Deux-Milliards.”

He had dropped his eyelids again, and became absorbed in thought.

“As for Father What’s-his-name, I think I recognize him. Here, I’ve

burned my coat. They always have too much fire in these cursed stoves.

Number 50-52. Former property of Gorbeau.”

Then he glanced at Marius.

“You saw only that bearded and that long-haired man?”

“And Panchaud.”

“You didn’t see a little imp of a dandy prowling about the premises?”

“No.”

“Nor a big lump of matter, resembling an elephant in the Jardin des

Plantes?”

“No.”

“Nor a scamp with the air of an old red tail?”

“No.”

“As for the fourth, no one sees him, not even his adjutants, clerks,

and employees. It is not surprising that you did not see him.”

“No. Who are all those persons?” asked Marius.

The inspector answered:—

“Besides, this is not the time for them.”

He relapsed into silence, then resumed:—

“50-52. I know that barrack. Impossible to conceal ourselves inside it

without the artists seeing us, and then they will get off simply by

countermanding the vaudeville. They are so modest! An audience

embarrasses them. None of that, none of that. I want to hear them sing

and make them dance.”

This monologue concluded, he turned to Marius, and demanded, gazing at

him intently the while:—

“Are you afraid?”

“Of what?” said Marius.

“Of these men?”

“No more than yourself!” retorted Marius rudely, who had begun to

notice that this police agent had not yet said “monsieur” to him.

The inspector stared still more intently at Marius, and continued with

sententious solemnity:—

“There, you speak like a brave man, and like an honest man. Courage

does not fear crime, and honesty does not fear authority.”

Marius interrupted him:—

“That is well, but what do you intend to do?”

The inspector contented himself with the remark:—

“The lodgers have pass-keys with which to get in at night. You must

have one.”

“Yes,” said Marius.

“Have you it about you?”

“Yes.”

“Give it to me,” said the inspector.

Marius took his key from his waistcoat pocket, handed it to the

inspector and added:—

“If you will take my advice, you will come in force.”

The inspector cast on Marius such a glance as Voltaire might have

bestowed on a provincial academician who had suggested a rhyme to him;

with one movement he plunged his hands, which were enormous, into the

two immense pockets of his top-coat, and pulled out two small steel

pistols, of the sort called “knock-me-downs.” Then he presented them to

Marius, saying rapidly, in a curt tone:—

“Take these. Go home. Hide in your chamber, so that you may be supposed

to have gone out. They are loaded. Each one carries two balls. You will

keep watch; there is a hole in the wall, as you have informed me. These

men will come. Leave them to their own devices for a time. When you

think matters have reached a crisis, and that it is time to put a stop

to them, fire a shot. Not too soon. The rest concerns me. A shot into

the ceiling, the air, no matter where. Above all things, not too soon.

Wait until they begin to put their project into execution; you are a

lawyer; you know the proper point.” Marius took the pistols and put

them in the side pocket of his coat.

“That makes a lump that can be seen,” said the inspector. “Put them in

your trousers pocket.”

Marius hid the pistols in his trousers pockets.

“Now,” pursued the inspector, “there is not a minute more to be lost by

any one. What time is it? Half-past two. Seven o’clock is the hour?”

“Six o’clock,” answered Marius.

“I have plenty of time,” said the inspector, “but no more than enough.

Don’t forget anything that I have said to you. Bang. A pistol shot.”

“Rest easy,” said Marius.

And as Marius laid his hand on the handle of the door on his way out,

the inspector called to him:—

“By the way, if you have occasion for my services between now and then,

come or send here. You will ask for Inspector Javert.”

CHAPTER XV—JONDRETTE MAKES HIS PURCHASES

A few moments later, about three o’clock, Courfeyrac chanced to be

passing along the Rue Mouffetard in company with Bossuet. The snow had

redoubled in violence, and filled the air. Bossuet was just saying to

Courfeyrac:—

“One would say, to see all these snow-flakes fall, that there was a

plague of white butterflies in heaven.” All at once, Bossuet caught

sight of Marius coming up the street towards the barrier with a

peculiar air.

“Hold!” said Bossuet. “There’s Marius.”

“I saw him,” said Courfeyrac. “Don’t let’s speak to him.”

“Why?”

“He is busy.”

“With what?”

“Don’t you see his air?”

“What air?”

“He has the air of a man who is following some one.”

“That’s true,” said Bossuet.

“Just see the eyes he is making!” said Courfeyrac.

“But who the deuce is he following?”

“Some fine, flowery bonneted wench! He’s in love.”

“But,” observed Bossuet, “I don’t see any wench nor any flowery bonnet

in the street. There’s not a woman round.”

Courfeyrac took a survey, and exclaimed:—

“He’s following a man!”

A man, in fact, wearing a gray cap, and whose gray beard could be

distinguished, although they only saw his back, was walking along about

twenty paces in advance of Marius.

This man was dressed in a great-coat which was perfectly new and too

large for him, and in a frightful pair of trousers all hanging in rags

and black with mud.

Bossuet burst out laughing.

“Who is that man?”

“He?” retorted Courfeyrac, “he’s a poet. Poets are very fond of wearing

the trousers of dealers in rabbit skins and the overcoats of peers of

France.”

“Let’s see where Marius will go,” said Bossuet; “let’s see where the

man is going, let’s follow them, hey?”

“Bossuet!” exclaimed Courfeyrac, “eagle of Meaux! You are a prodigious

brute. Follow a man who is following another man, indeed!”

They retraced their steps.

Marius had, in fact, seen Jondrette passing along the Rue Mouffetard,

and was spying on his proceedings.

Jondrette walked straight ahead, without a suspicion that he was

already held by a glance.

He quitted the Rue Mouffetard, and Marius saw him enter one of the most

terrible hovels in the Rue Gracieuse; he remained there about a quarter

of an hour, then returned to the Rue Mouffetard. He halted at an

ironmonger’s shop, which then stood at the corner of the Rue

Pierre-Lombard, and a few minutes later Marius saw him emerge from the

shop, holding in his hand a huge cold chisel with a white wood handle,

which he concealed beneath his great-coat. At the top of the Rue

Petit-Gentilly he turned to the left and proceeded rapidly to the Rue

du Petit-Banquier. The day was declining; the snow, which had ceased

for a moment, had just begun again. Marius posted himself on the watch

at the very corner of the Rue du Petit-Banquier, which was deserted, as

usual, and did not follow Jondrette into it. It was lucky that he did

so, for, on arriving in the vicinity of the wall where Marius had heard

the long-haired man and the bearded man conversing, Jondrette turned

round, made sure that no one was following him, did not see him, then

sprang across the wall and disappeared.

The waste land bordered by this wall communicated with the back yard of

an ex-livery stable-keeper of bad repute, who had failed and who still

kept a few old single-seated berlins under his sheds.

Marius thought that it would be wise to profit by Jondrette’s absence

to return home; moreover, it was growing late; every evening, Ma’am

Bougon when she set out for her dish-washing in town, had a habit of

locking the door, which was always closed at dusk. Marius had given his

key to the inspector of police; it was important, therefore, that he

should make haste.

Evening had arrived, night had almost closed in; on the horizon and in

the immensity of space, there remained but one spot illuminated by the

sun, and that was the moon.

It was rising in a ruddy glow behind the low dome of Salpêtrière.

Marius returned to No. 50-52 with great strides. The door was still

open when he arrived. He mounted the stairs on tip-toe and glided along

the wall of the corridor to his chamber. This corridor, as the reader

will remember, was bordered on both sides by attics, all of which were,

for the moment, empty and to let. Ma’am Bougon was in the habit of

leaving all the doors open. As he passed one of these attics, Marius

thought he perceived in the uninhabited cell the motionless heads of

four men, vaguely lighted up by a remnant of daylight, falling through

a dormer window.

Marius made no attempt to see, not wishing to be seen himself. He

succeeded in reaching his chamber without being seen and without making

any noise. It was high time. A moment later he heard Ma’am Bougon take

her departure, locking the door of the house behind her.

CHAPTER XVI—IN WHICH WILL BE FOUND THE WORDS TO AN ENGLISH AIR WHICH

WAS IN FASHION IN 1832

Marius seated himself on his bed. It might have been half-past five

o’clock. Only half an hour separated him from what was about to happen.

He heard the beating of his arteries as one hears the ticking of a

watch in the dark. He thought of the double march which was going on at

that moment in the dark,—crime advancing on one side, justice coming up

on the other. He was not afraid, but he could not think without a

shudder of what was about to take place. As is the case with all those

who are suddenly assailed by an unforeseen adventure, the entire day

produced upon him the effect of a dream, and in order to persuade

himself that he was not the prey of a nightmare, he had to feel the

cold barrels of the steel pistols in his trousers pockets.

It was no longer snowing; the moon disengaged itself more and more

clearly from the mist, and its light, mingled with the white reflection

of the snow which had fallen, communicated to the chamber a sort of

twilight aspect.

There was a light in the Jondrette den. Marius saw the hole in the wall

shining with a reddish glow which seemed bloody to him.

It was true that the light could not be produced by a candle. However,

there was not a sound in the Jondrette quarters, not a soul was moving

there, not a soul speaking, not a breath; the silence was glacial and

profound, and had it not been for that light, he might have thought

himself next door to a sepulchre.

Marius softly removed his boots and pushed them under his bed.

Several minutes elapsed. Marius heard the lower door turn on its

hinges; a heavy step mounted the staircase, and hastened along the

corridor; the latch of the hovel was noisily lifted; it was Jondrette

returning.

Instantly, several voices arose. The whole family was in the garret.

Only, it had been silent in the master’s absence, like wolf whelps in

the absence of the wolf.

“It’s I,” said he.

“Good evening, daddy,” yelped the girls.

“Well?” said the mother.

“All’s going first-rate,” responded Jondrette, “but my feet are beastly

cold. Good! You have dressed up. You have done well! You must inspire

confidence.”

“All ready to go out.”

“Don’t forget what I told you. You will do everything sure?”

“Rest easy.”

“Because—” said Jondrette. And he left the phrase unfinished.

Marius heard him lay something heavy on the table, probably the chisel

which he had purchased.

“By the way,” said Jondrette, “have you been eating here?”

“Yes,” said the mother. “I got three large potatoes and some salt. I

took advantage of the fire to cook them.”

“Good,” returned Jondrette. “To-morrow I will take you out to dine with

me. We will have a duck and fixings. You shall dine like Charles the

Tenth; all is going well!”

Then he added:—

“The mouse-trap is open. The cats are there.”

He lowered his voice still further, and said:—

“Put this in the fire.”

Marius heard a sound of charcoal being knocked with the tongs or some

iron utensil, and Jondrette continued:—

“Have you greased the hinges of the door so that they will not squeak?”

“Yes,” replied the mother.

“What time is it?”

“Nearly six. The half-hour struck from Saint-Médard a while ago.”

“The devil!” ejaculated Jondrette; “the children must go and watch.

Come you, do you listen here.”

A whispering ensued.

Jondrette’s voice became audible again:—

“Has old Bougon left?”

“Yes,” said the mother.

“Are you sure that there is no one in our neighbor’s room?”

“He has not been in all day, and you know very well that this is his

dinner hour.”

“You are sure?”

“Sure.”

“All the same,” said Jondrette, “there’s no harm in going to see

whether he is there. Here, my girl, take the candle and go there.”

Marius fell on his hands and knees and crawled silently under his bed.

Hardly had he concealed himself, when he perceived a light through the

crack of his door.

“P’pa,” cried a voice, “he is not in here.”

He recognized the voice of the eldest daughter.

“Did you go in?” demanded her father.

“No,” replied the girl, “but as his key is in the door, he must be

out.”

The father exclaimed:—

“Go in, nevertheless.”

The door opened, and Marius saw the tall Jondrette come in with a

candle in her hand. She was as she had been in the morning, only still

more repulsive in this light.

She walked straight up to the bed. Marius endured an indescribable

moment of anxiety; but near the bed there was a mirror nailed to the

wall, and it was thither that she was directing her steps. She raised

herself on tiptoe and looked at herself in it. In the neighboring room,

the sound of iron articles being moved was audible.

She smoothed her hair with the palm of her hand, and smiled into the

mirror, humming with her cracked and sepulchral voice:—

Nos amours ont duré toute une semaine,

Mais que du bonheur les instants sont courts!

S’adorer huit jours, c’était bien la peine!

Le temps des amours devrait durer toujours!

Devrait durer toujours! devrait durer toujours!28

In the meantime, Marius trembled. It seemed impossible to him that she

should not hear his breathing.

She stepped to the window and looked out with the half-foolish way she

had.

“How ugly Paris is when it has put on a white chemise!” said she.

She returned to the mirror and began again to put on airs before it,

scrutinizing herself full-face and three-quarters face in turn.

“Well!” cried her father, “what are you about there?”

“I am looking under the bed and the furniture,” she replied, continuing

to arrange her hair; “there’s no one here.”

“Booby!” yelled her father. “Come here this minute! And don’t waste any

time about it!”

“Coming! Coming!” said she. “One has no time for anything in this

hovel!”

She hummed:—

Vous me quittez pour aller à la gloire;

Mon triste cœur suivra partout.29

She cast a parting glance in the mirror and went out, shutting the door

behind her.

A moment more, and Marius heard the sound of the two young girls’ bare

feet in the corridor, and Jondrette’s voice shouting to them:—

“Pay strict heed! One on the side of the barrier, the other at the

corner of the Rue du Petit-Banquier. Don’t lose sight for a moment of

the door of this house, and the moment you see anything, rush here on

the instant! as hard as you can go! You have a key to get in.”

The eldest girl grumbled:—

“The idea of standing watch in the snow barefoot!”

“To-morrow you shall have some dainty little green silk boots!” said

the father.

They ran downstairs, and a few seconds later the shock of the outer

door as it banged to announced that they were outside.

There now remained in the house only Marius, the Jondrettes and

probably, also, the mysterious persons of whom Marius had caught a

glimpse in the twilight, behind the door of the unused attic.

CHAPTER XVII—THE USE MADE OF MARIUS’ FIVE-FRANC PIECE

Marius decided that the moment had now arrived when he must resume his

post at his observatory. In a twinkling, and with the agility of his

age, he had reached the hole in the partition.

He looked.

The interior of the Jondrette apartment presented a curious aspect, and

Marius found an explanation of the singular light which he had noticed.

A candle was burning in a candlestick covered with verdigris, but that

was not what really lighted the chamber. The hovel was completely

illuminated, as it were, by the reflection from a rather large

sheet-iron brazier standing in the fireplace, and filled with burning

charcoal, the brazier prepared by the Jondrette woman that morning. The

charcoal was glowing hot and the brazier was red; a blue flame

flickered over it, and helped him to make out the form of the chisel

purchased by Jondrette in the Rue Pierre-Lombard, where it had been

thrust into the brazier to heat. In one corner, near the door, and as

though prepared for some definite use, two heaps were visible, which

appeared to be, the one a heap of old iron, the other a heap of ropes.

All this would have caused the mind of a person who knew nothing of

what was in preparation, to waver between a very sinister and a very

simple idea. The lair thus lighted up more resembled a forge than a

mouth of hell, but Jondrette, in this light, had rather the air of a

demon than of a smith.

The heat of the brazier was so great, that the candle on the table was

melting on the side next the chafing-dish, and was drooping over. An

old dark-lantern of copper, worthy of Diogenes turned Cartouche, stood

on the chimney-piece.

The brazier, placed in the fireplace itself, beside the nearly extinct

brands, sent its vapors up the chimney, and gave out no odor.

The moon, entering through the four panes of the window, cast its

whiteness into the crimson and flaming garret; and to the poetic spirit

of Marius, who was dreamy even in the moment of action, it was like a

thought of heaven mingled with the misshapen reveries of earth.

A breath of air which made its way in through the open pane, helped to

dissipate the smell of the charcoal and to conceal the presence of the

brazier.

The Jondrette lair was, if the reader recalls what we have said of the

Gorbeau building, admirably chosen to serve as the theatre of a violent

and sombre deed, and as the envelope for a crime. It was the most

retired chamber in the most isolated house on the most deserted

boulevard in Paris. If the system of ambush and traps had not already

existed, they would have been invented there.

The whole thickness of a house and a multitude of uninhabited rooms

separated this den from the boulevard, and the only window that existed

opened on waste lands enclosed with walls and palisades.

Jondrette had lighted his pipe, seated himself on the seatless chair,

and was engaged in smoking. His wife was talking to him in a low tone.

If Marius had been Courfeyrac, that is to say, one of those men who

laugh on every occasion in life, he would have burst with laughter when

his gaze fell on the Jondrette woman. She had on a black bonnet with

plumes not unlike the hats of the heralds-at-arms at the coronation of

Charles X., an immense tartan shawl over her knitted petticoat, and the

man’s shoes which her daughter had scorned in the morning. It was this

toilette which had extracted from Jondrette the exclamation: “Good! You

have dressed up. You have done well. You must inspire confidence!”

As for Jondrette, he had not taken off the new surtout, which was too

large for him, and which M. Leblanc had given him, and his costume

continued to present that contrast of coat and trousers which

constituted the ideal of a poet in Courfeyrac’s eyes.

All at once, Jondrette lifted up his voice:—

“By the way! Now that I think of it. In this weather, he will come in a

carriage. Light the lantern, take it and go downstairs. You will stand

behind the lower door. The very moment that you hear the carriage stop,

you will open the door, instantly, he will come up, you will light the

staircase and the corridor, and when he enters here, you will go

downstairs again as speedily as possible, you will pay the coachman,

and dismiss the fiacre.”

“And the money?” inquired the woman.

Jondrette fumbled in his trousers pocket and handed her five francs.

“What’s this?” she exclaimed.

Jondrette replied with dignity:—

“That is the monarch which our neighbor gave us this morning.”

And he added:—

“Do you know what? Two chairs will be needed here.”

“What for?”

“To sit on.”

Marius felt a cold chill pass through his limbs at hearing this mild

answer from Jondrette.

“Pardieu! I’ll go and get one of our neighbor’s.”

And with a rapid movement, she opened the door of the den, and went out

into the corridor.

Marius absolutely had not the time to descend from the commode, reach

his bed, and conceal himself beneath it.

“Take the candle,” cried Jondrette.

“No,” said she, “it would embarrass me, I have the two chairs to carry.

There is moonlight.”

Marius heard Mother Jondrette’s heavy hand fumbling at his lock in the

dark. The door opened. He remained nailed to the spot with the shock

and with horror.

The Jondrette entered.

The dormer window permitted the entrance of a ray of moonlight between

two blocks of shadow. One of these blocks of shadow entirely covered

the wall against which Marius was leaning, so that he disappeared

within it.

Mother Jondrette raised her eyes, did not see Marius, took the two

chairs, the only ones which Marius possessed, and went away, letting

the door fall heavily to behind her.

She re-entered the lair.

“Here are the two chairs.”

“And here is the lantern. Go down as quick as you can.”

She hastily obeyed, and Jondrette was left alone.

He placed the two chairs on opposite sides of the table, turned the

chisel in the brazier, set in front of the fireplace an old screen

which masked the chafing-dish, then went to the corner where lay the

pile of rope, and bent down as though to examine something. Marius then

recognized the fact, that what he had taken for a shapeless mass was a

very well-made rope-ladder, with wooden rungs and two hooks with which

to attach it.

This ladder, and some large tools, veritable masses of iron, which were

mingled with the old iron piled up behind the door, had not been in the

Jondrette hovel in the morning, and had evidently been brought thither

in the afternoon, during Marius’ absence.

“Those are the utensils of an edge-tool maker,” thought Marius.

Had Marius been a little more learned in this line, he would have

recognized in what he took for the engines of an edge-tool maker,

certain instruments which will force a lock or pick a lock, and others

which will cut or slice, the two families of tools which burglars call

\_cadets\_ and \_fauchants\_.

The fireplace and the two chairs were exactly opposite Marius. The

brazier being concealed, the only light in the room was now furnished

by the candle; the smallest bit of crockery on the table or on the

chimney-piece cast a large shadow. There was something indescribably

calm, threatening, and hideous about this chamber. One felt that there

existed in it the anticipation of something terrible.

Jondrette had allowed his pipe to go out, a serious sign of

preoccupation, and had again seated himself. The candle brought out the

fierce and the fine angles of his countenance. He indulged in scowls

and in abrupt unfoldings of the right hand, as though he were

responding to the last counsels of a sombre inward monologue. In the

course of one of these dark replies which he was making to himself, he

pulled the table drawer rapidly towards him, took out a long kitchen

knife which was concealed there, and tried the edge of its blade on his

nail. That done, he put the knife back in the drawer and shut it.

Marius, on his side, grasped the pistol in his right pocket, drew it

out and cocked it.

The pistol emitted a sharp, clear click, as he cocked it.

Jondrette started, half rose, listened a moment, then began to laugh

and said:—

“What a fool I am! It’s the partition cracking!”

Marius kept the pistol in his hand.

CHAPTER XVIII—MARIUS’ TWO CHAIRS FORM A VIS-A-VIS

Suddenly, the distant and melancholy vibration of a clock shook the

panes. Six o’clock was striking from Saint-Médard.

Jondrette marked off each stroke with a toss of his head. When the

sixth had struck, he snuffed the candle with his fingers.

Then he began to pace up and down the room, listened at the corridor,

walked on again, then listened once more.

“Provided only that he comes!” he muttered, then he returned to his

chair.

He had hardly reseated himself when the door opened.

Mother Jondrette had opened it, and now remained in the corridor making

a horrible, amiable grimace, which one of the holes of the dark-lantern

illuminated from below.

“Enter, sir,” she said.

“Enter, my benefactor,” repeated Jondrette, rising hastily.

M. Leblanc made his appearance.

He wore an air of serenity which rendered him singularly venerable.

He laid four louis on the table.

“Monsieur Fabantou,” said he, “this is for your rent and your most

pressing necessities. We will attend to the rest hereafter.”

“May God requite it to you, my generous benefactor!” said Jondrette.

And rapidly approaching his wife:—

“Dismiss the carriage!”

She slipped out while her husband was lavishing salutes and offering M.

Leblanc a chair. An instant later she returned and whispered in his

ear:—

“’Tis done.”

The snow, which had not ceased falling since the morning, was so deep

that the arrival of the fiacre had not been audible, and they did not

now hear its departure.

Meanwhile, M. Leblanc had seated himself.

Jondrette had taken possession of the other chair, facing M. Leblanc.

Now, in order to form an idea of the scene which is to follow, let the

reader picture to himself in his own mind, a cold night, the solitudes

of the Salpêtrière covered with snow and white as winding-sheets in the

moonlight, the taper-like lights of the street lanterns which shone

redly here and there along those tragic boulevards, and the long rows

of black elms, not a passer-by for perhaps a quarter of a league

around, the Gorbeau hovel, at its highest pitch of silence, of horror,

and of darkness; in that building, in the midst of those solitudes, in

the midst of that darkness, the vast Jondrette garret lighted by a

single candle, and in that den two men seated at a table, M. Leblanc

tranquil, Jondrette smiling and alarming, the Jondrette woman, the

female wolf, in one corner, and, behind the partition, Marius,

invisible, erect, not losing a word, not missing a single movement, his

eye on the watch, and pistol in hand.

However, Marius experienced only an emotion of horror, but no fear. He

clasped the stock of the pistol firmly and felt reassured. “I shall be

able to stop that wretch whenever I please,” he thought.

He felt that the police were there somewhere in ambuscade, waiting for

the signal agreed upon and ready to stretch out their arm.

Moreover, he was in hopes, that this violent encounter between

Jondrette and M. Leblanc would cast some light on all the things which

he was interested in learning.

CHAPTER XIX—OCCUPYING ONE’S SELF WITH OBSCURE DEPTHS

Hardly was M. Leblanc seated, when he turned his eyes towards the

pallets, which were empty.

“How is the poor little wounded girl?” he inquired.

“Bad,” replied Jondrette with a heart-broken and grateful smile, “very

bad, my worthy sir. Her elder sister has taken her to the Bourbe to

have her hurt dressed. You will see them presently; they will be back

immediately.”

“Madame Fabantou seems to me to be better,” went on M. Leblanc, casting

his eyes on the eccentric costume of the Jondrette woman, as she stood

between him and the door, as though already guarding the exit, and

gazed at him in an attitude of menace and almost of combat.

“She is dying,” said Jondrette. “But what do you expect, sir! She has

so much courage, that woman has! She’s not a woman, she’s an ox.”

The Jondrette, touched by his compliment, deprecated it with the

affected airs of a flattered monster.

“You are always too good to me, Monsieur Jondrette!”

“Jondrette!” said M. Leblanc, “I thought your name was Fabantou?”

“Fabantou, alias Jondrette!” replied the husband hurriedly. “An

artistic sobriquet!”

And launching at his wife a shrug of the shoulders which M. Leblanc did

not catch, he continued with an emphatic and caressing inflection of

voice:—

“Ah! we have had a happy life together, this poor darling and I! What

would there be left for us if we had not that? We are so wretched, my

respectable sir! We have arms, but there is no work! We have the will,

no work! I don’t know how the government arranges that, but, on my word

of honor, sir, I am not Jacobin, sir, I am not a bousingot.30 I don’t

wish them any evil, but if I were the ministers, on my most sacred

word, things would be different. Here, for instance, I wanted to have

my girls taught the trade of paper-box makers. You will say to me:

‘What! a trade?’ Yes! A trade! A simple trade! A bread-winner! What a

fall, my benefactor! What a degradation, when one has been what we have

been! Alas! There is nothing left to us of our days of prosperity! One

thing only, a picture, of which I think a great deal, but which I am

willing to part with, for I must live! Item, one must live!”

While Jondrette thus talked, with an apparent incoherence which

detracted nothing from the thoughtful and sagacious expression of his

physiognomy, Marius raised his eyes, and perceived at the other end of

the room a person whom he had not seen before. A man had just entered,

so softly that the door had not been heard to turn on its hinges. This

man wore a violet knitted vest, which was old, worn, spotted, cut and

gaping at every fold, wide trousers of cotton velvet, wooden shoes on

his feet, no shirt, had his neck bare, his bare arms tattooed, and his

face smeared with black. He had seated himself in silence on the

nearest bed, and, as he was behind Jondrette, he could only be

indistinctly seen.

That sort of magnetic instinct which turns aside the gaze, caused M.

Leblanc to turn round almost at the same moment as Marius. He could not

refrain from a gesture of surprise which did not escape Jondrette.

“Ah! I see!” exclaimed Jondrette, buttoning up his coat with an air of

complaisance, “you are looking at your overcoat? It fits me! My faith,

but it fits me!”

“Who is that man?” said M. Leblanc.

“Him?” ejaculated Jondrette, “he’s a neighbor of mine. Don’t pay any

attention to him.”

The neighbor was a singular-looking individual. However, manufactories

of chemical products abound in the Faubourg Saint-Marceau. Many of the

workmen might have black faces. Besides this, M. Leblanc’s whole person

was expressive of candid and intrepid confidence.

He went on:—

“Excuse me; what were you saying, M. Fabantou?”

“I was telling you, sir, and dear protector,” replied Jondrette placing

his elbows on the table and contemplating M. Leblanc with steady and

tender eyes, not unlike the eyes of the boa-constrictor, “I was telling

you, that I have a picture to sell.”

A slight sound came from the door. A second man had just entered and

seated himself on the bed, behind Jondrette.

Like the first, his arms were bare, and he had a mask of ink or

lampblack.

Although this man had, literally, glided into the room, he had not been

able to prevent M. Leblanc catching sight of him.

“Don’t mind them,” said Jondrette, “they are people who belong in the

house. So I was saying, that there remains in my possession a valuable

picture. But stop, sir, take a look at it.”

He rose, went to the wall at the foot of which stood the panel which we

have already mentioned, and turned it round, still leaving it supported

against the wall. It really was something which resembled a picture,

and which the candle illuminated, somewhat. Marius could make nothing

out of it, as Jondrette stood between the picture and him; he only saw

a coarse daub, and a sort of principal personage colored with the harsh

crudity of foreign canvasses and screen paintings.

“What is that?” asked M. Leblanc.

Jondrette exclaimed:—

“A painting by a master, a picture of great value, my benefactor! I am

as much attached to it as I am to my two daughters; it recalls

souvenirs to me! But I have told you, and I will not take it back, that

I am so wretched that I will part with it.”

Either by chance, or because he had begun to feel a dawning uneasiness,

M. Leblanc’s glance returned to the bottom of the room as he examined

the picture.

There were now four men, three seated on the bed, one standing near the

door-post, all four with bare arms and motionless, with faces smeared

with black. One of those on the bed was leaning against the wall, with

closed eyes, and it might have been supposed that he was asleep. He was

old; his white hair contrasting with his blackened face produced a

horrible effect. The other two seemed to be young; one wore a beard,

the other wore his hair long. None of them had on shoes; those who did

not wear socks were barefooted.

Jondrette noticed that M. Leblanc’s eye was fixed on these men.

“They are friends. They are neighbors,” said he. “Their faces are black

because they work in charcoal. They are chimney-builders. Don’t trouble

yourself about them, my benefactor, but buy my picture. Have pity on my

misery. I will not ask you much for it. How much do you think it is

worth?”

“Well,” said M. Leblanc, looking Jondrette full in the eye, and with

the manner of a man who is on his guard, “it is some signboard for a

tavern, and is worth about three francs.”

Jondrette replied sweetly:—

“Have you your pocket-book with you? I should be satisfied with a

thousand crowns.”

M. Leblanc sprang up, placed his back against the wall, and cast a

rapid glance around the room. He had Jondrette on his left, on the side

next the window, and the Jondrette woman and the four men on his right,

on the side next the door. The four men did not stir, and did not even

seem to be looking on.

Jondrette had again begun to speak in a plaintive tone, with so vague

an eye, and so lamentable an intonation, that M. Leblanc might have

supposed that what he had before him was a man who had simply gone mad

with misery.

“If you do not buy my picture, my dear benefactor,” said Jondrette, “I

shall be left without resources; there will be nothing left for me but

to throw myself into the river. When I think that I wanted to have my

two girls taught the middle-class paper-box trade, the making of boxes

for New Year’s gifts! Well! A table with a board at the end to keep the

glasses from falling off is required, then a special stove is needed, a

pot with three compartments for the different degrees of strength of

the paste, according as it is to be used for wood, paper, or stuff, a

paring-knife to cut the cardboard, a mould to adjust it, a hammer to

nail the steels, pincers, how the devil do I know what all? And all

that in order to earn four sous a day! And you have to work fourteen

hours a day! And each box passes through the workwoman’s hands thirteen

times! And you can’t wet the paper! And you mustn’t spot anything! And

you must keep the paste hot. The devil, I tell you! Four sous a day!

How do you suppose a man is to live?”

As he spoke, Jondrette did not look at M. Leblanc, who was observing

him. M. Leblanc’s eye was fixed on Jondrette, and Jondrette’s eye was

fixed on the door. Marius’ eager attention was transferred from one to

the other. M. Leblanc seemed to be asking himself: “Is this man an

idiot?” Jondrette repeated two or three distinct times, with all manner

of varying inflections of the whining and supplicating order: “There is

nothing left for me but to throw myself into the river! I went down

three steps at the side of the bridge of Austerlitz the other day for

that purpose.”

All at once his dull eyes lighted up with a hideous flash; the little

man drew himself up and became terrible, took a step toward M. Leblanc

and cried in a voice of thunder: “That has nothing to do with the

question! Do you know me?”

CHAPTER XX—THE TRAP

The door of the garret had just opened abruptly, and allowed a view of

three men clad in blue linen blouses, and masked with masks of black

paper. The first was thin, and had a long, iron-tipped cudgel; the

second, who was a sort of colossus, carried, by the middle of the

handle, with the blade downward, a butcher’s pole-axe for slaughtering

cattle. The third, a man with thick-set shoulders, not so slender as

the first, held in his hand an enormous key stolen from the door of

some prison.

It appeared that the arrival of these men was what Jondrette had been

waiting for. A rapid dialogue ensued between him and the man with the

cudgel, the thin one.

“Is everything ready?” said Jondrette.

“Yes,” replied the thin man.

“Where is Montparnasse?”

“The young principal actor stopped to chat with your girl.”

“Which?”

“The eldest.”

“Is there a carriage at the door?”

“Yes.”

“Is the team harnessed?”

“Yes.”

“With two good horses?”

“Excellent.”

“Is it waiting where I ordered?”

“Yes.”

“Good,” said Jondrette.

M. Leblanc was very pale. He was scrutinizing everything around him in

the den, like a man who understands what he has fallen into, and his

head, directed in turn toward all the heads which surrounded him, moved

on his neck with an astonished and attentive slowness, but there was

nothing in his air which resembled fear. He had improvised an

intrenchment out of the table; and the man, who but an instant

previously, had borne merely the appearance of a kindly old man, had

suddenly become a sort of athlete, and placed his robust fist on the

back of his chair, with a formidable and surprising gesture.

This old man, who was so firm and so brave in the presence of such a

danger, seemed to possess one of those natures which are as courageous

as they are kind, both easily and simply. The father of a woman whom we

love is never a stranger to us. Marius felt proud of that unknown man.

Three of the men, of whom Jondrette had said: “They are

chimney-builders,” had armed themselves from the pile of old iron, one

with a heavy pair of shears, the second with weighing-tongs, the third

with a hammer, and had placed themselves across the entrance without

uttering a syllable. The old man had remained on the bed, and had

merely opened his eyes. The Jondrette woman had seated herself beside

him.

Marius decided that in a few seconds more the moment for intervention

would arrive, and he raised his right hand towards the ceiling, in the

direction of the corridor, in readiness to discharge his pistol.

Jondrette having terminated his colloquy with the man with the cudgel,

turned once more to M. Leblanc, and repeated his question, accompanying

it with that low, repressed, and terrible laugh which was peculiar to

him:—

“So you do not recognize me?”

M. Leblanc looked him full in the face, and replied:—

“No.”

Then Jondrette advanced to the table. He leaned across the candle,

crossing his arms, putting his angular and ferocious jaw close to M.

Leblanc’s calm face, and advancing as far as possible without forcing

M. Leblanc to retreat, and, in this posture of a wild beast who is

about to bite, he exclaimed:—

“My name is not Fabantou, my name is not Jondrette, my name is

Thénardier. I am the inn-keeper of Montfermeil! Do you understand?

Thénardier! Now do you know me?”

An almost imperceptible flush crossed M. Leblanc’s brow, and he replied

with a voice which neither trembled nor rose above its ordinary level,

with his accustomed placidity:—

“No more than before.”

Marius did not hear this reply. Any one who had seen him at that moment

through the darkness would have perceived that he was haggard, stupid,

thunder-struck. At the moment when Jondrette said: “My name is

Thénardier,” Marius had trembled in every limb, and had leaned against

the wall, as though he felt the cold of a steel blade through his

heart. Then his right arm, all ready to discharge the signal shot,

dropped slowly, and at the moment when Jondrette repeated, “Thénardier,

do you understand?” Marius’s faltering fingers had come near letting

the pistol fall. Jondrette, by revealing his identity, had not moved M.

Leblanc, but he had quite upset Marius. That name of Thénardier, with

which M. Leblanc did not seem to be acquainted, Marius knew well. Let

the reader recall what that name meant to him! That name he had worn on

his heart, inscribed in his father’s testament! He bore it at the

bottom of his mind, in the depths of his memory, in that sacred

injunction: “A certain Thénardier saved my life. If my son encounters

him, he will do him all the good that lies in his power.” That name, it

will be remembered, was one of the pieties of his soul; he mingled it

with the name of his father in his worship. What! This man was that

Thénardier, that inn-keeper of Montfermeil whom he had so long and so

vainly sought! He had found him at last, and how? His father’s saviour

was a ruffian! That man, to whose service Marius was burning to devote

himself, was a monster! That liberator of Colonel Pontmercy was on the

point of committing a crime whose scope Marius did not, as yet, clearly

comprehend, but which resembled an assassination! And against whom,

great God! what a fatality! What a bitter mockery of fate! His father

had commanded him from the depths of his coffin to do all the good in

his power to this Thénardier, and for four years Marius had cherished

no other thought than to acquit this debt of his father’s, and at the

moment when he was on the eve of having a brigand seized in the very

act of crime by justice, destiny cried to him: “This is Thénardier!” He

could at last repay this man for his father’s life, saved amid a

hail-storm of grape-shot on the heroic field of Waterloo, and repay it

with the scaffold! He had sworn to himself that if ever he found that

Thénardier, he would address him only by throwing himself at his feet;

and now he actually had found him, but it was only to deliver him over

to the executioner! His father said to him: “Succor Thénardier!” And he

replied to that adored and sainted voice by crushing Thénardier! He was

about to offer to his father in his grave the spectacle of that man who

had torn him from death at the peril of his own life, executed on the

Place Saint-Jacques through the means of his son, of that Marius to

whom he had entrusted that man by his will! And what a mockery to have

so long worn on his breast his father’s last commands, written in his

own hand, only to act in so horribly contrary a sense! But, on the

other hand, now look on that trap and not prevent it! Condemn the

victim and to spare the assassin! Could one be held to any gratitude

towards so miserable a wretch? All the ideas which Marius had cherished

for the last four years were pierced through and through, as it were,

by this unforeseen blow.

He shuddered. Everything depended on him. Unknown to themselves, he

held in his hand all those beings who were moving about there before

his eyes. If he fired his pistol, M. Leblanc was saved, and Thénardier

lost; if he did not fire, M. Leblanc would be sacrificed, and, who

knows? Thénardier would escape. Should he dash down the one or allow

the other to fall? Remorse awaited him in either case.

What was he to do? What should he choose? Be false to the most

imperious souvenirs, to all those solemn vows to himself, to the most

sacred duty, to the most venerated text! Should he ignore his father’s

testament, or allow the perpetration of a crime! On the one hand, it

seemed to him that he heard “his Ursule” supplicating for her father

and on the other, the colonel commending Thénardier to his care. He

felt that he was going mad. His knees gave way beneath him. And he had

not even the time for deliberation, so great was the fury with which

the scene before his eyes was hastening to its catastrophe. It was like

a whirlwind of which he had thought himself the master, and which was

now sweeping him away. He was on the verge of swooning.

In the meantime, Thénardier, whom we shall henceforth call by no other

name, was pacing up and down in front of the table in a sort of frenzy

and wild triumph.

He seized the candle in his fist, and set it on the chimney-piece with

so violent a bang that the wick came near being extinguished, and the

tallow bespattered the wall.

Then he turned to M. Leblanc with a horrible look, and spit out these

words:—

“Done for! Smoked brown! Cooked! Spitchcocked!”

And again he began to march back and forth, in full eruption.

“Ah!” he cried, “so I’ve found you again at last, Mister

philanthropist! Mister threadbare millionnaire! Mister giver of dolls!

you old ninny! Ah! so you don’t recognize me! No, it wasn’t you who

came to Montfermeil, to my inn, eight years ago, on Christmas eve,

1823! It wasn’t you who carried off that Fantine’s child from me! The

Lark! It wasn’t you who had a yellow great-coat! No! Nor a package of

duds in your hand, as you had this morning here! Say, wife, it seems to

be his mania to carry packets of woollen stockings into houses! Old

charity monger, get out with you! Are you a hosier, Mister

millionnaire? You give away your stock in trade to the poor, holy man!

What bosh! merry Andrew! Ah! and you don’t recognize me? Well, I

recognize you, that I do! I recognized you the very moment you poked

your snout in here. Ah! you’ll find out presently, that it isn’t all

roses to thrust yourself in that fashion into people’s houses, under

the pretext that they are taverns, in wretched clothes, with the air of

a poor man, to whom one would give a sou, to deceive persons, to play

the generous, to take away their means of livelihood, and to make

threats in the woods, and you can’t call things quits because

afterwards, when people are ruined, you bring a coat that is too large,

and two miserable hospital blankets, you old blackguard, you

child-stealer!”

He paused, and seemed to be talking to himself for a moment. One would

have said that his wrath had fallen into some hole, like the Rhone;

then, as though he were concluding aloud the things which he had been

saying to himself in a whisper, he smote the table with his fist, and

shouted:—

“And with his goody-goody air!”

And, apostrophizing M. Leblanc:—

“Parbleu! You made game of me in the past! You are the cause of all my

misfortunes! For fifteen hundred francs you got a girl whom I had, and

who certainly belonged to rich people, and who had already brought in a

great deal of money, and from whom I might have extracted enough to

live on all my life! A girl who would have made up to me for everything

that I lost in that vile cook-shop, where there was nothing but one

continual row, and where, like a fool, I ate up my last farthing! Oh! I

wish all the wine folks drank in my house had been poison to those who

drank it! Well, never mind! Say, now! You must have thought me

ridiculous when you went off with the Lark! You had your cudgel in the

forest. You were the stronger. Revenge. I’m the one to hold the trumps

to-day! You’re in a sorry case, my good fellow! Oh, but I can laugh!

Really, I laugh! Didn’t he fall into the trap! I told him that I was an

actor, that my name was Fabantou, that I had played comedy with

Mamselle Mars, with Mamselle Muche, that my landlord insisted on being

paid tomorrow, the 4th of February, and he didn’t even notice that the

8th of January, and not the 4th of February is the time when the

quarter runs out! Absurd idiot! And the four miserable Philippes which

he has brought me! Scoundrel! He hadn’t the heart even to go as high as

a hundred francs! And how he swallowed my platitudes! That did amuse

me. I said to myself: ‘Blockhead! Come, I’ve got you! I lick your paws

this morning, but I’ll gnaw your heart this evening!’”

Thénardier paused. He was out of breath. His little, narrow chest

panted like a forge bellows. His eyes were full of the ignoble

happiness of a feeble, cruel, and cowardly creature, which finds that

it can, at last, harass what it has feared, and insult what it has

flattered, the joy of a dwarf who should be able to set his heel on the

head of Goliath, the joy of a jackal which is beginning to rend a sick

bull, so nearly dead that he can no longer defend himself, but

sufficiently alive to suffer still.

M. Leblanc did not interrupt him, but said to him when he paused:—

“I do not know what you mean to say. You are mistaken in me. I am a

very poor man, and anything but a millionnaire. I do not know you. You

are mistaking me for some other person.”

“Ah!” roared Thénardier hoarsely, “a pretty lie! You stick to that

pleasantry, do you! You’re floundering, my old buck! Ah! You don’t

remember! You don’t see who I am?”

“Excuse me, sir,” said M. Leblanc with a politeness of accent, which at

that moment seemed peculiarly strange and powerful, “I see that you are

a villain!”

Who has not remarked the fact that odious creatures possess a

susceptibility of their own, that monsters are ticklish! At this word

“villain,” the female Thénardier sprang from the bed, Thénardier

grasped his chair as though he were about to crush it in his hands.

“Don’t you stir!” he shouted to his wife; and, turning to M. Leblanc:—

“Villain! Yes, I know that you call us that, you rich gentlemen! Stop!

it’s true that I became bankrupt, that I am in hiding, that I have no

bread, that I have not a single sou, that I am a villain! It’s three

days since I have had anything to eat, so I’m a villain! Ah! you folks

warm your feet, you have Sakoski boots, you have wadded great-coats,

like archbishops, you lodge on the first floor in houses that have

porters, you eat truffles, you eat asparagus at forty francs the bunch

in the month of January, and green peas, you gorge yourselves, and when

you want to know whether it is cold, you look in the papers to see what

the engineer Chevalier’s thermometer says about it. We, it is we who

are thermometers. We don’t need to go out and look on the quay at the

corner of the Tour de l’Horologe, to find out the number of degrees of

cold; we feel our blood congealing in our veins, and the ice forming

round our hearts, and we say: ‘There is no God!’ And you come to our

caverns, yes our caverns, for the purpose of calling us villains! But

we’ll devour you! But we’ll devour you, poor little things! Just see

here, Mister millionnaire: I have been a solid man, I have held a

license, I have been an elector, I am a bourgeois, that I am! And it’s

quite possible that you are not!”

Here Thénardier took a step towards the men who stood near the door,

and added with a shudder:—

“When I think that he has dared to come here and talk to me like a

cobbler!”

Then addressing M. Leblanc with a fresh outburst of frenzy:—

“And listen to this also, Mister philanthropist! I’m not a suspicious

character, not a bit of it! I’m not a man whose name nobody knows, and

who comes and abducts children from houses! I’m an old French soldier,

I ought to have been decorated! I was at Waterloo, so I was! And in the

battle I saved a general called the Comte of I don’t know what. He told

me his name, but his beastly voice was so weak that I didn’t hear. All

I caught was Merci [thanks]. I’d rather have had his name than his

thanks. That would have helped me to find him again. The picture that

you see here, and which was painted by David at Bruqueselles,—do you

know what it represents? It represents me. David wished to immortalize

that feat of prowess. I have that general on my back, and I am carrying

him through the grape-shot. There’s the history of it! That general

never did a single thing for me; he was no better than the rest! But

nonetheless, I saved his life at the risk of my own, and I have the

certificate of the fact in my pocket! I am a soldier of Waterloo, by

all the furies! And now that I have had the goodness to tell you all

this, let’s have an end of it. I want money, I want a deal of money, I

must have an enormous lot of money, or I’ll exterminate you, by the

thunder of the good God!”

Marius had regained some measure of control over his anguish, and was

listening. The last possibility of doubt had just vanished. It

certainly was the Thénardier of the will. Marius shuddered at that

reproach of ingratitude directed against his father, and which he was

on the point of so fatally justifying. His perplexity was redoubled.

Moreover, there was in all these words of Thénardier, in his accent, in

his gesture, in his glance which darted flames at every word, there

was, in this explosion of an evil nature disclosing everything, in that

mixture of braggadocio and abjectness, of pride and pettiness, of rage

and folly, in that chaos of real griefs and false sentiments, in that

immodesty of a malicious man tasting the voluptuous delights of

violence, in that shameless nudity of a repulsive soul, in that

conflagration of all sufferings combined with all hatreds, something

which was as hideous as evil, and as heart-rending as the truth.

The picture of the master, the painting by David which he had proposed

that M. Leblanc should purchase, was nothing else, as the reader has

divined, than the sign of his tavern painted, as it will be remembered,

by himself, the only relic which he had preserved from his shipwreck at

Montfermeil.

As he had ceased to intercept Marius’ visual ray, Marius could examine

this thing, and in the daub, he actually did recognize a battle, a

background of smoke, and a man carrying another man. It was the group

composed of Pontmercy and Thénardier; the sergeant the rescuer, the

colonel rescued. Marius was like a drunken man; this picture restored

his father to life in some sort; it was no longer the signboard of the

wine-shop at Montfermeil, it was a resurrection; a tomb had yawned, a

phantom had risen there. Marius heard his heart beating in his temples,

he had the cannon of Waterloo in his ears, his bleeding father, vaguely

depicted on that sinister panel terrified him, and it seemed to him

that the misshapen spectre was gazing intently at him.

When Thénardier had recovered his breath, he turned his bloodshot eyes

on M. Leblanc, and said to him in a low, curt voice:—

“What have you to say before we put the handcuffs on you?”

M. Leblanc held his peace.

In the midst of this silence, a cracked voice launched this lugubrious

sarcasm from the corridor:—

“If there’s any wood to be split, I’m there!”

It was the man with the axe, who was growing merry.

At the same moment, an enormous, bristling, and clayey face made its

appearance at the door, with a hideous laugh which exhibited not teeth,

but fangs.

It was the face of the man with the butcher’s axe.

“Why have you taken off your mask?” cried Thénardier in a rage.

“For fun,” retorted the man.

For the last few minutes M. Leblanc had appeared to be watching and

following all the movements of Thénardier, who, blinded and dazzled by

his own rage, was stalking to and fro in the den with full confidence

that the door was guarded, and of holding an unarmed man fast, he being

armed himself, of being nine against one, supposing that the female

Thénardier counted for but one man.

During his address to the man with the pole-axe, he had turned his back

to M. Leblanc.

M. Leblanc seized this moment, overturned the chair with his foot and

the table with his fist, and with one bound, with prodigious agility,

before Thénardier had time to turn round, he had reached the window. To

open it, to scale the frame, to bestride it, was the work of a second

only. He was half out when six robust fists seized him and dragged him

back energetically into the hovel. These were the three

“chimney-builders,” who had flung themselves upon him. At the same time

the Thénardier woman had wound her hands in his hair.

At the trampling which ensued, the other ruffians rushed up from the

corridor. The old man on the bed, who seemed under the influence of

wine, descended from the pallet and came reeling up, with a

stone-breaker’s hammer in his hand.

One of the “chimney-builders,” whose smirched face was lighted up by

the candle, and in whom Marius recognized, in spite of his daubing,

Panchaud, alias Printanier, alias Bigrenaille, lifted above M.

Leblanc’s head a sort of bludgeon made of two balls of lead, at the two

ends of a bar of iron.

Marius could not resist this sight. “My father,” he thought, “forgive

me!”

And his finger sought the trigger of his pistol.

The shot was on the point of being discharged when Thénardier’s voice

shouted:—

“Don’t harm him!”

This desperate attempt of the victim, far from exasperating Thénardier,

had calmed him. There existed in him two men, the ferocious man and the

adroit man. Up to that moment, in the excess of his triumph in the

presence of the prey which had been brought down, and which did not

stir, the ferocious man had prevailed; when the victim struggled and

tried to resist, the adroit man reappeared and took the upper hand.

“Don’t hurt him!” he repeated, and without suspecting it, his first

success was to arrest the pistol in the act of being discharged, and to

paralyze Marius, in whose opinion the urgency of the case disappeared,

and who, in the face of this new phase, saw no inconvenience in waiting

a while longer.

Who knows whether some chance would not arise which would deliver him

from the horrible alternative of allowing Ursule’s father to perish, or

of destroying the colonel’s saviour?

A herculean struggle had begun. With one blow full in the chest, M.

Leblanc had sent the old man tumbling, rolling in the middle of the

room, then with two backward sweeps of his hand he had overthrown two

more assailants, and he held one under each of his knees; the wretches

were rattling in the throat beneath this pressure as under a granite

millstone; but the other four had seized the formidable old man by both

arms and the back of his neck, and were holding him doubled up over the

two “chimney-builders” on the floor.

Thus, the master of some and mastered by the rest, crushing those

beneath him and stifling under those on top of him, endeavoring in vain

to shake off all the efforts which were heaped upon him, M. Leblanc

disappeared under the horrible group of ruffians like the wild boar

beneath a howling pile of dogs and hounds.

They succeeded in overthrowing him upon the bed nearest the window, and

there they held him in awe. The Thénardier woman had not released her

clutch on his hair.

“Don’t you mix yourself up in this affair,” said Thénardier. “You’ll

tear your shawl.”

The Thénardier obeyed, as the female wolf obeys the male wolf, with a

growl.

“Now,” said Thénardier, “search him, you other fellows!”

M. Leblanc seemed to have renounced the idea of resistance.

They searched him.

He had nothing on his person except a leather purse containing six

francs, and his handkerchief.

Thénardier put the handkerchief into his own pocket.

“What! No pocket-book?” he demanded.

“No, nor watch,” replied one of the “chimney-builders.”

“Never mind,” murmured the masked man who carried the big key, in the

voice of a ventriloquist, “he’s a tough old fellow.”

Thénardier went to the corner near the door, picked up a bundle of

ropes and threw them at the men.

“Tie him to the leg of the bed,” said he.

And, catching sight of the old man who had been stretched across the

room by the blow from M. Leblanc’s fist, and who made no movement, he

added:—

“Is Boulatruelle dead?”

“No,” replied Bigrenaille, “he’s drunk.”

“Sweep him into a corner,” said Thénardier.

Two of the “chimney-builders” pushed the drunken man into the corner

near the heap of old iron with their feet.

“Babet,” said Thénardier in a low tone to the man with the cudgel, “why

did you bring so many; they were not needed.”

“What can you do?” replied the man with the cudgel, “they all wanted to

be in it. This is a bad season. There’s no business going on.”

The pallet on which M. Leblanc had been thrown was a sort of hospital

bed, elevated on four coarse wooden legs, roughly hewn.

M. Leblanc let them take their own course.

The ruffians bound him securely, in an upright attitude, with his feet

on the ground at the head of the bed, the end which was most remote

from the window, and nearest to the fireplace.

When the last knot had been tied, Thénardier took a chair and seated

himself almost facing M. Leblanc.

Thénardier no longer looked like himself; in the course of a few

moments his face had passed from unbridled violence to tranquil and

cunning sweetness.

Marius found it difficult to recognize in that polished smile of a man

in official life the almost bestial mouth which had been foaming but a

moment before; he gazed with amazement on that fantastic and alarming

metamorphosis, and he felt as a man might feel who should behold a

tiger converted into a lawyer.

“Monsieur—” said Thénardier.

And dismissing with a gesture the ruffians who still kept their hands

on M. Leblanc:—

“Stand off a little, and let me have a talk with the gentleman.”

All retired towards the door.

He went on:—

“Monsieur, you did wrong to try to jump out of the window. You might

have broken your leg. Now, if you will permit me, we will converse

quietly. In the first place, I must communicate to you an observation

which I have made which is, that you have not uttered the faintest

cry.”

Thénardier was right, this detail was correct, although it had escaped

Marius in his agitation. M. Leblanc had barely pronounced a few words,

without raising his voice, and even during his struggle with the six

ruffians near the window he had preserved the most profound and

singular silence.

Thénardier continued:—

“Mon Dieu! You might have shouted ‘stop thief’ a bit, and I should not

have thought it improper. ‘Murder!’ That, too, is said occasionally,

and, so far as I am concerned, I should not have taken it in bad part.

It is very natural that you should make a little row when you find

yourself with persons who don’t inspire you with sufficient confidence.

You might have done that, and no one would have troubled you on that

account. You would not even have been gagged. And I will tell you why.

This room is very private. That’s its only recommendation, but it has

that in its favor. You might fire off a mortar and it would produce

about as much noise at the nearest police station as the snores of a

drunken man. Here a cannon would make a \_boum\_, and the thunder would

make a \_pouf\_. It’s a handy lodging. But, in short, you did not shout,

and it is better so. I present you my compliments, and I will tell you

the conclusion that I draw from that fact: My dear sir, when a man

shouts, who comes? The police. And after the police? Justice. Well! You

have not made an outcry; that is because you don’t care to have the

police and the courts come in any more than we do. It is because,—I

have long suspected it,—you have some interest in hiding something. On

our side we have the same interest. So we can come to an

understanding.”

As he spoke thus, it seemed as though Thénardier, who kept his eyes

fixed on M. Leblanc, were trying to plunge the sharp points which

darted from the pupils into the very conscience of his prisoner.

Moreover, his language, which was stamped with a sort of moderated,

subdued insolence and crafty insolence, was reserved and almost choice,

and in that rascal, who had been nothing but a robber a short time

previously, one now felt “the man who had studied for the priesthood.”

The silence preserved by the prisoner, that precaution which had been

carried to the point of forgetting all anxiety for his own life, that

resistance opposed to the first impulse of nature, which is to utter a

cry, all this, it must be confessed, now that his attention had been

called to it, troubled Marius, and affected him with painful

astonishment.

Thénardier’s well-grounded observation still further obscured for

Marius the dense mystery which enveloped that grave and singular person

on whom Courfeyrac had bestowed the sobriquet of Monsieur Leblanc.

But whoever he was, bound with ropes, surrounded with executioners,

half plunged, so to speak, in a grave which was closing in upon him to

the extent of a degree with every moment that passed, in the presence

of Thénardier’s wrath, as in the presence of his sweetness, this man

remained impassive; and Marius could not refrain from admiring at such

a moment the superbly melancholy visage.

Here, evidently, was a soul which was inaccessible to terror, and which

did not know the meaning of despair. Here was one of those men who

command amazement in desperate circumstances. Extreme as was the

crisis, inevitable as was the catastrophe, there was nothing here of

the agony of the drowning man, who opens his horror-filled eyes under

the water.

Thénardier rose in an unpretending manner, went to the fireplace,

shoved aside the screen, which he leaned against the neighboring

pallet, and thus unmasked the brazier full of glowing coals, in which

the prisoner could plainly see the chisel white-hot and spotted here

and there with tiny scarlet stars.

Then Thénardier returned to his seat beside M. Leblanc.

“I continue,” said he. “We can come to an understanding. Let us arrange

this matter in an amicable way. I was wrong to lose my temper just now,

I don’t know what I was thinking of, I went a great deal too far, I

said extravagant things. For example, because you are a millionnaire, I

told you that I exacted money, a lot of money, a deal of money. That

would not be reasonable. Mon Dieu, in spite of your riches, you have

expenses of your own—who has not? I don’t want to ruin you, I am not a

greedy fellow, after all. I am not one of those people who, because

they have the advantage of the position, profit by the fact to make

themselves ridiculous. Why, I’m taking things into consideration and

making a sacrifice on my side. I only want two hundred thousand

francs.”

M. Leblanc uttered not a word.

Thénardier went on:—

“You see that I put not a little water in my wine; I’m very moderate. I

don’t know the state of your fortune, but I do know that you don’t

stick at money, and a benevolent man like yourself can certainly give

two hundred thousand francs to the father of a family who is out of

luck. Certainly, you are reasonable, too; you haven’t imagined that I

should take all the trouble I have to-day and organized this affair

this evening, which has been labor well bestowed, in the opinion of

these gentlemen, merely to wind up by asking you for enough to go and

drink red wine at fifteen sous and eat veal at Desnoyer’s. Two hundred

thousand francs—it’s surely worth all that. This trifle once out of

your pocket, I guarantee you that that’s the end of the matter, and

that you have no further demands to fear. You will say to me: ‘But I

haven’t two hundred thousand francs about me.’ Oh! I’m not

extortionate. I don’t demand that. I only ask one thing of you. Have

the goodness to write what I am about to dictate to you.”

Here Thénardier paused; then he added, emphasizing his words, and

casting a smile in the direction of the brazier:—

“I warn you that I shall not admit that you don’t know how to write.”

A grand inquisitor might have envied that smile.

Thénardier pushed the table close to M. Leblanc, and took an inkstand,

a pen, and a sheet of paper from the drawer which he left half open,

and in which gleamed the long blade of the knife.

He placed the sheet of paper before M. Leblanc.

“Write,” said he.

The prisoner spoke at last.

“How do you expect me to write? I am bound.”

“That’s true, excuse me!” ejaculated Thénardier, “you are quite right.”

And turning to Bigrenaille:—

“Untie the gentleman’s right arm.”

Panchaud, alias Printanier, alias Bigrenaille, executed Thénardier’s

order.

When the prisoner’s right arm was free, Thénardier dipped the pen in

the ink and presented it to him.

“Understand thoroughly, sir, that you are in our power, at our

discretion, that no human power can get you out of this, and that we

shall be really grieved if we are forced to proceed to disagreeable

extremities. I know neither your name, nor your address, but I warn

you, that you will remain bound until the person charged with carrying

the letter which you are about to write shall have returned. Now, be so

good as to write.”

“What?” demanded the prisoner.

“I will dictate.”

M. Leblanc took the pen.

Thénardier began to dictate:—

“My daughter—”

The prisoner shuddered, and raised his eyes to Thénardier.

“Put down ‘My dear daughter’—” said Thénardier.

M. Leblanc obeyed.

Thénardier continued:—

“Come instantly—”

He paused:—

“You address her as \_thou\_, do you not?”

“Who?” asked M. Leblanc.

“Parbleu!” cried Thénardier, “the little one, the Lark.”

M. Leblanc replied without the slightest apparent emotion:—

“I do not know what you mean.”

“Go on, nevertheless,” ejaculated Thénardier, and he continued to

dictate:—

“Come immediately, I am in absolute need of thee. The person who will

deliver this note to thee is instructed to conduct thee to me. I am

waiting for thee. Come with confidence.”

M. Leblanc had written the whole of this.

Thénardier resumed:—

“Ah! erase ‘come with confidence’; that might lead her to suppose that

everything was not as it should be, and that distrust is possible.”

M. Leblanc erased the three words.

“Now,” pursued Thénardier, “sign it. What’s your name?”

The prisoner laid down the pen and demanded:—

“For whom is this letter?”

“You know well,” retorted Thénardier, “for the little one I just told

you so.”

It was evident that Thénardier avoided naming the young girl in

question. He said “the Lark,” he said “the little one,” but he did not

pronounce her name—the precaution of a clever man guarding his secret

from his accomplices. To mention the name was to deliver the whole

“affair” into their hands, and to tell them more about it than there

was any need of their knowing.

He went on:—

“Sign. What is your name?”

“Urbain Fabre,” said the prisoner.

Thénardier, with the movement of a cat, dashed his hand into his pocket

and drew out the handkerchief which had been seized on M. Leblanc. He

looked for the mark on it, and held it close to the candle.

“U. F. That’s it. Urbain Fabre. Well, sign it U. F.”

The prisoner signed.

“As two hands are required to fold the letter, give it to me, I will

fold it.”

That done, Thénardier resumed:—

“Address it, ‘Mademoiselle Fabre,’ at your house. I know that you live

a long distance from here, near Saint-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas, because you

go to mass there every day, but I don’t know in what street. I see that

you understand your situation. As you have not lied about your name,

you will not lie about your address. Write it yourself.”

The prisoner paused thoughtfully for a moment, then he took the pen and

wrote:—

“Mademoiselle Fabre, at M. Urbain Fabre’s, Rue Saint-Dominique-D’Enfer,

No. 17.”

Thénardier seized the letter with a sort of feverish convulsion.

“Wife!” he cried.

The Thénardier woman hastened to him.

“Here’s the letter. You know what you have to do. There is a carriage

at the door. Set out at once, and return ditto.”

And addressing the man with the meat-axe:—

“Since you have taken off your nose-screen, accompany the mistress. You

will get up behind the fiacre. You know where you left the team?”

“Yes,” said the man.

And depositing his axe in a corner, he followed Madame Thénardier.

As they set off, Thénardier thrust his head through the half-open door,

and shouted into the corridor:—

“Above all things, don’t lose the letter! remember that you carry two

hundred thousand francs with you!”

The Thénardier’s hoarse voice replied:—

“Be easy. I have it in my bosom.”

A minute had not elapsed, when the sound of the cracking of a whip was

heard, which rapidly retreated and died away.

“Good!” growled Thénardier. “They’re going at a fine pace. At such a

gallop, the bourgeoise will be back inside three-quarters of an hour.”

He drew a chair close to the fireplace, folding his arms, and

presenting his muddy boots to the brazier.

“My feet are cold!” said he.

Only five ruffians now remained in the den with Thénardier and the

prisoner.

These men, through the black masks or paste which covered their faces,

and made of them, at fear’s pleasure, charcoal-burners, negroes, or

demons, had a stupid and gloomy air, and it could be felt that they

perpetrated a crime like a bit of work, tranquilly, without either

wrath or mercy, with a sort of ennui. They were crowded together in one

corner like brutes, and remained silent.

Thénardier warmed his feet.

The prisoner had relapsed into his taciturnity. A sombre calm had

succeeded to the wild uproar which had filled the garret but a few

moments before.

The candle, on which a large “stranger” had formed, cast but a dim

light in the immense hovel, the brazier had grown dull, and all those

monstrous heads cast misshapen shadows on the walls and ceiling.

No sound was audible except the quiet breathing of the old drunken man,

who was fast asleep.

Marius waited in a state of anxiety that was augmented by every trifle.

The enigma was more impenetrable than ever.

Who was this “little one” whom Thénardier had called the Lark? Was she

his “Ursule”? The prisoner had not seemed to be affected by that word,

“the Lark,” and had replied in the most natural manner in the world: “I

do not know what you mean.” On the other hand, the two letters U. F.

were explained; they meant Urbain Fabre; and Ursule was no longer named

Ursule. This was what Marius perceived most clearly of all.

A sort of horrible fascination held him nailed to his post, from which

he was observing and commanding this whole scene. There he stood,

almost incapable of movement or reflection, as though annihilated by

the abominable things viewed at such close quarters. He waited, in the

hope of some incident, no matter of what nature, since he could not

collect his thoughts and did not know upon what course to decide.

“In any case,” he said, “if she is the Lark, I shall see her, for the

Thénardier woman is to bring her hither. That will be the end, and then

I will give my life and my blood if necessary, but I will deliver her!

Nothing shall stop me.”

Nearly half an hour passed in this manner. Thénardier seemed to be

absorbed in gloomy reflections, the prisoner did not stir. Still,

Marius fancied that at intervals, and for the last few moments, he had

heard a faint, dull noise in the direction of the prisoner.

All at once, Thénardier addressed the prisoner:

“By the way, Monsieur Fabre, I might as well say it to you at once.”

These few words appeared to be the beginning of an explanation. Marius

strained his ears.

“My wife will be back shortly, don’t get impatient. I think that the

Lark really is your daughter, and it seems to me quite natural that you

should keep her. Only, listen to me a bit. My wife will go and hunt her

up with your letter. I told my wife to dress herself in the way she

did, so that your young lady might make no difficulty about following

her. They will both enter the carriage with my comrade behind.

Somewhere, outside the barrier, there is a trap harnessed to two very

good horses. Your young lady will be taken to it. She will alight from

the fiacre. My comrade will enter the other vehicle with her, and my

wife will come back here to tell us: ‘It’s done.’ As for the young

lady, no harm will be done to her; the trap will conduct her to a place

where she will be quiet, and just as soon as you have handed over to me

those little two hundred thousand francs, she will be returned to you.

If you have me arrested, my comrade will give a turn of his thumb to

the Lark, that’s all.”

The prisoner uttered not a syllable. After a pause, Thénardier

continued:—

“It’s very simple, as you see. There’ll be no harm done unless you wish

that there should be harm done. I’m telling you how things stand. I

warn you so that you may be prepared.”

He paused: the prisoner did not break the silence, and Thénardier

resumed:—

“As soon as my wife returns and says to me: ‘The Lark is on the way,’

we will release you, and you will be free to go and sleep at home. You

see that our intentions are not evil.”

Terrible images passed through Marius’ mind. What! That young girl whom

they were abducting was not to be brought back? One of those monsters

was to bear her off into the darkness? Whither? And what if it were

she!

It was clear that it was she. Marius felt his heart stop beating.

What was he to do? Discharge the pistol? Place all those scoundrels in

the hands of justice? But the horrible man with the meat-axe would,

nonetheless, be out of reach with the young girl, and Marius reflected

on Thénardier’s words, of which he perceived the bloody significance:

“If you have me arrested, my comrade will give a turn of his thumb to

the Lark.”

Now, it was not alone by the colonel’s testament, it was by his own

love, it was by the peril of the one he loved, that he felt himself

restrained.

This frightful situation, which had already lasted above half an hour,

was changing its aspect every moment.

Marius had sufficient strength of mind to review in succession all the

most heart-breaking conjectures, seeking hope and finding none.

The tumult of his thoughts contrasted with the funereal silence of the

den.

In the midst of this silence, the door at the bottom of the staircase

was heard to open and shut again.

The prisoner made a movement in his bonds.

“Here’s the bourgeoise,” said Thénardier.

He had hardly uttered the words, when the Thénardier woman did in fact

rush hastily into the room, red, panting, breathless, with flaming

eyes, and cried, as she smote her huge hands on her thighs

simultaneously:—

“False address!”

The ruffian who had gone with her made his appearance behind her and

picked up his axe again.

She resumed:—

“Nobody there! Rue Saint-Dominique, No. 17, no Monsieur Urbain Fabre!

They know not what it means!”

She paused, choking, then went on:—

“Monsieur Thénardier! That old fellow has duped you! You are too good,

you see! If it had been me, I’d have chopped the beast in four quarters

to begin with! And if he had acted ugly, I’d have boiled him alive! He

would have been obliged to speak, and say where the girl is, and where

he keeps his shiners! That’s the way I should have managed matters!

People are perfectly right when they say that men are a deal stupider

than women! Nobody at No. 17. It’s nothing but a big carriage gate! No

Monsieur Fabre in the Rue Saint-Dominique! And after all that racing

and fee to the coachman and all! I spoke to both the porter and the

portress, a fine, stout woman, and they know nothing about him!”

Marius breathed freely once more.

She, Ursule or the Lark, he no longer knew what to call her, was safe.

While his exasperated wife vociferated, Thénardier had seated himself

on the table.

For several minutes he uttered not a word, but swung his right foot,

which hung down, and stared at the brazier with an air of savage

reverie.

Finally, he said to the prisoner, with a slow and singularly ferocious

tone:

“A false address? What did you expect to gain by that?”

“To gain time!” cried the prisoner in a thundering voice, and at the

same instant he shook off his bonds; they were cut. The prisoner was

only attached to the bed now by one leg.

Before the seven men had time to collect their senses and dash forward,

he had bent down into the fireplace, had stretched out his hand to the

brazier, and had then straightened himself up again, and now

Thénardier, the female Thénardier, and the ruffians, huddled in

amazement at the extremity of the hovel, stared at him in stupefaction,

as almost free and in a formidable attitude, he brandished above his

head the red-hot chisel, which emitted a threatening glow.

The judicial examination to which the ambush in the Gorbeau house

eventually gave rise, established the fact that a large sou piece, cut

and worked in a peculiar fashion, was found in the garret, when the

police made their descent on it. This sou piece was one of those

marvels of industry, which are engendered by the patience of the

galleys in the shadows and for the shadows, marvels which are nothing

else than instruments of escape. These hideous and delicate products of

wonderful art are to jewellers’ work what the metaphors of slang are to

poetry. There are Benvenuto Cellinis in the galleys, just as there are

Villons in language. The unhappy wretch who aspires to deliverance

finds means sometimes without tools, sometimes with a common

wooden-handled knife, to saw a sou into two thin plates, to hollow out

these plates without affecting the coinage stamp, and to make a furrow

on the edge of the sou in such a manner that the plates will adhere

again. This can be screwed together and unscrewed at will; it is a box.

In this box he hides a watch-spring, and this watch-spring, properly

handled, cuts good-sized chains and bars of iron. The unfortunate

convict is supposed to possess merely a sou; not at all, he possesses

liberty. It was a large sou of this sort which, during the subsequent

search of the police, was found under the bed near the window. They

also found a tiny saw of blue steel which would fit the sou.

It is probable that the prisoner had this sou piece on his person at

the moment when the ruffians searched him, that he contrived to conceal

it in his hand, and that afterward, having his right hand free, he

unscrewed it, and used it as a saw to cut the cords which fastened him,

which would explain the faint noise and almost imperceptible movements

which Marius had observed.

As he had not been able to bend down, for fear of betraying himself, he

had not cut the bonds of his left leg.

The ruffians had recovered from their first surprise.

“Be easy,” said Bigrenaille to Thénardier. “He still holds by one leg,

and he can’t get away. I’ll answer for that. I tied that paw for him.”

In the meanwhile, the prisoner had begun to speak:—

“You are wretches, but my life is not worth the trouble of defending

it. When you think that you can make me speak, that you can make me

write what I do not choose to write, that you can make me say what I do

not choose to say—”

He stripped up his left sleeve, and added:—

“See here.”

At the same moment he extended his arm, and laid the glowing chisel

which he held in his left hand by its wooden handle on his bare flesh.

The crackling of the burning flesh became audible, and the odor

peculiar to chambers of torture filled the hovel.

[Illustration: Red Hot Chisel]

Marius reeled in utter horror, the very ruffians shuddered, hardly a

muscle of the old man’s face contracted, and while the red-hot iron

sank into the smoking wound, impassive and almost august, he fixed on

Thénardier his beautiful glance, in which there was no hatred, and

where suffering vanished in serene majesty.

With grand and lofty natures, the revolts of the flesh and the senses

when subjected to physical suffering cause the soul to spring forth,

and make it appear on the brow, just as rebellions among the soldiery

force the captain to show himself.

“Wretches!” said he, “have no more fear of me than I have for you!”

And, tearing the chisel from the wound, he hurled it through the

window, which had been left open; the horrible, glowing tool

disappeared into the night, whirling as it flew, and fell far away on

the snow.

The prisoner resumed:—

“Do what you please with me.” He was disarmed.

“Seize him!” said Thénardier.

Two of the ruffians laid their hands on his shoulder, and the masked

man with the ventriloquist’s voice took up his station in front of him,

ready to smash his skull at the slightest movement.

At the same time, Marius heard below him, at the base of the partition,

but so near that he could not see who was speaking, this colloquy

conducted in a low tone:—

“There is only one thing left to do.”

“Cut his throat.”

“That’s it.”

It was the husband and wife taking counsel together.

Thénardier walked slowly towards the table, opened the drawer, and took

out the knife. Marius fretted with the handle of his pistol.

Unprecedented perplexity! For the last hour he had had two voices in

his conscience, the one enjoining him to respect his father’s

testament, the other crying to him to rescue the prisoner. These two

voices continued uninterruptedly that struggle which tormented him to

agony. Up to that moment he had cherished a vague hope that he should

find some means of reconciling these two duties, but nothing within the

limits of possibility had presented itself.

However, the peril was urgent, the last bounds of delay had been

reached; Thénardier was standing thoughtfully a few paces distant from

the prisoner.

Marius cast a wild glance about him, the last mechanical resource of

despair. All at once a shudder ran through him.

At his feet, on the table, a bright ray of light from the full moon

illuminated and seemed to point out to him a sheet of paper. On this

paper he read the following line written that very morning, in large

letters, by the eldest of the Thénardier girls:—

“THE BOBBIES ARE HERE.”

An idea, a flash, crossed Marius’ mind; this was the expedient of which

he was in search, the solution of that frightful problem which was

torturing him, of sparing the assassin and saving the victim.

He knelt down on his commode, stretched out his arm, seized the sheet

of paper, softly detached a bit of plaster from the wall, wrapped the

paper round it, and tossed the whole through the crevice into the

middle of the den.

It was high time. Thénardier had conquered his last fears or his last

scruples, and was advancing on the prisoner.

“Something is falling!” cried the Thénardier woman.

“What is it?” asked her husband.

The woman darted forward and picked up the bit of plaster. She handed

it to her husband.

“Where did this come from?” demanded Thénardier.

“Pardie!” ejaculated his wife, “where do you suppose it came from?

Through the window, of course.”

“I saw it pass,” said Bigrenaille.

Thénardier rapidly unfolded the paper and held it close to the candle.

“It’s in Éponine’s handwriting. The devil!”

He made a sign to his wife, who hastily drew near, and showed her the

line written on the sheet of paper, then he added in a subdued voice:—

“Quick! The ladder! Let’s leave the bacon in the mousetrap and decamp!”

“Without cutting that man’s throat?” asked, the Thénardier woman.

“We haven’t the time.”

“Through what?” resumed Bigrenaille.

“Through the window,” replied Thénardier. “Since Ponine has thrown the

stone through the window, it indicates that the house is not watched on

that side.”

The mask with the ventriloquist’s voice deposited his huge key on the

floor, raised both arms in the air, and opened and clenched his fists,

three times rapidly without uttering a word.

This was the signal like the signal for clearing the decks for action

on board ship.

The ruffians who were holding the prisoner released him; in the

twinkling of an eye the rope ladder was unrolled outside the window,

and solidly fastened to the sill by the two iron hooks.

The prisoner paid no attention to what was going on around him. He

seemed to be dreaming or praying.

As soon as the ladder was arranged, Thénardier cried:

“Come! the bourgeoise first!”

And he rushed headlong to the window.

But just as he was about to throw his leg over, Bigrenaille seized him

roughly by the collar.

“Not much, come now, you old dog, after us!”

“After us!” yelled the ruffians.

“You are children,” said Thénardier, “we are losing time. The police

are on our heels.”

“Well,” said the ruffians, “let’s draw lots to see who shall go down

first.”

Thénardier exclaimed:—

“Are you mad! Are you crazy! What a pack of boobies! You want to waste

time, do you? Draw lots, do you? By a wet finger, by a short straw!

With written names! Thrown into a hat!—”

“Would you like my hat?” cried a voice on the threshold.

All wheeled round. It was Javert.

He had his hat in his hand, and was holding it out to them with a

smile.

CHAPTER XXI—ONE SHOULD ALWAYS BEGIN BY ARRESTING THE VICTIMS

At nightfall, Javert had posted his men and had gone into ambush

himself between the trees of the Rue de la Barrière-des-Gobelins which

faced the Gorbeau house, on the other side of the boulevard. He had

begun operations by opening “his pockets,” and dropping into it the two

young girls who were charged with keeping a watch on the approaches to

the den. But he had only “caged” Azelma. As for Éponine, she was not at

her post, she had disappeared, and he had not been able to seize her.

Then Javert had made a point and had bent his ear to waiting for the

signal agreed upon. The comings and goings of the fiacres had greatly

agitated him. At last, he had grown impatient, and, \_sure that there

was a nest there\_, sure of being in “luck,” having recognized many of

the ruffians who had entered, he had finally decided to go upstairs

without waiting for the pistol-shot.

It will be remembered that he had Marius’ pass-key.

He had arrived just in the nick of time.

The terrified ruffians flung themselves on the arms which they had

abandoned in all the corners at the moment of flight. In less than a

second, these seven men, horrible to behold, had grouped themselves in

an attitude of defence, one with his meat-axe, another with his key,

another with his bludgeon, the rest with shears, pincers, and hammers.

Thénardier had his knife in his fist. The Thénardier woman snatched up

an enormous paving-stone which lay in the angle of the window and

served her daughters as an ottoman.

[Illustration: Snatched up a Paving Stone]

Javert put on his hat again, and advanced a couple of paces into the

room, with arms folded, his cane under one arm, his sword in its

sheath.

“Halt there,” said he. “You shall not go out by the window, you shall

go through the door. It’s less unhealthy. There are seven of you, there

are fifteen of us. Don’t let’s fall to collaring each other like men of

Auvergne.”

Bigrenaille drew out a pistol which he had kept concealed under his

blouse, and put it in Thénardier’s hand, whispering in the latter’s

ear:—

“It’s Javert. I don’t dare fire at that man. Do you dare?”

“Parbleu!” replied Thénardier.

“Well, then, fire.”

Thénardier took the pistol and aimed at Javert.

Javert, who was only three paces from him, stared intently at him and

contented himself with saying:—

“Come now, don’t fire. You’ll miss fire.”

Thénardier pulled the trigger. The pistol missed fire.

“Didn’t I tell you so!” ejaculated Javert.

Bigrenaille flung his bludgeon at Javert’s feet.

“You’re the emperor of the fiends! I surrender.”

“And you?” Javert asked the rest of the ruffians.

They replied:—

“So do we.”

Javert began again calmly:—

“That’s right, that’s good, I said so, you are nice fellows.”

“I only ask one thing,” said Bigrenaille, “and that is, that I may not

be denied tobacco while I am in confinement.”

“Granted,” said Javert.

And turning round and calling behind him:—

“Come in now!”

A squad of policemen, sword in hand, and agents armed with bludgeons

and cudgels, rushed in at Javert’s summons. They pinioned the ruffians.

This throng of men, sparely lighted by the single candle, filled the

den with shadows.

“Handcuff them all!” shouted Javert.

“Come on!” cried a voice which was not the voice of a man, but of which

no one would ever have said: “It is a woman’s voice.”

The Thénardier woman had entrenched herself in one of the angles of the

window, and it was she who had just given vent to this roar.

The policemen and agents recoiled.

She had thrown off her shawl, but retained her bonnet; her husband, who

was crouching behind her, was almost hidden under the discarded shawl,

and she was shielding him with her body, as she elevated the

paving-stone above her head with the gesture of a giantess on the point

of hurling a rock.

“Beware!” she shouted.

All crowded back towards the corridor. A broad open space was cleared

in the middle of the garret.

The Thénardier woman cast a glance at the ruffians who had allowed

themselves to be pinioned, and muttered in hoarse and guttural

accents:—

“The cowards!”

Javert smiled, and advanced across the open space which the Thénardier

was devouring with her eyes.

“Don’t come near me,” she cried, “or I’ll crush you.”

“What a grenadier!” ejaculated Javert; “you’ve got a beard like a man,

mother, but I have claws like a woman.”

And he continued to advance.

The Thénardier, dishevelled and terrible, set her feet far apart, threw

herself backwards, and hurled the paving-stone at Javert’s head. Javert

ducked, the stone passed over him, struck the wall behind, knocked off

a huge piece of plastering, and, rebounding from angle to angle across

the hovel, now luckily almost empty, rested at Javert’s feet.

At the same moment, Javert reached the Thénardier couple. One of his

big hands descended on the woman’s shoulder; the other on the husband’s

head.

“The handcuffs!” he shouted.

The policemen trooped in in force, and in a few seconds Javert’s order

had been executed.

The Thénardier female, overwhelmed, stared at her pinioned hands, and

at those of her husband, who had dropped to the floor, and exclaimed,

weeping:—

“My daughters!”

“They are in the jug,” said Javert.

In the meanwhile, the agents had caught sight of the drunken man asleep

behind the door, and were shaking him:—

He awoke, stammering:—

“Is it all over, Jondrette?”

“Yes,” replied Javert.

The six pinioned ruffians were standing, and still preserved their

spectral mien; all three besmeared with black, all three masked.

“Keep on your masks,” said Javert.

And passing them in review with a glance of a Frederick II. at a

Potsdam parade, he said to the three “chimney-builders”:—

“Good day, Bigrenaille! good day, Brujon! good day, Deuxmilliards!”

Then turning to the three masked men, he said to the man with the

meat-axe:—

“Good day, Gueulemer!”

And to the man with the cudgel:—

“Good day, Babet!”

And to the ventriloquist:—

“Your health, Claquesous.”

At that moment, he caught sight of the ruffians’ prisoner, who, ever

since the entrance of the police, had not uttered a word, and had held

his head down.

“Untie the gentleman!” said Javert, “and let no one go out!”

That said, he seated himself with sovereign dignity before the table,

where the candle and the writing-materials still remained, drew a

stamped paper from his pocket, and began to prepare his report.

When he had written the first lines, which are formulas that never

vary, he raised his eyes:—

“Let the gentleman whom these gentlemen bound step forward.”

The policemen glanced round them.

“Well,” said Javert, “where is he?”

The prisoner of the ruffians, M. Leblanc, M. Urbain Fabre, the father

of Ursule or the Lark, had disappeared.

The door was guarded, but the window was not. As soon as he had found

himself released from his bonds, and while Javert was drawing up his

report, he had taken advantage of confusion, the crowd, the darkness,

and of a moment when the general attention was diverted from him, to

dash out of the window.

An agent sprang to the opening and looked out. He saw no one outside.

The rope ladder was still shaking.

“The devil!” ejaculated Javert between his teeth, “he must have been

the most valuable of the lot.”

CHAPTER XXII—THE LITTLE ONE WHO WAS CRYING IN VOLUME TWO

On the day following that on which these events took place in the house

on the Boulevard de l’Hôpital, a child, who seemed to be coming from

the direction of the bridge of Austerlitz, was ascending the side-alley

on the right in the direction of the Barrière de Fontainebleau.

Night had fully come.

This lad was pale, thin, clad in rags, with linen trousers in the month

of February, and was singing at the top of his voice.

At the corner of the Rue du Petit-Banquier, a bent old woman was

rummaging in a heap of refuse by the light of a street lantern; the

child jostled her as he passed, then recoiled, exclaiming:—

“Hello! And I took it for an enormous, enormous dog!”

He pronounced the word \_enormous\_ the second time with a jeering swell

of the voice which might be tolerably well represented by capitals: “an

enormous, ENORMOUS dog.”

The old woman straightened herself up in a fury.

“Nasty brat!” she grumbled. “If I hadn’t been bending over, I know well

where I would have planted my foot on you.”

The boy was already far away.

“Kisss! kisss!” he cried. “After that, I don’t think I was mistaken!”

The old woman, choking with indignation, now rose completely upright,

and the red gleam of the lantern fully lighted up her livid face, all

hollowed into angles and wrinkles, with crow’s-feet meeting the corners

of her mouth.

Her body was lost in the darkness, and only her head was visible. One

would have pronounced her a mask of Decrepitude carved out by a light

from the night.

The boy surveyed her.

“Madame,” said he, “does not possess that style of beauty which pleases

me.”

He then pursued his road, and resumed his song:—

“Le roi Coupdesabot

S’en allait à la chasse,

À la chasse aux corbeaux—”

At the end of these three lines he paused. He had arrived in front of

No. 50-52, and finding the door fastened, he began to assault it with

resounding and heroic kicks, which betrayed rather the man’s shoes that

he was wearing than the child’s feet which he owned.

In the meanwhile, the very old woman whom he had encountered at the

corner of the Rue du Petit-Banquier hastened up behind him, uttering

clamorous cries and indulging in lavish and exaggerated gestures.

“What’s this? What’s this? Lord God! He’s battering the door down! He’s

knocking the house down.”

The kicks continued.

The old woman strained her lungs.

“Is that the way buildings are treated nowadays?”

All at once she paused.

She had recognized the gamin.

“What! so it’s that imp!”

“Why, it’s the old lady,” said the lad. “Good day, Bougonmuche. I have

come to see my ancestors.”

The old woman retorted with a composite grimace, and a wonderful

improvisation of hatred taking advantage of feebleness and ugliness,

which was, unfortunately, wasted in the dark:—

“There’s no one here.”

“Bah!” retorted the boy, “where’s my father?”

“At La Force.”

“Come, now! And my mother?”

“At Saint-Lazare.”

“Well! And my sisters?”

“At the Madelonettes.”

The lad scratched his head behind his ear, stared at Ma’am Bougon, and

said:—

“Ah!”

Then he executed a pirouette on his heel; a moment later, the old

woman, who had remained on the door-step, heard him singing in his

clear, young voice, as he plunged under the black elm-trees, in the

wintry wind:—

“Le roi Coupdesabot

S’en allait à la chasse,

À la chasse aux corbeaux,

Monté sur deux échasses.

Quand on passait dessous,

On lui payait deux sous.”31

[THE END OF VOLUME III “MARIUS”]

VOLUME IV

SAINT-DENIS

[Illustration: Frontispiece Volume Four]

[Illustration: Titlepage Volume Four]

THE IDYL IN THE RUE PLUMET AND THE EPIC IN THE RUE SAINT-DENIS

BOOK FIRST—A FEW PAGES OF HISTORY

CHAPTER I—WELL CUT

1831 and 1832, the two years which are immediately connected with the

Revolution of July, form one of the most peculiar and striking moments

of history. These two years rise like two mountains midway between

those which precede and those which follow them. They have a

revolutionary grandeur. Precipices are to be distinguished there. The

social masses, the very assizes of civilization, the solid group of

superposed and adhering interests, the century-old profiles of the

ancient French formation, appear and disappear in them every instant,

athwart the storm clouds of systems, of passions, and of theories.

These appearances and disappearances have been designated as movement

and resistance. At intervals, truth, that daylight of the human soul,

can be descried shining there.

This remarkable epoch is decidedly circumscribed and is beginning to be

sufficiently distant from us to allow of our grasping the principal

lines even at the present day.

We shall make the attempt.

The Restoration had been one of those intermediate phases, hard to

define, in which there is fatigue, buzzing, murmurs, sleep, tumult, and

which are nothing else than the arrival of a great nation at a

halting-place.

These epochs are peculiar and mislead the politicians who desire to

convert them to profit. In the beginning, the nation asks nothing but

repose; it thirsts for but one thing, peace; it has but one ambition,

to be small. Which is the translation of remaining tranquil. Of great

events, great hazards, great adventures, great men, thank God, we have

seen enough, we have them heaped higher than our heads. We would

exchange Cæsar for Prusias, and Napoleon for the King of Yvetot. “What

a good little king was he!” We have marched since daybreak, we have

reached the evening of a long and toilsome day; we have made our first

change with Mirabeau, the second with Robespierre, the third with

Bonaparte; we are worn out. Each one demands a bed.

Devotion which is weary, heroism which has grown old, ambitions which

are sated, fortunes which are made, seek, demand, implore, solicit,

what? A shelter. They have it. They take possession of peace, of

tranquillity, of leisure; behold, they are content. But, at the same

time certain facts arise, compel recognition, and knock at the door in

their turn. These facts are the products of revolutions and wars, they

are, they exist, they have the right to install themselves in society,

and they do install themselves therein; and most of the time, facts are

the stewards of the household and fouriers32 who do nothing but prepare

lodgings for principles.

This, then, is what appears to philosophical politicians:—

At the same time that weary men demand repose, accomplished facts

demand guarantees. Guarantees are the same to facts that repose is to

men.

This is what England demanded of the Stuarts after the Protector; this

is what France demanded of the Bourbons after the Empire.

These guarantees are a necessity of the times. They must be accorded.

Princes “grant” them, but in reality, it is the force of things which

gives them. A profound truth, and one useful to know, which the Stuarts

did not suspect in 1662 and which the Bourbons did not even obtain a

glimpse of in 1814.

The predestined family, which returned to France when Napoleon fell,

had the fatal simplicity to believe that it was itself which bestowed,

and that what it had bestowed it could take back again; that the House

of Bourbon possessed the right divine, that France possessed nothing,

and that the political right conceded in the charter of Louis XVIII.

was merely a branch of the right divine, was detached by the House of

Bourbon and graciously given to the people until such day as it should

please the King to reassume it. Still, the House of Bourbon should have

felt, from the displeasure created by the gift, that it did not come

from it.

This house was churlish to the nineteenth century. It put on an

ill-tempered look at every development of the nation. To make use of a

trivial word, that is to say, of a popular and a true word, it looked

glum. The people saw this.

It thought it possessed strength because the Empire had been carried

away before it like a theatrical stage-setting. It did not perceive

that it had, itself, been brought in in the same fashion. It did not

perceive that it also lay in that hand which had removed Napoleon.

It thought that it had roots, because it was the past. It was mistaken;

it formed a part of the past, but the whole past was France. The roots

of French society were not fixed in the Bourbons, but in the nations.

These obscure and lively roots constituted, not the right of a family,

but the history of a people. They were everywhere, except under the

throne.

The House of Bourbon was to France the illustrious and bleeding knot in

her history, but was no longer the principal element of her destiny,

and the necessary base of her politics. She could get along without the

Bourbons; she had done without them for two and twenty years; there had

been a break of continuity; they did not suspect the fact. And how

should they have suspected it, they who fancied that Louis XVII.

reigned on the 9th of Thermidor, and that Louis XVIII. was reigning at

the battle of Marengo? Never, since the origin of history, had princes

been so blind in the presence of facts and the portion of divine

authority which facts contain and promulgate. Never had that pretension

here below which is called the right of kings denied to such a point

the right from on high.

A capital error which led this family to lay its hand once more on the

guarantees “granted” in 1814, on the concessions, as it termed them.

Sad. A sad thing! What it termed its concessions were our conquests;

what it termed our encroachments were our rights.

When the hour seemed to it to have come, the Restoration, supposing

itself victorious over Bonaparte and well-rooted in the country, that

is to say, believing itself to be strong and deep, abruptly decided on

its plan of action, and risked its stroke. One morning it drew itself

up before the face of France, and, elevating its voice, it contested

the collective title and the individual right of the nation to

sovereignty, of the citizen to liberty. In other words, it denied to

the nation that which made it a nation, and to the citizen that which

made him a citizen.

This is the foundation of those famous acts which are called the

ordinances of July. The Restoration fell.

It fell justly. But, we admit, it had not been absolutely hostile to

all forms of progress. Great things had been accomplished, with it

alongside.

Under the Restoration, the nation had grown accustomed to calm

discussion, which had been lacking under the Republic, and to grandeur

in peace, which had been wanting under the Empire. France free and

strong had offered an encouraging spectacle to the other peoples of

Europe. The Revolution had had the word under Robespierre; the cannon

had had the word under Bonaparte; it was under Louis XVIII. and Charles

X. that it was the turn of intelligence to have the word. The wind

ceased, the torch was lighted once more. On the lofty heights, the pure

light of mind could be seen flickering. A magnificent, useful, and

charming spectacle. For a space of fifteen years, those great

principles which are so old for the thinker, so new for the statesman,

could be seen at work in perfect peace, on the public square; equality

before the law, liberty of conscience, liberty of speech, liberty of

the press, the accessibility of all aptitudes to all functions. Thus it

proceeded until 1830. The Bourbons were an instrument of civilization

which broke in the hands of Providence.

The fall of the Bourbons was full of grandeur, not on their side, but

on the side of the nation. They quitted the throne with gravity, but

without authority; their descent into the night was not one of those

solemn disappearances which leave a sombre emotion in history; it was

neither the spectral calm of Charles I., nor the eagle scream of

Napoleon. They departed, that is all. They laid down the crown, and

retained no aureole. They were worthy, but they were not august. They

lacked, in a certain measure, the majesty of their misfortune. Charles

X. during the voyage from Cherbourg, causing a round table to be cut

over into a square table, appeared to be more anxious about imperilled

etiquette than about the crumbling monarchy. This diminution saddened

devoted men who loved their persons, and serious men who honored their

race. The populace was admirable. The nation, attacked one morning with

weapons, by a sort of royal insurrection, felt itself in the possession

of so much force that it did not go into a rage. It defended itself,

restrained itself, restored things to their places, the government to

law, the Bourbons to exile, alas! and then halted! It took the old king

Charles X. from beneath that dais which had sheltered Louis XIV. and

set him gently on the ground. It touched the royal personages only with

sadness and precaution. It was not one man, it was not a few men, it

was France, France entire, France victorious and intoxicated with her

victory, who seemed to be coming to herself, and who put into practice,

before the eyes of the whole world, these grave words of Guillaume du

Vair after the day of the Barricades:—

“It is easy for those who are accustomed to skim the favors of the

great, and to spring, like a bird from bough to bough, from an

afflicted fortune to a flourishing one, to show themselves harsh

towards their Prince in his adversity; but as for me, the fortune of my

Kings and especially of my afflicted Kings, will always be venerable to

me.”

The Bourbons carried away with them respect, but not regret. As we have

just stated, their misfortune was greater than they were. They faded

out in the horizon.

The Revolution of July instantly had friends and enemies throughout the

entire world. The first rushed toward her with joy and enthusiasm, the

others turned away, each according to his nature. At the first blush,

the princes of Europe, the owls of this dawn, shut their eyes, wounded

and stupefied, and only opened them to threaten. A fright which can be

comprehended, a wrath which can be pardoned. This strange revolution

had hardly produced a shock; it had not even paid to vanquished royalty

the honor of treating it as an enemy, and of shedding its blood. In the

eyes of despotic governments, who are always interested in having

liberty calumniate itself, the Revolution of July committed the fault

of being formidable and of remaining gentle. Nothing, however, was

attempted or plotted against it. The most discontented, the most

irritated, the most trembling, saluted it; whatever our egotism and our

rancor may be, a mysterious respect springs from events in which we are

sensible of the collaboration of some one who is working above man.

The Revolution of July is the triumph of right overthrowing the fact. A

thing which is full of splendor.

Right overthrowing the fact. Hence the brilliancy of the Revolution of

1830, hence, also, its mildness. Right triumphant has no need of being

violent.

Right is the just and the true.

The property of right is to remain eternally beautiful and pure. The

fact, even when most necessary to all appearances, even when most

thoroughly accepted by contemporaries, if it exist only as a fact, and

if it contain only too little of right, or none at all, is infallibly

destined to become, in the course of time, deformed, impure, perhaps,

even monstrous. If one desires to learn at one blow, to what degree of

hideousness the fact can attain, viewed at the distance of centuries,

let him look at Machiavelli. Machiavelli is not an evil genius, nor a

demon, nor a miserable and cowardly writer; he is nothing but the fact.

And he is not only the Italian fact; he is the European fact, the fact

of the sixteenth century. He seems hideous, and so he is, in the

presence of the moral idea of the nineteenth.

This conflict of right and fact has been going on ever since the origin

of society. To terminate this duel, to amalgamate the pure idea with

the humane reality, to cause right to penetrate pacifically into the

fact and the fact into right, that is the task of sages.

CHAPTER II—BADLY SEWED

But the task of sages is one thing, the task of clever men is another.

The Revolution of 1830 came to a sudden halt.

As soon as a revolution has made the coast, the skilful make haste to

prepare the shipwreck.

The skilful in our century have conferred on themselves the title of

Statesmen; so that this word, \_statesmen\_, has ended by becoming

somewhat of a slang word. It must be borne in mind, in fact, that

wherever there is nothing but skill, there is necessarily pettiness. To

say “the skilful” amounts to saying “the mediocre.”

In the same way, to say “statesmen” is sometimes equivalent to saying

“traitors.” If, then, we are to believe the skilful, revolutions like

the Revolution of July are severed arteries; a prompt ligature is

indispensable. The right, too grandly proclaimed, is shaken. Also,

right once firmly fixed, the state must be strengthened. Liberty once

assured, attention must be directed to power.

Here the sages are not, as yet, separated from the skilful, but they

begin to be distrustful. Power, very good. But, in the first place,

what is power? In the second, whence comes it? The skilful do not seem

to hear the murmured objection, and they continue their manœuvres.

According to the politicians, who are ingenious in putting the mask of

necessity on profitable fictions, the first requirement of a people

after a revolution, when this people forms part of a monarchical

continent, is to procure for itself a dynasty. In this way, say they,

peace, that is to say, time to dress our wounds, and to repair the

house, can be had after a revolution. The dynasty conceals the

scaffolding and covers the ambulance. Now, it is not always easy to

procure a dynasty.

If it is absolutely necessary, the first man of genius or even the

first man of fortune who comes to hand suffices for the manufacturing

of a king. You have, in the first case, Napoleon; in the second,

Iturbide.

But the first family that comes to hand does not suffice to make a

dynasty. There is necessarily required a certain modicum of antiquity

in a race, and the wrinkle of the centuries cannot be improvised.

If we place ourselves at the point of view of the “statesmen,” after

making all allowances, of course, after a revolution, what are the

qualities of the king which result from it? He may be and it is useful

for him to be a revolutionary; that is to say, a participant in his own

person in that revolution, that he should have lent a hand to it, that

he should have either compromised or distinguished himself therein,

that he should have touched the axe or wielded the sword in it.

What are the qualities of a dynasty? It should be national; that is to

say, revolutionary at a distance, not through acts committed, but by

reason of ideas accepted. It should be composed of past and be

historic; be composed of future and be sympathetic.

All this explains why the early revolutions contented themselves with

finding a man, Cromwell or Napoleon; and why the second absolutely

insisted on finding a family, the House of Brunswick or the House of

Orleans.

Royal houses resemble those Indian fig-trees, each branch of which,

bending over to the earth, takes root and becomes a fig-tree itself.

Each branch may become a dynasty. On the sole condition that it shall

bend down to the people.

Such is the theory of the skilful.

Here, then, lies the great art: to make a little render to success the

sound of a catastrophe in order that those who profit by it may tremble

from it also, to season with fear every step that is taken, to augment

the curve of the transition to the point of retarding progress, to dull

that aurora, to denounce and retrench the harshness of enthusiasm, to

cut all angles and nails, to wad triumph, to muffle up right, to

envelop the giant-people in flannel, and to put it to bed very

speedily, to impose a diet on that excess of health, to put Hercules on

the treatment of a convalescent, to dilute the event with the

expedient, to offer to spirits thirsting for the ideal that nectar

thinned out with a potion, to take one’s precautions against too much

success, to garnish the revolution with a shade.

1830 practised this theory, already applied to England by 1688.

1830 is a revolution arrested midway. Half of progress, quasi-right.

Now, logic knows not the “almost,” absolutely as the sun knows not the

candle.

Who arrests revolutions half-way? The bourgeoisie?

Why?

Because the bourgeoisie is interest which has reached satisfaction.

Yesterday it was appetite, to-day it is plenitude, to-morrow it will be

satiety.

The phenomenon of 1814 after Napoleon was reproduced in 1830 after

Charles X.

The attempt has been made, and wrongly, to make a class of the

bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie is simply the contented portion of the

people. The bourgeois is the man who now has time to sit down. A chair

is not a caste.

But through a desire to sit down too soon, one may arrest the very

march of the human race. This has often been the fault of the

bourgeoisie.

One is not a class because one has committed a fault. Selfishness is

not one of the divisions of the social order.

Moreover, we must be just to selfishness. The state to which that part

of the nation which is called the bourgeoisie aspired after the shock

of 1830 was not the inertia which is complicated with indifference and

laziness, and which contains a little shame; it was not the slumber

which presupposes a momentary forgetfulness accessible to dreams; it

was the halt.

The halt is a word formed of a singular double and almost contradictory

sense: a troop on the march, that is to say, movement; a stand, that is

to say, repose.

The halt is the restoration of forces; it is repose armed and on the

alert; it is the accomplished fact which posts sentinels and holds

itself on its guard.

The halt presupposes the combat of yesterday and the combat of

to-morrow.

It is the partition between 1830 and 1848.

What we here call combat may also be designated as progress.

The bourgeoisie then, as well as the statesmen, required a man who

should express this word Halt. An Although-Because. A composite

individuality, signifying revolution and signifying stability, in other

terms, strengthening the present by the evident compatibility of the

past with the future.

This man was “already found.” His name was Louis Philippe d’Orleans.

The 221 made Louis Philippe King. Lafayette undertook the coronation.

He called it \_the best of republics\_. The town-hall of Paris took the

place of the Cathedral of Rheims.

This substitution of a half-throne for a whole throne was “the work of

1830.”

When the skilful had finished, the immense vice of their solution

became apparent. All this had been accomplished outside the bounds of

absolute right. Absolute right cried: “I protest!” then, terrible to

say, it retired into the darkness.

CHAPTER III—LOUIS PHILIPPE

Revolutions have a terrible arm and a happy hand, they strike firmly

and choose well. Even incomplete, even debased and abused and reduced

to the state of a junior revolution like the Revolution of 1830, they

nearly always retain sufficient providential lucidity to prevent them

from falling amiss. Their eclipse is never an abdication.

Nevertheless, let us not boast too loudly; revolutions also may be

deceived, and grave errors have been seen.

Let us return to 1830. 1830, in its deviation, had good luck. In the

establishment which entitled itself order after the revolution had been

cut short, the King amounted to more than royalty. Louis Philippe was a

rare man.

The son of a father to whom history will accord certain attenuating

circumstances, but also as worthy of esteem as that father had been of

blame; possessing all private virtues and many public virtues; careful

of his health, of his fortune, of his person, of his affairs, knowing

the value of a minute and not always the value of a year; sober,

serene, peaceable, patient; a good man and a good prince; sleeping with

his wife, and having in his palace lackeys charged with the duty of

showing the conjugal bed to the bourgeois, an ostentation of the

regular sleeping-apartment which had become useful after the former

illegitimate displays of the elder branch; knowing all the languages of

Europe, and, what is more rare, all the languages of all interests, and

speaking them; an admirable representative of the “middle class,” but

outstripping it, and in every way greater than it; possessing excellent

sense, while appreciating the blood from which he had sprung, counting

most of all on his intrinsic worth, and, on the question of his race,

very particular, declaring himself Orleans and not Bourbon; thoroughly

the first Prince of the Blood Royal while he was still only a Serene

Highness, but a frank bourgeois from the day he became king; diffuse in

public, concise in private; reputed, but not proved to be a miser; at

bottom, one of those economists who are readily prodigal at their own

fancy or duty; lettered, but not very sensitive to letters; a

gentleman, but not a chevalier; simple, calm, and strong; adored by his

family and his household; a fascinating talker, an undeceived

statesman, inwardly cold, dominated by immediate interest, always

governing at the shortest range, incapable of rancor and of gratitude,

making use without mercy of superiority on mediocrity, clever in

getting parliamentary majorities to put in the wrong those mysterious

unanimities which mutter dully under thrones; unreserved, sometimes

imprudent in his lack of reserve, but with marvellous address in that

imprudence; fertile in expedients, in countenances, in masks; making

France fear Europe and Europe France! Incontestably fond of his

country, but preferring his family; assuming more domination than

authority and more authority than dignity, a disposition which has this

unfortunate property, that as it turns everything to success, it admits

of ruse and does not absolutely repudiate baseness, but which has this

valuable side, that it preserves politics from violent shocks, the

state from fractures, and society from catastrophes; minute, correct,

vigilant, attentive, sagacious, indefatigable; contradicting himself at

times and giving himself the lie; bold against Austria at Ancona,

obstinate against England in Spain, bombarding Antwerp, and paying off

Pritchard; singing the Marseillaise with conviction, inaccessible to

despondency, to lassitude, to the taste for the beautiful and the

ideal, to daring generosity, to Utopia, to chimæras, to wrath, to

vanity, to fear; possessing all the forms of personal intrepidity; a

general at Valmy; a soldier at Jemappes; attacked eight times by

regicides and always smiling. Brave as a grenadier, courageous as a

thinker; uneasy only in the face of the chances of a European shaking

up, and unfitted for great political adventures; always ready to risk

his life, never his work; disguising his will in influence, in order

that he might be obeyed as an intelligence rather than as a king;

endowed with observation and not with divination; not very attentive to

minds, but knowing men, that is to say requiring to see in order to

judge; prompt and penetrating good sense, practical wisdom, easy

speech, prodigious memory; drawing incessantly on this memory, his only

point of resemblance with Cæsar, Alexander, and Napoleon; knowing

deeds, facts, details, dates, proper names, ignorant of tendencies,

passions, the diverse geniuses of the crowd, the interior aspirations,

the hidden and obscure uprisings of souls, in a word, all that can be

designated as the invisible currents of consciences; accepted by the

surface, but little in accord with France lower down; extricating

himself by dint of tact; governing too much and not enough; his own

first minister; excellent at creating out of the pettiness of realities

an obstacle to the immensity of ideas; mingling a genuine creative

faculty of civilization, of order and organization, an indescribable

spirit of proceedings and chicanery, the founder and lawyer of a

dynasty; having something of Charlemagne and something of an attorney;

in short, a lofty and original figure, a prince who understood how to

create authority in spite of the uneasiness of France, and power in

spite of the jealousy of Europe. Louis Philippe will be classed among

the eminent men of his century, and would be ranked among the most

illustrious governors of history had he loved glory but a little, and

if he had had the sentiment of what is great to the same degree as the

feeling for what is useful.

Louis Philippe had been handsome, and in his old age he remained

graceful; not always approved by the nation, he always was so by the

masses; he pleased. He had that gift of charming. He lacked majesty; he

wore no crown, although a king, and no white hair, although an old man;

his manners belonged to the old regime and his habits to the new; a

mixture of the noble and the bourgeois which suited 1830; Louis

Philippe was transition reigning; he had preserved the ancient

pronunciation and the ancient orthography which he placed at the

service of opinions modern; he loved Poland and Hungary, but he wrote

\_les Polonois\_, and he pronounced \_les Hongrais\_. He wore the uniform

of the national guard, like Charles X., and the ribbon of the Legion of

Honor, like Napoleon.

He went a little to chapel, not at all to the chase, never to the

opera. Incorruptible by sacristans, by whippers-in, by ballet-dancers;

this made a part of his bourgeois popularity. He had no heart. He went

out with his umbrella under his arm, and this umbrella long formed a

part of his aureole. He was a bit of a mason, a bit of a gardener,

something of a doctor; he bled a postilion who had tumbled from his

horse; Louis Philippe no more went about without his lancet, than did

Henri IV. without his poniard. The Royalists jeered at this ridiculous

king, the first who had ever shed blood with the object of healing.

For the grievances against Louis Philippe, there is one deduction to be

made; there is that which accuses royalty, that which accuses the

reign, that which accuses the King; three columns which all give

different totals. Democratic right confiscated, progress becomes a

matter of secondary interest, the protests of the street violently

repressed, military execution of insurrections, the rising passed over

by arms, the Rue Transnonain, the counsels of war, the absorption of

the real country by the legal country, on half shares with three

hundred thousand privileged persons,—these are the deeds of royalty;

Belgium refused, Algeria too harshly conquered, and, as in the case of

India by the English, with more barbarism than civilization, the breach

of faith, to Abd-el-Kader, Blaye, Deutz bought, Pritchard paid,—these

are the doings of the reign; the policy which was more domestic than

national was the doing of the King.

As will be seen, the proper deduction having been made, the King’s

charge is decreased.

This is his great fault; he was modest in the name of France.

Whence arises this fault?

We will state it.

Louis Philippe was rather too much of a paternal king; that incubation

of a family with the object of founding a dynasty is afraid of

everything and does not like to be disturbed; hence excessive timidity,

which is displeasing to the people, who have the 14th of July in their

civil and Austerlitz in their military tradition.

Moreover, if we deduct the public duties which require to be fulfilled

first of all, that deep tenderness of Louis Philippe towards his family

was deserved by the family. That domestic group was worthy of

admiration. Virtues there dwelt side by side with talents. One of Louis

Philippe’s daughters, Marie d’Orleans, placed the name of her race

among artists, as Charles d’Orleans had placed it among poets. She made

of her soul a marble which she named Jeanne d’Arc. Two of Louis

Philippe’s daughters elicited from Metternich this eulogium: “They are

young people such as are rarely seen, and princes such as are never

seen.”

This, without any dissimulation, and also without any exaggeration, is

the truth about Louis Philippe.

To be Prince Equality, to bear in his own person the contradiction of

the Restoration and the Revolution, to have that disquieting side of

the revolutionary which becomes reassuring in governing power, therein

lay the fortune of Louis Philippe in 1830; never was there a more

complete adaptation of a man to an event; the one entered into the

other, and the incarnation took place. Louis Philippe is 1830 made man.

Moreover, he had in his favor that great recommendation to the throne,

exile. He had been proscribed, a wanderer, poor. He had lived by his

own labor. In Switzerland, this heir to the richest princely domains in

France had sold an old horse in order to obtain bread. At Reichenau, he

gave lessons in mathematics, while his sister Adelaide did wool work

and sewed. These souvenirs connected with a king rendered the

bourgeoisie enthusiastic. He had, with his own hands, demolished the

iron cage of Mont-Saint-Michel, built by Louis XI., and used by Louis

XV. He was the companion of Dumouriez, he was the friend of Lafayette;

he had belonged to the Jacobins’ club; Mirabeau had slapped him on the

shoulder; Danton had said to him: “Young man!” At the age of four and

twenty, in ’93, being then M. de Chartres, he had witnessed, from the

depth of a box, the trial of Louis XVI., so well named \_that poor

tyrant\_. The blind clairvoyance of the Revolution, breaking royalty in

the King and the King with royalty, did so almost without noticing the

man in the fierce crushing of the idea, the vast storm of the

Assembly-Tribunal, the public wrath interrogating, Capet not knowing

what to reply, the alarming, stupefied vacillation by that royal head

beneath that sombre breath, the relative innocence of all in that

catastrophe, of those who condemned as well as of the man condemned,—he

had looked on those things, he had contemplated that giddiness; he had

seen the centuries appear before the bar of the Assembly-Convention; he

had beheld, behind Louis XVI., that unfortunate passer-by who was made

responsible, the terrible culprit, the monarchy, rise through the

shadows; and there had lingered in his soul the respectful fear of

these immense justices of the populace, which are almost as impersonal

as the justice of God.

The trace left in him by the Revolution was prodigious. Its memory was

like a living imprint of those great years, minute by minute. One day,

in the presence of a witness whom we are not permitted to doubt, he

rectified from memory the whole of the letter A in the alphabetical

list of the Constituent Assembly.

Louis Philippe was a king of the broad daylight. While he reigned the

press was free, the tribune was free, conscience and speech were free.

The laws of September are open to sight. Although fully aware of the

gnawing power of light on privileges, he left his throne exposed to the

light. History will do justice to him for this loyalty.

Louis Philippe, like all historical men who have passed from the scene,

is to-day put on his trial by the human conscience. His case is, as

yet, only in the lower court.

The hour when history speaks with its free and venerable accent, has

not yet sounded for him; the moment has not come to pronounce a

definite judgment on this king; the austere and illustrious historian

Louis Blanc has himself recently softened his first verdict; Louis

Philippe was elected by those two \_almosts\_ which are called the 221

and 1830, that is to say, by a half-Parliament, and a half-revolution;

and in any case, from the superior point of view where philosophy must

place itself, we cannot judge him here, as the reader has seen above,

except with certain reservations in the name of the absolute democratic

principle; in the eyes of the absolute, outside these two rights, the

right of man in the first place, the right of the people in the second,

all is usurpation; but what we can say, even at the present day, that

after making these reserves is, that to sum up the whole, and in

whatever manner he is considered, Louis Philippe, taken in himself, and

from the point of view of human goodness, will remain, to use the

antique language of ancient history, one of the best princes who ever

sat on a throne.

What is there against him? That throne. Take away Louis Philippe the

king, there remains the man. And the man is good. He is good at times

even to the point of being admirable. Often, in the midst of his

gravest souvenirs, after a day of conflict with the whole diplomacy of

the continent, he returned at night to his apartments, and there,

exhausted with fatigue, overwhelmed with sleep, what did he do? He took

a death sentence and passed the night in revising a criminal suit,

considering it something to hold his own against Europe, but that it

was a still greater matter to rescue a man from the executioner. He

obstinately maintained his opinion against his keeper of the seals; he

disputed the ground with the guillotine foot by foot against the crown

attorneys, those \_chatterers of the law\_, as he called them. Sometimes

the pile of sentences covered his table; he examined them all; it was

anguish to him to abandon these miserable, condemned heads. One day, he

said to the same witness to whom we have recently referred: “I won

seven last night.” During the early years of his reign, the death

penalty was as good as abolished, and the erection of a scaffold was a

violence committed against the King. The Grève having disappeared with

the elder branch, a bourgeois place of execution was instituted under

the name of the Barrière-Saint-Jacques; “practical men” felt the

necessity of a quasi-legitimate guillotine; and this was one of the

victories of Casimir Périer, who represented the narrow sides of the

bourgeoisie, over Louis Philippe, who represented its liberal sides.

Louis Philippe annotated Beccaria with his own hand. After the Fieschi

machine, he exclaimed: “What a pity that I was not wounded! Then I

might have pardoned!” On another occasion, alluding to the resistance

offered by his ministry, he wrote in connection with a political

criminal, who is one of the most generous figures of our day: “His

pardon is granted; it only remains for me to obtain it.” Louis Philippe

was as gentle as Louis IX. and as kindly as Henri IV.

Now, to our mind, in history, where kindness is the rarest of pearls,

the man who is kindly almost takes precedence of the man who is great.

Louis Philippe having been severely judged by some, harshly, perhaps,

by others, it is quite natural that a man, himself a phantom at the

present day, who knew that king, should come and testify in his favor

before history; this deposition, whatever else it may be, is evidently

and above all things, entirely disinterested; an epitaph penned by a

dead man is sincere; one shade may console another shade; the sharing

of the same shadows confers the right to praise it; it is not greatly

to be feared that it will ever be said of two tombs in exile: “This one

flattered the other.”

CHAPTER IV—CRACKS BENEATH THE FOUNDATION

At the moment when the drama which we are narrating is on the point of

penetrating into the depths of one of the tragic clouds which envelop

the beginning of Louis Philippe’s reign, it was necessary that there

should be no equivoque, and it became requisite that this book should

offer some explanation with regard to this king.

Louis Philippe had entered into possession of his royal authority

without violence, without any direct action on his part, by virtue of a

revolutionary change, evidently quite distinct from the real aim of the

Revolution, but in which he, the Duc d’Orléans, exercised no personal

initiative. He had been born a Prince, and he believed himself to have

been elected King. He had not served this mandate on himself; he had

not taken it; it had been offered to him, and he had accepted it;

convinced, wrongly, to be sure, but convinced nevertheless, that the

offer was in accordance with right and that the acceptance of it was in

accordance with duty. Hence his possession was in good faith. Now, we

say it in good conscience, Louis Philippe being in possession in

perfect good faith, and the democracy being in good faith in its

attack, the amount of terror discharged by the social conflicts weighs

neither on the King nor on the democracy. A clash of principles

resembles a clash of elements. The ocean defends the water, the

hurricane defends the air, the King defends Royalty, the democracy

defends the people; the relative, which is the monarchy, resists the

absolute, which is the republic; society bleeds in this conflict, but

that which constitutes its suffering to-day will constitute its safety

later on; and, in any case, those who combat are not to be blamed; one

of the two parties is evidently mistaken; the right is not, like the

Colossus of Rhodes, on two shores at once, with one foot on the

republic, and one in Royalty; it is indivisible, and all on one side;

but those who are in error are so sincerely; a blind man is no more a

criminal than a Vendean is a ruffian. Let us, then, impute to the

fatality of things alone these formidable collisions. Whatever the

nature of these tempests may be, human irresponsibility is mingled with

them.

Let us complete this exposition.

The government of 1840 led a hard life immediately. Born yesterday, it

was obliged to fight to-day.

Hardly installed, it was already everywhere conscious of vague

movements of traction on the apparatus of July so recently laid, and so

lacking in solidity.

Resistance was born on the morrow; perhaps even, it was born on the

preceding evening. From month to month the hostility increased, and

from being concealed it became patent.

The Revolution of July, which gained but little acceptance outside of

France by kings, had been diversely interpreted in France, as we have

said.

God delivers over to men his visible will in events, an obscure text

written in a mysterious tongue. Men immediately make translations of

it; translations hasty, incorrect, full of errors, of gaps, and of

nonsense. Very few minds comprehend the divine language. The most

sagacious, the calmest, the most profound, decipher slowly, and when

they arrive with their text, the task has long been completed; there

are already twenty translations on the public place. From each

remaining springs a party, and from each misinterpretation a faction;

and each party thinks that it alone has the true text, and each faction

thinks that it possesses the light.

Power itself is often a faction.

There are, in revolutions, swimmers who go against the current; they

are the old parties.

For the old parties who clung to heredity by the grace of God, think

that revolutions, having sprung from the right to revolt, one has the

right to revolt against them. Error. For in these revolutions, the one

who revolts is not the people; it is the king. Revolution is precisely

the contrary of revolt. Every revolution, being a normal outcome,

contains within itself its legitimacy, which false revolutionists

sometimes dishonor, but which remains even when soiled, which survives

even when stained with blood.

Revolutions spring not from an accident, but from necessity. A

revolution is a return from the fictitious to the real. It is because

it must be that it is.

Nonetheless did the old legitimist parties assail the Revolution of

1830 with all the vehemence which arises from false reasoning. Errors

make excellent projectiles. They strike it cleverly in its vulnerable

spot, in default of a cuirass, in its lack of logic; they attacked this

revolution in its royalty. They shouted to it: “Revolution, why this

king?” Factions are blind men who aim correctly.

This cry was uttered equally by the republicans. But coming from them,

this cry was logical. What was blindness in the legitimists was

clearness of vision in the democrats. 1830 had bankrupted the people.

The enraged democracy reproached it with this.

Between the attack of the past and the attack of the future, the

establishment of July struggled. It represented the minute at

loggerheads on the one hand with the monarchical centuries, on the

other hand with eternal right.

In addition, and beside all this, as it was no longer revolution and

had become a monarchy, 1830 was obliged to take precedence of all

Europe. To keep the peace, was an increase of complication. A harmony

established contrary to sense is often more onerous than a war. From

this secret conflict, always muzzled, but always growling, was born

armed peace, that ruinous expedient of civilization which in the

harness of the European cabinets is suspicious in itself. The Royalty

of July reared up, in spite of the fact that it caught it in the

harness of European cabinets. Metternich would gladly have put it in

kicking-straps. Pushed on in France by progress, it pushed on the

monarchies, those loiterers in Europe. After having been towed, it

undertook to tow.

Meanwhile, within her, pauperism, the proletariat, salary, education,

penal servitude, prostitution, the fate of the woman, wealth, misery,

production, consumption, division, exchange, coin, credit, the rights

of capital, the rights of labor,—all these questions were multiplied

above society, a terrible slope.

Outside of political parties properly so called, another movement

became manifest. Philosophical fermentation replied to democratic

fermentation. The elect felt troubled as well as the masses; in another

manner, but quite as much.

Thinkers meditated, while the soil, that is to say, the people,

traversed by revolutionary currents, trembled under them with

indescribably vague epileptic shocks. These dreamers, some isolated,

others united in families and almost in communion, turned over social

questions in a pacific but profound manner; impassive miners, who

tranquilly pushed their galleries into the depths of a volcano, hardly

disturbed by the dull commotion and the furnaces of which they caught

glimpses.

This tranquillity was not the least beautiful spectacle of this

agitated epoch.

These men left to political parties the question of rights, they

occupied themselves with the question of happiness.

The well-being of man, that was what they wanted to extract from

society.

They raised material questions, questions of agriculture, of industry,

of commerce, almost to the dignity of a religion. In civilization, such

as it has formed itself, a little by the command of God, a great deal

by the agency of man, interests combine, unite, and amalgamate in a

manner to form a veritable hard rock, in accordance with a dynamic law,

patiently studied by economists, those geologists of politics. These

men who grouped themselves under different appellations, but who may

all be designated by the generic title of socialists, endeavored to

pierce that rock and to cause it to spout forth the living waters of

human felicity.

From the question of the scaffold to the question of war, their works

embraced everything. To the rights of man, as proclaimed by the French

Revolution, they added the rights of woman and the rights of the child.

The reader will not be surprised if, for various reasons, we do not

here treat in a thorough manner, from the theoretical point of view,

the questions raised by socialism. We confine ourselves to indicating

them.

All the problems that the socialists proposed to themselves, cosmogonic

visions, reverie and mysticism being cast aside, can be reduced to two

principal problems.

First problem: To produce wealth.

Second problem: To share it.

The first problem contains the question of work.

The second contains the question of salary.

In the first problem the employment of forces is in question.

In the second, the distribution of enjoyment.

From the proper employment of forces results public power.

From a good distribution of enjoyments results individual happiness.

By a good distribution, not an equal but an equitable distribution must

be understood.

From these two things combined, the public power without, individual

happiness within, results social prosperity.

Social prosperity means the man happy, the citizen free, the nation

great.

England solves the first of these two problems. She creates wealth

admirably, she divides it badly. This solution which is complete on one

side only leads her fatally to two extremes: monstrous opulence,

monstrous wretchedness. All enjoyments for some, all privations for the

rest, that is to say, for the people; privilege, exception, monopoly,

feudalism, born from toil itself. A false and dangerous situation,

which sates public power or private misery, which sets the roots of the

State in the sufferings of the individual. A badly constituted grandeur

in which are combined all the material elements and into which no moral

element enters.

Communism and agrarian law think that they solve the second problem.

They are mistaken. Their division kills production. Equal partition

abolishes emulation; and consequently labor. It is a partition made by

the butcher, which kills that which it divides. It is therefore

impossible to pause over these pretended solutions. Slaying wealth is

not the same thing as dividing it.

The two problems require to be solved together, to be well solved. The

two problems must be combined and made but one.

Solve only the first of the two problems; you will be Venice, you will

be England. You will have, like Venice, an artificial power, or, like

England, a material power; you will be the wicked rich man. You will

die by an act of violence, as Venice died, or by bankruptcy, as England

will fall. And the world will allow to die and fall all that is merely

selfishness, all that does not represent for the human race either a

virtue or an idea.

It is well understood here, that by the words Venice, England, we

designate not the peoples, but social structures; the oligarchies

superposed on nations, and not the nations themselves. The nations

always have our respect and our sympathy. Venice, as a people, will

live again; England, the aristocracy, will fall, but England, the

nation, is immortal. That said, we continue.

Solve the two problems, encourage the wealthy, and protect the poor,

suppress misery, put an end to the unjust farming out of the feeble by

the strong, put a bridle on the iniquitous jealousy of the man who is

making his way against the man who has reached the goal, adjust,

mathematically and fraternally, salary to labor, mingle gratuitous and

compulsory education with the growth of childhood, and make of science

the base of manliness, develop minds while keeping arms busy, be at one

and the same time a powerful people and a family of happy men, render

property democratic, not by abolishing it, but by making it universal,

so that every citizen, without exception, may be a proprietor, an

easier matter than is generally supposed; in two words, learn how to

produce wealth and how to distribute it, and you will have at once

moral and material greatness; and you will be worthy to call yourself

France.

This is what socialism said outside and above a few sects which have

gone astray; that is what it sought in facts, that is what it sketched

out in minds.

Efforts worthy of admiration! Sacred attempts!

These doctrines, these theories, these resistances, the unforeseen

necessity for the statesman to take philosophers into account, confused

evidences of which we catch a glimpse, a new system of politics to be

created, which shall be in accord with the old world without too much

disaccord with the new revolutionary ideal, a situation in which it

became necessary to use Lafayette to defend Polignac, the intuition of

progress transparent beneath the revolt, the chambers and streets, the

competitions to be brought into equilibrium around him, his faith in

the Revolution, perhaps an eventual indefinable resignation born of the

vague acceptance of a superior definitive right, his desire to remain

of his race, his domestic spirit, his sincere respect for the people,

his own honesty, preoccupied Louis Philippe almost painfully, and there

were moments when strong and courageous as he was, he was overwhelmed

by the difficulties of being a king.

He felt under his feet a formidable disaggregation, which was not,

nevertheless, a reduction to dust, France being more France than ever.

Piles of shadows covered the horizon. A strange shade, gradually

drawing nearer, extended little by little over men, over things, over

ideas; a shade which came from wraths and systems. Everything which had

been hastily stifled was moving and fermenting. At times the conscience

of the honest man resumed its breathing, so great was the discomfort of

that air in which sophisms were intermingled with truths. Spirits

trembled in the social anxiety like leaves at the approach of a storm.

The electric tension was such that at certain instants, the first

comer, a stranger, brought light. Then the twilight obscurity closed in

again. At intervals, deep and dull mutterings allowed a judgment to be

formed as to the quantity of thunder contained by the cloud.

Twenty months had barely elapsed since the Revolution of July, the year

1832 had opened with an aspect of something impending and threatening.

The distress of the people, the laborers without bread, the last Prince

de Condé engulfed in the shadows, Brussels expelling the Nassaus as

Paris did the Bourbons, Belgium offering herself to a French Prince and

giving herself to an English Prince, the Russian hatred of Nicolas,

behind us the demons of the South, Ferdinand in Spain, Miguel in

Portugal, the earth quaking in Italy, Metternich extending his hand

over Bologna, France treating Austria sharply at Ancona, at the North

no one knew what sinister sound of the hammer nailing up Poland in her

coffin, irritated glances watching France narrowly all over Europe,

England, a suspected ally, ready to give a push to that which was

tottering and to hurl herself on that which should fall, the peerage

sheltering itself behind Beccaria to refuse four heads to the law, the

fleurs-de-lys erased from the King’s carriage, the cross torn from

Notre Dame, Lafayette lessened, Laffitte ruined, Benjamin Constant dead

in indigence, Casimir Périer dead in the exhaustion of his power;

political and social malady breaking out simultaneously in the two

capitals of the kingdom, the one in the city of thought, the other in

the city of toil; at Paris civil war, at Lyons servile war; in the two

cities, the same glare of the furnace; a crater-like crimson on the

brow of the people; the South rendered fanatic, the West troubled, the

Duchesse de Berry in la Vendée, plots, conspiracies, risings, cholera,

added the sombre roar of tumult of events to the sombre roar of ideas.

CHAPTER V—FACTS WHENCE HISTORY SPRINGS AND WHICH HISTORY IGNORES

Towards the end of April, everything had become aggravated. The

fermentation entered the boiling state. Ever since 1830, petty partial

revolts had been going on here and there, which were quickly

suppressed, but ever bursting forth afresh, the sign of a vast

underlying conflagration. Something terrible was in preparation.

Glimpses could be caught of the features still indistinct and

imperfectly lighted, of a possible revolution. France kept an eye on

Paris; Paris kept an eye on the Faubourg Saint-Antoine.

The Faubourg Saint-Antoine, which was in a dull glow, was beginning its

ebullition.

[Illustration: A Street Orator]

The wine-shops of the Rue de Charonne were, although the union of the

two epithets seems singular when applied to wine-shops, grave and

stormy.

The government was there purely and simply called in question. There

people publicly discussed the \_question of fighting or of keeping

quiet\_. There were back shops where workingmen were made to swear that

they would hasten into the street at the first cry of alarm, and “that

they would fight without counting the number of the enemy.” This

engagement once entered into, a man seated in the corner of the

wine-shop “assumed a sonorous tone,” and said, “You understand! You

have sworn!”

Sometimes they went upstairs, to a private room on the first floor, and

there scenes that were almost masonic were enacted. They made the

initiated take oaths \_to render service to himself as well as to the

fathers of families\_. That was the formula.

In the tap-rooms, “subversive” pamphlets were read. \_They treated the

government with contempt\_, says a secret report of that time.

Words like the following could be heard there:—

“I don’t know the names of the leaders. We folks shall not know the day

until two hours beforehand.” One workman said: “There are three hundred

of us, let each contribute ten sous, that will make one hundred and

fifty francs with which to procure powder and shot.”

Another said: “I don’t ask for six months, I don’t ask for even two. In

less than a fortnight we shall be parallel with the government. With

twenty-five thousand men we can face them.” Another said: “I don’t

sleep at night, because I make cartridges all night.” From time to

time, men “of bourgeois appearance, and in good coats” came and “caused

embarrassment,” and with the air of “command,” shook hands with \_the

most important\_, and then went away. They never stayed more than ten

minutes. Significant remarks were exchanged in a low tone: “The plot is

ripe, the matter is arranged.” “It was murmured by all who were there,”

to borrow the very expression of one of those who were present. The

exaltation was such that one day, a workingman exclaimed, before the

whole wine-shop: “We have no arms!” One of his comrades replied: “The

soldiers have!” thus parodying without being aware of the fact,

Bonaparte’s proclamation to the army in Italy: “When they had anything

of a more secret nature on hand,” adds one report, “they did not

communicate it to each other.” It is not easy to understand what they

could conceal after what they said.

These reunions were sometimes periodical. At certain ones of them,

there were never more than eight or ten persons present, and they were

always the same. In others, any one entered who wished, and the room

was so full that they were forced to stand. Some went thither through

enthusiasm and passion; others because it \_was on their way to their

work\_. As during the Revolution, there were patriotic women in some of

these wine-shops who embraced newcomers.

Other expressive facts came to light.

A man would enter a shop, drink, and go his way with the remark:

“Wine-merchant, the revolution will pay what is due to you.”

Revolutionary agents were appointed in a wine-shop facing the Rue de

Charonne. The balloting was carried on in their caps.

Workingmen met at the house of a fencing-master who gave lessons in the

Rue de Cotte. There there was a trophy of arms formed of wooden

broadswords, canes, clubs, and foils. One day, the buttons were removed

from the foils.

A workman said: “There are twenty-five of us, but they don’t count on

me, because I am looked upon as a machine.” Later on, that machine

became Quenisset.

The indefinite things which were brewing gradually acquired a strange

and indescribable notoriety. A woman sweeping off her doorsteps said to

another woman: “For a long time, there has been a strong force busy

making cartridges.” In the open street, proclamation could be seen

addressed to the National Guard in the departments. One of these

proclamations was signed: \_Burtot, wine-merchant\_.

One day a man with his beard worn like a collar and with an Italian

accent mounted a stone post at the door of a liquor-seller in the

Marché Lenoir, and read aloud a singular document, which seemed to

emanate from an occult power. Groups formed around him, and applauded.

The passages which touched the crowd most deeply were collected and

noted down. “—Our doctrines are trammelled, our proclamations torn, our

bill-stickers are spied upon and thrown into prison.”—“The breakdown

which has recently taken place in cottons has converted to us many

mediums.”—“The future of nations is being worked out in our obscure

ranks.”—“Here are the fixed terms: action or reaction, revolution or

counter-revolution. For, at our epoch, we no longer believe either in

inertia or in immobility. For the people against the people, that is

the question. There is no other.”—“On the day when we cease to suit

you, break us, but up to that day, help us to march on.” All this in

broad daylight.

Other deeds, more audacious still, were suspicious in the eyes of the

people by reason of their very audacity. On the 4th of April, 1832, a

passer-by mounted the post on the corner which forms the angle of the

Rue Sainte-Marguerite and shouted: “I am a Babouvist!” But beneath

Babeuf, the people scented Gisquet.

Among other things, this man said:—

“Down with property! The opposition of the left is cowardly and

treacherous. When it wants to be on the right side, it preaches

revolution, it is democratic in order to escape being beaten, and

royalist so that it may not have to fight. The republicans are beasts

with feathers. Distrust the republicans, citizens of the laboring

classes.”

“Silence, citizen spy!” cried an artisan.

This shout put an end to the discourse.

Mysterious incidents occurred.

At nightfall, a workingman encountered near the canal a “very well

dressed man,” who said to him: “Whither are you bound, citizen?” “Sir,”

replied the workingman, “I have not the honor of your acquaintance.” “I

know you very well, however.” And the man added: “Don’t be alarmed, I

am an agent of the committee. You are suspected of not being quite

faithful. You know that if you reveal anything, there is an eye fixed

on you.” Then he shook hands with the workingman and went away, saying:

“We shall meet again soon.”

The police, who were on the alert, collected singular dialogues, not

only in the wine-shops, but in the street.

“Get yourself received very soon,” said a weaver to a cabinet-maker.

“Why?”

“There is going to be a shot to fire.”

Two ragged pedestrians exchanged these remarkable replies, fraught with

evident Jacquerie:—

“Who governs us?”

“M. Philippe.”

“No, it is the bourgeoisie.”

The reader is mistaken if he thinks that we take the word \_Jacquerie\_

in a bad sense. The Jacques were the poor.

On another occasion two men were heard to say to each other as they

passed by: “We have a good plan of attack.”

Only the following was caught of a private conversation between four

men who were crouching in a ditch of the circle of the Barrière du

Trône:—

“Everything possible will be done to prevent his walking about Paris

any more.”

Who was the \_he?\_ Menacing obscurity.

“The principal leaders,” as they said in the faubourg, held themselves

apart. It was supposed that they met for consultation in a wine-shop

near the point Saint-Eustache. A certain Aug—, chief of the Society aid

for tailors, Rue Mondétour, had the reputation of serving as

intermediary central between the leaders and the Faubourg

Saint-Antoine.

Nevertheless, there was always a great deal of mystery about these

leaders, and no certain fact can invalidate the singular arrogance of

this reply made later on by a man accused before the Court of Peers:—

“Who was your leader?”

\_“I knew of none and I recognized none.”\_

There was nothing but words, transparent but vague; sometimes idle

reports, rumors, hearsay. Other indications cropped up.

A carpenter, occupied in nailing boards to a fence around the ground on

which a house was in process of construction, in the Rue de Reuilly

found on that plot the torn fragment of a letter on which were still

legible the following lines:—

The committee must take measures to prevent recruiting in the sections

for the different societies.

And, as a postscript:—

We have learned that there are guns in the Rue du

Faubourg-Poissonnière, No. 5 [bis], to the number of five or six

thousand, in the house of a gunsmith in that court. The section owns no

arms.

What excited the carpenter and caused him to show this thing to his

neighbors was the fact, that a few paces further on he picked up

another paper, torn like the first, and still more significant, of

which we reproduce a facsimile, because of the historical interest

attaching to these strange documents:—

[Illustration]

+——————————————————————————————————————————————————————————————————————+

| Q | C | D | E | Learn this list by heart. After so doing |

| | | | | | you will tear it up. The men admitted will do the same |

| | | | | | when you have transmitted their orders to them. Health and |

| | | | | | Fraternity, u og a’ fe L. |

+——————————————————————————————————————————————————————————————————————+

It was only later on that the persons who were in the secret of this

find at the time, learned the significance of those four capital

letters: \_quinturions, centurions, decurions, éclaireurs\_ [scouts], and

the sense of the letters: \_u og a’ fe\_, which was a date, and meant

April 15th, 1832. Under each capital letter were inscribed names

followed by very characteristic notes. Thus: Q. \_Bannerel\_. 8 guns, 83

cartridges. A safe man.—C. \_Boubière\_. 1 pistol, 40 cartridges.—D.

\_Rollet\_. 1 foil, 1 pistol, 1 pound of powder.—E. \_Tessier\_. 1 sword, 1

cartridge-box. Exact.— \_Terreur\_. 8 guns. Brave, etc.

Finally, this carpenter found, still in the same enclosure, a third

paper on which was written in pencil, but very legibly, this sort of

enigmatical list:—

Unité: Blanchard: Arbre-Sec. 6.

Barra. Soize. Salle-au-Comte.

Kosciusko. Aubry the Butcher?

J. J. R.

Caius Gracchus.

Right of revision. Dufond. Four.

Fall of the Girondists. Derbac. Maubuée.

Washington. Pinson. 1 pistol, 86 cartridges.

Marseillaise.

Sovereignty of the people. Michel. Quincampoix. Sword.

Hoche.

Marceau. Plato. Arbre-Sec.

Warsaw. Tilly, crier of the Populaire.

The honest bourgeois into whose hands this list fell knew its

significance. It appears that this list was the complete nomenclature

of the sections of the fourth arondissement of the Society of the

Rights of Man, with the names and dwellings of the chiefs of sections.

To-day, when all these facts which were obscure are nothing more than

history, we may publish them. It should be added, that the foundation

of the Society of the Rights of Man seems to have been posterior to the

date when this paper was found. Perhaps this was only a rough draft.

Still, according to all the remarks and the words, according to written

notes, material facts begin to make their appearance.

In the Rue Popincourt, in the house of a dealer in bric-à-brac, there

were seized seven sheets of gray paper, all folded alike lengthwise and

in four; these sheets enclosed twenty-six squares of this same gray

paper folded in the form of a cartridge, and a card, on which was

written the following:—

Saltpetre . . . . . . . . . . . 12 ounces.

Sulphur . . . . . . . . . . . 2 ounces.

Charcoal . . . . . . . . . . . 2 ounces and a half.

Water . . . . . . . . . . . 2 ounces.

The report of the seizure stated that the drawer exhaled a strong smell

of powder.

A mason returning from his day’s work, left behind him a little package

on a bench near the bridge of Austerlitz. This package was taken to the

police station. It was opened, and in it were found two printed

dialogues, signed \_Lahautière\_, a song entitled: “Workmen, band

together,” and a tin box full of cartridges.

One artisan drinking with a comrade made the latter feel him to see how

warm he was; the other man felt a pistol under his waistcoat.

In a ditch on the boulevard, between Père-Lachaise and the Barrière du

Trône, at the most deserted spot, some children, while playing,

discovered beneath a mass of shavings and refuse bits of wood, a bag

containing a bullet-mould, a wooden punch for the preparation of

cartridges, a wooden bowl, in which there were grains of

hunting-powder, and a little cast-iron pot whose interior presented

evident traces of melted lead.

Police agents, making their way suddenly and unexpectedly at five

o’clock in the morning, into the dwelling of a certain Pardon, who was

afterwards a member of the Barricade-Merry section and got himself

killed in the insurrection of April, 1834, found him standing near his

bed, and holding in his hand some cartridges which he was in the act of

preparing.

Towards the hour when workingmen repose, two men were seen to meet

between the Barrière Picpus and the Barrière Charenton in a little lane

between two walls, near a wine-shop, in front of which there was a “Jeu

de Siam.”33 One drew a pistol from beneath his blouse and handed it to

the other. As he was handing it to him, he noticed that the

perspiration of his chest had made the powder damp. He primed the

pistol and added more powder to what was already in the pan. Then the

two men parted.

A certain Gallais, afterwards killed in the Rue Beaubourg in the affair

of April, boasted of having in his house seven hundred cartridges and

twenty-four flints.

The government one day received a warning that arms and two hundred

thousand cartridges had just been distributed in the faubourg. On the

following week thirty thousand cartridges were distributed. The

remarkable point about it was, that the police were not able to seize a

single one.

An intercepted letter read: “The day is not far distant when, within

four hours by the clock, eighty thousand patriots will be under arms.”

All this fermentation was public, one might almost say tranquil. The

approaching insurrection was preparing its storm calmly in the face of

the government. No singularity was lacking to this still subterranean

crisis, which was already perceptible. The bourgeois talked peaceably

to the working-classes of what was in preparation. They said: “How is

the rising coming along?” in the same tone in which they would have

said: “How is your wife?”

A furniture-dealer, of the Rue Moreau, inquired: “Well, when are you

going to make the attack?”

Another shop-keeper said:—

“The attack will be made soon.”

“I know it. A month ago, there were fifteen thousand of you, now there

are twenty-five thousand.” He offered his gun, and a neighbor offered a

small pistol which he was willing to sell for seven francs.

Moreover, the revolutionary fever was growing. Not a point in Paris nor

in France was exempt from it. The artery was beating everywhere. Like

those membranes which arise from certain inflammations and form in the

human body, the network of secret societies began to spread all over

the country. From the associations of the Friends of the People, which

was at the same time public and secret, sprang the Society of the

Rights of Man, which also dated from one of the orders of the day:

\_Pluviôse, Year 40 of the republican era\_, which was destined to

survive even the mandate of the Court of Assizes which pronounced its

dissolution, and which did not hesitate to bestow on its sections

significant names like the following:—

Pikes.

Tocsin.

Signal cannon.

Phrygian cap.

January 21.

The beggars.

The vagabonds.

Forward march.

Robespierre.

Level.

Ça Ira.

The Society of the Rights of Man engendered the Society of Action.

These were impatient individuals who broke away and hastened ahead.

Other associations sought to recruit themselves from the great mother

societies. The members of sections complained that they were torn

asunder. Thus, the Gallic Society, and the committee of organization of

the Municipalities. Thus the associations for the liberty of the press,

for individual liberty, for the instruction of the people against

indirect taxes. Then the Society of Equal Workingmen which was divided

into three fractions, the levellers, the communists, the reformers.

Then the Army of the Bastilles, a sort of cohort organized on a

military footing, four men commanded by a corporal, ten by a sergeant,

twenty by a sub-lieutenant, forty by a lieutenant; there were never

more than five men who knew each other. Creation where precaution is

combined with audacity and which seemed stamped with the genius of

Venice.

The central committee, which was at the head, had two arms, the Society

of Action, and the Army of the Bastilles.

A legitimist association, the Chevaliers of Fidelity, stirred about

among these the republican affiliations. It was denounced and

repudiated there.

The Parisian societies had ramifications in the principal cities,

Lyons, Nantes, Lille, Marseilles, and each had its Society of the

Rights of Man, the Charbonnière, and The Free Men. All had a

revolutionary society which was called the Cougourde. We have already

mentioned this word.

In Paris, the Faubourg Saint-Marceau kept up an equal buzzing with the

Faubourg Saint-Antoine, and the schools were no less moved than the

faubourgs. A café in the Rue Saint-Hyacinthe and the wine-shop of the

\_Seven Billiards\_, Rue des Mathurins-Saint-Jacques, served as rallying

points for the students. The Society of the Friends of the A B C

affiliated to the Mutualists of Angers, and to the Cougourde of Aix,

met, as we have seen, in the Café Musain. These same young men

assembled also, as we have stated already, in a restaurant wine-shop of

the Rue Mondétour which was called Corinthe. These meetings were

secret. Others were as public as possible, and the reader can judge of

their boldness from these fragments of an interrogatory undergone in

one of the ulterior prosecutions: “Where was this meeting held?” “In

the Rue de la Paix.” “At whose house?” “In the street.” “What sections

were there?” “Only one.” “Which?” “The Manuel section.” “Who was its

leader?” “I.” “You are too young to have decided alone upon the bold

course of attacking the government. Where did your instructions come

from?” “From the central committee.”

The army was mined at the same time as the population, as was proved

subsequently by the operations of Béford, Luneville, and Épinard. They

counted on the fifty-second regiment, on the fifth, on the eighth, on

the thirty-seventh, and on the twentieth light cavalry. In Burgundy and

in the southern towns they planted the liberty tree; that is to say, a

pole surmounted by a red cap.

Such was the situation.

The Faubourg Saint-Antoine, more than any other group of the

population, as we stated in the beginning, accentuated this situation

and made it felt. That was the sore point. This old faubourg, peopled

like an ant-hill, laborious, courageous, and angry as a hive of bees,

was quivering with expectation and with the desire for a tumult.

Everything was in a state of agitation there, without any interruption,

however, of the regular work. It is impossible to convey an idea of

this lively yet sombre physiognomy. In this faubourg exists poignant

distress hidden under attic roofs; there also exist rare and ardent

minds. It is particularly in the matter of distress and intelligence

that it is dangerous to have extremes meet.

The Faubourg Saint-Antoine had also other causes to tremble; for it

received the counter-shock of commercial crises, of failures, strikes,

slack seasons, all inherent to great political disturbances. In times

of revolution misery is both cause and effect. The blow which it deals

rebounds upon it. This population full of proud virtue, capable to the

highest degree of latent heat, always ready to fly to arms, prompt to

explode, irritated, deep, undermined, seemed to be only awaiting the

fall of a spark. Whenever certain sparks float on the horizon chased by

the wind of events, it is impossible not to think of the Faubourg

Saint-Antoine and of the formidable chance which has placed at the very

gates of Paris that powder-house of suffering and ideas.

The wine-shops of the \_Faubourg Antoine\_, which have been more than

once drawn in the sketches which the reader has just perused, possess

historical notoriety. In troublous times people grow intoxicated there

more on words than on wine. A sort of prophetic spirit and an afflatus

of the future circulates there, swelling hearts and enlarging souls.

The cabarets of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine resemble those taverns of

Mont Aventine erected on the cave of the Sibyl and communicating with

the profound and sacred breath; taverns where the tables were almost

tripods, and where was drunk what Ennius calls the \_sibylline wine\_.

The Faubourg Saint-Antoine is a reservoir of people. Revolutionary

agitations create fissures there, through which trickles the popular

sovereignty. This sovereignty may do evil; it can be mistaken like any

other; but, even when led astray, it remains great. We may say of it as

of the blind cyclops, \_Ingens\_.

In ’93, according as the idea which was floating about was good or

evil, according as it was the day of fanaticism or of enthusiasm, there

leaped forth from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine now savage legions, now

heroic bands.

Savage. Let us explain this word. When these bristling men, who in the

early days of the revolutionary chaos, tattered, howling, wild, with

uplifted bludgeon, pike on high, hurled themselves upon ancient Paris

in an uproar, what did they want? They wanted an end to oppression, an

end to tyranny, an end to the sword, work for men, instruction for the

child, social sweetness for the woman, liberty, equality, fraternity,

bread for all, the idea for all, the Edenizing of the world. Progress;

and that holy, sweet, and good thing, progress, they claimed in

terrible wise, driven to extremities as they were, half naked, club in

fist, a roar in their mouths. They were savages, yes; but the savages

of civilization.

They proclaimed right furiously; they were desirous, if only with fear

and trembling, to force the human race to paradise. They seemed

barbarians, and they were saviours. They demanded light with the mask

of night.

Facing these men, who were ferocious, we admit, and terrifying, but

ferocious and terrifying for good ends, there are other men, smiling,

embroidered, gilded, beribboned, starred, in silk stockings, in white

plumes, in yellow gloves, in varnished shoes, who, with their elbows on

a velvet table, beside a marble chimney-piece, insist gently on

demeanor and the preservation of the past, of the Middle Ages, of

divine right, of fanaticism, of innocence, of slavery, of the death

penalty, of war, glorifying in low tones and with politeness, the

sword, the stake, and the scaffold. For our part, if we were forced to

make a choice between the barbarians of civilization and the civilized

men of barbarism, we should choose the barbarians.

But, thank Heaven, still another choice is possible. No perpendicular

fall is necessary, in front any more than in the rear.

Neither despotism nor terrorism. We desire progress with a gentle

slope.

God takes care of that. God’s whole policy consists in rendering slopes

less steep.

CHAPTER VI—ENJOLRAS AND HIS LIEUTENANTS

It was about this epoch that Enjolras, in view of a possible

catastrophe, instituted a kind of mysterious census.

All were present at a secret meeting at the Café Musain.

Enjolras said, mixing his words with a few half-enigmatical but

significant metaphors:—

“It is proper that we should know where we stand and on whom we may

count. If combatants are required, they must be provided. It can do no

harm to have something with which to strike. Passers-by always have

more chance of being gored when there are bulls on the road than when

there are none. Let us, therefore, reckon a little on the herd. How

many of us are there? There is no question of postponing this task

until to-morrow. Revolutionists should always be hurried; progress has

no time to lose. Let us mistrust the unexpected. Let us not be caught

unprepared. We must go over all the seams that we have made and see

whether they hold fast. This business ought to be concluded to-day.

Courfeyrac, you will see the polytechnic students. It is their day to

go out. To-day is Wednesday. Feuilly, you will see those of the

Glacière, will you not? Combeferre has promised me to go to Picpus.

There is a perfect swarm and an excellent one there. Bahorel will visit

the Estrapade. Prouvaire, the masons are growing lukewarm; you will

bring us news from the lodge of the Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Honoré. Joly

will go to Dupuytren’s clinical lecture, and feel the pulse of the

medical school. Bossuet will take a little turn in the court and talk

with the young law licentiates. I will take charge of the Cougourde

myself.”

“That arranges everything,” said Courfeyrac.

“No.”

“What else is there?”

“A very important thing.”

“What is that?” asked Courfeyrac.

“The Barrière du Maine,” replied Enjolras.

Enjolras remained for a moment as though absorbed in reflection, then

he resumed:—

“At the Barrière du Maine there are marble-workers, painters, and

journeymen in the studios of sculptors. They are an enthusiastic

family, but liable to cool off. I don’t know what has been the matter

with them for some time past. They are thinking of something else. They

are becoming extinguished. They pass their time playing dominoes. There

is urgent need that some one should go and talk with them a little, but

with firmness. They meet at Richefeu’s. They are to be found there

between twelve and one o’clock. Those ashes must be fanned into a glow.

For that errand I had counted on that abstracted Marius, who is a good

fellow on the whole, but he no longer comes to us. I need some one for

the Barrière du Maine. I have no one.”

“What about me?” said Grantaire. “Here am I.”

“You?”

“I.”

“You indoctrinate republicans! you warm up hearts that have grown cold

in the name of principle!”

“Why not?”

“Are you good for anything?”

“I have a vague ambition in that direction,” said Grantaire.

“You do not believe in everything.”

“I believe in you.”

“Grantaire will you do me a service?”

“Anything. I’ll black your boots.”

“Well, don’t meddle with our affairs. Sleep yourself sober from your

absinthe.”

“You are an ingrate, Enjolras.”

“You the man to go to the Barrière du Maine! You capable of it!”

“I am capable of descending the Rue de Grès, of crossing the Place

Saint-Michel, of sloping through the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, of taking

the Rue de Vaugirard, of passing the Carmelites, of turning into the

Rue d’Assas, of reaching the Rue du Cherche-Midi, of leaving behind me

the Conseil de Guerre, of pacing the Rue des Vieilles-Tuileries, of

striding across the boulevard, of following the Chaussée du Maine, of

passing the barrier, and entering Richefeu’s. I am capable of that. My

shoes are capable of that.”

“Do you know anything of those comrades who meet at Richefeu’s?”

“Not much. We only address each other as \_thou\_.”

“What will you say to them?”

“I will speak to them of Robespierre, pardi! Of Danton. Of principles.”

“You?”

“I. But I don’t receive justice. When I set about it, I am terrible. I

have read Prudhomme, I know the Social Contract, I know my constitution

of the year Two by heart. ‘The liberty of one citizen ends where the

liberty of another citizen begins.’ Do you take me for a brute? I have

an old bank-bill of the Republic in my drawer. The Rights of Man, the

sovereignty of the people, sapristi! I am even a bit of a Hébertist. I

can talk the most superb twaddle for six hours by the clock, watch in

hand.”

“Be serious,” said Enjolras.

“I am wild,” replied Grantaire.

Enjolras meditated for a few moments, and made the gesture of a man who

has taken a resolution.

“Grantaire,” he said gravely, “I consent to try you. You shall go to

the Barrière du Maine.”

Grantaire lived in furnished lodgings very near the Café Musain. He

went out, and five minutes later he returned. He had gone home to put

on a Robespierre waistcoat.

“Red,” said he as he entered, and he looked intently at Enjolras. Then,

with the palm of his energetic hand, he laid the two scarlet points of

the waistcoat across his breast.

And stepping up to Enjolras, he whispered in his ear:—

“Be easy.”

He jammed his hat on resolutely and departed.

A quarter of an hour later, the back room of the Café Musain was

deserted. All the friends of the A B C were gone, each in his own

direction, each to his own task. Enjolras, who had reserved the

Cougourde of Aix for himself, was the last to leave.

Those members of the Cougourde of Aix who were in Paris then met on the

plain of Issy, in one of the abandoned quarries which are so numerous

in that side of Paris.

As Enjolras walked towards this place, he passed the whole situation in

review in his own mind. The gravity of events was self-evident. When

facts, the premonitory symptoms of latent social malady, move heavily,

the slightest complication stops and entangles them. A phenomenon

whence arises ruin and new births. Enjolras descried a luminous

uplifting beneath the gloomy skirts of the future. Who knows? Perhaps

the moment was at hand. The people were again taking possession of

right, and what a fine spectacle! The revolution was again majestically

taking possession of France and saying to the world: “The sequel

to-morrow!” Enjolras was content. The furnace was being heated. He had

at that moment a powder train of friends scattered all over Paris. He

composed, in his own mind, with Combeferre’s philosophical and

penetrating eloquence, Feuilly’s cosmopolitan enthusiasm, Courfeyrac’s

dash, Bahorel’s smile, Jean Prouvaire’s melancholy, Joly’s science,

Bossuet’s sarcasms, a sort of electric spark which took fire nearly

everywhere at once. All hands to work. Surely, the result would answer

to the effort. This was well. This made him think of Grantaire.

“Hold,” said he to himself, “the Barrière du Maine will not take me far

out of my way. What if I were to go on as far as Richefeu’s? Let us

have a look at what Grantaire is about, and see how he is getting on.”

One o’clock was striking from the Vaugirard steeple when Enjolras

reached the Richefeu smoking-room.

He pushed open the door, entered, folded his arms, letting the door

fall to and strike his shoulders, and gazed at that room filled with

tables, men, and smoke.

A voice broke forth from the mist of smoke, interrupted by another

voice. It was Grantaire holding a dialogue with an adversary.

Grantaire was sitting opposite another figure, at a marble Saint-Anne

table, strewn with grains of bran and dotted with dominos. He was

hammering the table with his fist, and this is what Enjolras heard:—

“Double-six.”

“Fours.”

“The pig! I have no more.”

“You are dead. A two.”

“Six.”

“Three.”

“One.”

“It’s my move.”

“Four points.”

“Not much.”

“It’s your turn.”

“I have made an enormous mistake.”

“You are doing well.”

“Fifteen.”

“Seven more.”

“That makes me twenty-two.” [Thoughtfully, “Twenty-two!”]

“You weren’t expecting that double-six. If I had placed it at the

beginning, the whole play would have been changed.”

“A two again.”

“One.”

“One! Well, five.”

“I haven’t any.”

“It was your play, I believe?”

“Yes.”

“Blank.”

“What luck he has! Ah! You are lucky! [Long reverie.] Two.”

“One.”

“Neither five nor one. That’s bad for you.”

“Domino.”

“Plague take it!”

BOOK SECOND—ÉPONINE

CHAPTER I—THE LARK’S MEADOW

Marius had witnessed the unexpected termination of the ambush upon

whose track he had set Javert; but Javert had no sooner quitted the

building, bearing off his prisoners in three hackney-coaches, than

Marius also glided out of the house. It was only nine o’clock in the

evening. Marius betook himself to Courfeyrac. Courfeyrac was no longer

the imperturbable inhabitant of the Latin Quarter, he had gone to live

in the Rue de la Verrerie “for political reasons”; this quarter was one

where, at that epoch, insurrection liked to install itself. Marius said

to Courfeyrac: “I have come to sleep with you.” Courfeyrac dragged a

mattress off his bed, which was furnished with two, spread it out on

the floor, and said: “There.”

At seven o’clock on the following morning, Marius returned to the

hovel, paid the quarter’s rent which he owed to Ma’am Bougon, had his

books, his bed, his table, his commode, and his two chairs loaded on a

hand-cart and went off without leaving his address, so that when Javert

returned in the course of the morning, for the purpose of questioning

Marius as to the events of the preceding evening, he found only Ma’am

Bougon, who answered: “Moved away!”

Ma’am Bougon was convinced that Marius was to some extent an accomplice

of the robbers who had been seized the night before. “Who would ever

have said it?” she exclaimed to the portresses of the quarter, “a young

man like that, who had the air of a girl!”

Marius had two reasons for this prompt change of residence. The first

was, that he now had a horror of that house, where he had beheld, so

close at hand, and in its most repulsive and most ferocious

development, a social deformity which is, perhaps, even more terrible

than the wicked rich man, the wicked poor man. The second was, that he

did not wish to figure in the lawsuit which would insue in all

probability, and be brought in to testify against Thénardier.

Javert thought that the young man, whose name he had forgotten, was

afraid, and had fled, or perhaps, had not even returned home at the

time of the ambush; he made some efforts to find him, however, but

without success.

A month passed, then another. Marius was still with Courfeyrac. He had

learned from a young licentiate in law, an habitual frequenter of the

courts, that Thénardier was in close confinement. Every Monday, Marius

had five francs handed in to the clerk’s office of La Force for

Thénardier.

As Marius had no longer any money, he borrowed the five francs from

Courfeyrac. It was the first time in his life that he had ever borrowed

money. These periodical five francs were a double riddle to Courfeyrac

who lent and to Thénardier who received them. “To whom can they go?”

thought Courfeyrac. “Whence can this come to me?” Thénardier asked

himself.

Moreover, Marius was heart-broken. Everything had plunged through a

trap-door once more. He no longer saw anything before him; his life was

again buried in mystery where he wandered fumblingly. He had for a

moment beheld very close at hand, in that obscurity, the young girl

whom he loved, the old man who seemed to be her father, those unknown

beings, who were his only interest and his only hope in this world;

and, at the very moment when he thought himself on the point of

grasping them, a gust had swept all these shadows away. Not a spark of

certainty and truth had been emitted even in the most terrible of

collisions. No conjecture was possible. He no longer knew even the name

that he thought he knew. It certainly was not Ursule. And the Lark was

a nickname. And what was he to think of the old man? Was he actually in

hiding from the police? The white-haired workman whom Marius had

encountered in the vicinity of the Invalides recurred to his mind. It

now seemed probable that that workingman and M. Leblanc were one and

the same person. So he disguised himself? That man had his heroic and

his equivocal sides. Why had he not called for help? Why had he fled?

Was he, or was he not, the father of the young girl? Was he, in short,

the man whom Thénardier thought that he recognized? Thénardier might

have been mistaken. These formed so many insoluble problems. All this,

it is true, detracted nothing from the angelic charms of the young girl

of the Luxembourg. Heart-rending distress; Marius bore a passion in his

heart, and night over his eyes. He was thrust onward, he was drawn, and

he could not stir. All had vanished, save love. Of love itself he had

lost the instincts and the sudden illuminations. Ordinarily, this flame

which burns us lights us also a little, and casts some useful gleams

without. But Marius no longer even heard these mute counsels of

passion. He never said to himself: “What if I were to go to such a

place? What if I were to try such and such a thing?” The girl whom he

could no longer call Ursule was evidently somewhere; nothing warned

Marius in what direction he should seek her. His whole life was now

summed up in two words; absolute uncertainty within an impenetrable

fog. To see her once again; he still aspired to this, but he no longer

expected it.

To crown all, his poverty had returned. He felt that icy breath close

to him, on his heels. In the midst of his torments, and long before

this, he had discontinued his work, and nothing is more dangerous than

discontinued work; it is a habit which vanishes. A habit which is easy

to get rid of, and difficult to take up again.

A certain amount of dreaming is good, like a narcotic in discreet

doses. It lulls to sleep the fevers of the mind at labor, which are

sometimes severe, and produces in the spirit a soft and fresh vapor

which corrects the over-harsh contours of pure thought, fills in gaps

here and there, binds together and rounds off the angles of the ideas.

But too much dreaming sinks and drowns. Woe to the brain-worker who

allows himself to fall entirely from thought into reverie! He thinks

that he can re-ascend with equal ease, and he tells himself that, after

all, it is the same thing. Error!

Thought is the toil of the intelligence, reverie its voluptuousness. To

replace thought with reverie is to confound a poison with a food.

Marius had begun in that way, as the reader will remember. Passion had

supervened and had finished the work of precipitating him into chimæras

without object or bottom. One no longer emerges from one’s self except

for the purpose of going off to dream. Idle production. Tumultuous and

stagnant gulf. And, in proportion as labor diminishes, needs increase.

This is a law. Man, in a state of reverie, is generally prodigal and

slack; the unstrung mind cannot hold life within close bounds.

There is, in that mode of life, good mingled with evil, for if

enervation is baleful, generosity is good and healthful. But the poor

man who is generous and noble, and who does not work, is lost.

Resources are exhausted, needs crop up.

Fatal declivity down which the most honest and the firmest as well as

the most feeble and most vicious are drawn, and which ends in one of

two holds, suicide or crime.

By dint of going outdoors to think, the day comes when one goes out to

throw one’s self in the water.

Excess of reverie breeds men like Escousse and Lebras.

Marius was descending this declivity at a slow pace, with his eyes

fixed on the girl whom he no longer saw. What we have just written

seems strange, and yet it is true. The memory of an absent being

kindles in the darkness of the heart; the more it has disappeared, the

more it beams; the gloomy and despairing soul sees this light on its

horizon; the star of the inner night. She—that was Marius’ whole

thought. He meditated of nothing else; he was confusedly conscious that

his old coat was becoming an impossible coat, and that his new coat was

growing old, that his shirts were wearing out, that his hat was wearing

out, that his boots were giving out, and he said to himself: “If I

could but see her once again before I die!”

One sweet idea alone was left to him, that she had loved him, that her

glance had told him so, that she did not know his name, but that she

did know his soul, and that, wherever she was, however mysterious the

place, she still loved him perhaps. Who knows whether she were not

thinking of him as he was thinking of her? Sometimes, in those

inexplicable hours such as are experienced by every heart that loves,

though he had no reasons for anything but sadness and yet felt an

obscure quiver of joy, he said to himself: “It is her thoughts that are

coming to me!” Then he added: “Perhaps my thoughts reach her also.”

This illusion, at which he shook his head a moment later, was

sufficient, nevertheless, to throw beams, which at times resembled

hope, into his soul. From time to time, especially at that evening hour

which is the most depressing to even the dreamy, he allowed the purest,

the most impersonal, the most ideal of the reveries which filled his

brain, to fall upon a notebook which contained nothing else. He called

this “writing to her.”

It must not be supposed that his reason was deranged. Quite the

contrary. He had lost the faculty of working and of moving firmly

towards any fixed goal, but he was endowed with more clear-sightedness

and rectitude than ever. Marius surveyed by a calm and real, although

peculiar light, what passed before his eyes, even the most indifferent

deeds and men; he pronounced a just criticism on everything with a sort

of honest dejection and candid disinterestedness. His judgment, which

was almost wholly disassociated from hope, held itself aloof and soared

on high.

In this state of mind nothing escaped him, nothing deceived him, and

every moment he was discovering the foundation of life, of humanity,

and of destiny. Happy, even in the midst of anguish, is he to whom God

has given a soul worthy of love and of unhappiness! He who has not

viewed the things of this world and the heart of man under this double

light has seen nothing and knows nothing of the true.

The soul which loves and suffers is in a state of sublimity.

However, day followed day, and nothing new presented itself. It merely

seemed to him, that the sombre space which still remained to be

traversed by him was growing shorter with every instant. He thought

that he already distinctly perceived the brink of the bottomless abyss.

“What!” he repeated to himself, “shall I not see her again before

then!”

When you have ascended the Rue Saint-Jacques, left the barrier on one

side and followed the old inner boulevard for some distance, you reach

the Rue de la Santé, then the Glacière, and, a little while before

arriving at the little river of the Gobelins, you come to a sort of

field which is the only spot in the long and monotonous chain of the

boulevards of Paris, where Ruysdael would be tempted to sit down.

There is something indescribable there which exhales grace, a green

meadow traversed by tightly stretched lines, from which flutter rags

drying in the wind, and an old market-gardener’s house, built in the

time of Louis XIII., with its great roof oddly pierced with dormer

windows, dilapidated palisades, a little water amid poplar-trees,

women, voices, laughter; on the horizon the Panthéon, the pole of the

Deaf-Mutes, the Val-de-Grâce, black, squat, fantastic, amusing,

magnificent, and in the background, the severe square crests of the

towers of Notre Dame.

As the place is worth looking at, no one goes thither. Hardly one cart

or wagoner passes in a quarter of an hour.

It chanced that Marius’ solitary strolls led him to this plot of

ground, near the water. That day, there was a rarity on the boulevard,

a passer-by. Marius, vaguely impressed with the almost savage beauty of

the place, asked this passer-by:—“What is the name of this spot?”

The person replied: “It is the Lark’s meadow.”

And he added: “It was here that Ulbach killed the shepherdess of Ivry.”

But after the word “Lark” Marius heard nothing more. These sudden

congealments in the state of reverie, which a single word suffices to

evoke, do occur. The entire thought is abruptly condensed around an

idea, and it is no longer capable of perceiving anything else.

The Lark was the appellation which had replaced Ursule in the depths of

Marius’ melancholy.—“Stop,” said he with a sort of unreasoning stupor

peculiar to these mysterious asides, “this is her meadow. I shall know

where she lives now.”

It was absurd, but irresistible.

And every day he returned to that meadow of the Lark.

CHAPTER II—EMBRYONIC FORMATION OF CRIMES IN THE INCUBATION OF PRISONS

Javert’s triumph in the Gorbeau hovel seemed complete, but had not been

so.

In the first place, and this constituted the principal anxiety, Javert

had not taken the prisoner prisoner. The assassinated man who flees is

more suspicious than the assassin, and it is probable that this

personage, who had been so precious a capture for the ruffians, would

be no less fine a prize for the authorities.

And then, Montparnasse had escaped Javert.

Another opportunity of laying hands on that “devil’s dandy” must be

waited for. Montparnasse had, in fact, encountered Éponine as she stood

on the watch under the trees of the boulevard, and had led her off,

preferring to play Nemorin with the daughter rather than Schinderhannes

with the father. It was well that he did so. He was free. As for

Éponine, Javert had caused her to be seized; a mediocre consolation.

Éponine had joined Azelma at Les Madelonettes.

And finally, on the way from the Gorbeau house to La Force, one of the

principal prisoners, Claquesous, had been lost. It was not known how

this had been effected, the police agents and the sergeants “could not

understand it at all.” He had converted himself into vapor, he had

slipped through the handcuffs, he had trickled through the crevices of

the carriage, the fiacre was cracked, and he had fled; all that they

were able to say was, that on arriving at the prison, there was no

Claquesous. Either the fairies or the police had had a hand in it. Had

Claquesous melted into the shadows like a snow-flake in water? Had

there been unavowed connivance of the police agents? Did this man

belong to the double enigma of order and disorder? Was he concentric

with infraction and repression? Had this sphinx his fore paws in crime

and his hind paws in authority? Javert did not accept such

comminations, and would have bristled up against such compromises; but

his squad included other inspectors besides himself, who were more

initiated than he, perhaps, although they were his subordinates in the

secrets of the Prefecture, and Claquesous had been such a villain that

he might make a very good agent. It is an excellent thing for

ruffianism and an admirable thing for the police to be on such intimate

juggling terms with the night. These double-edged rascals do exist.

However that may be, Claquesous had gone astray and was not found

again. Javert appeared to be more irritated than amazed at this.

As for Marius, “that booby of a lawyer,” who had probably become

frightened, and whose name Javert had forgotten, Javert attached very

little importance to him. Moreover, a lawyer can be hunted up at any

time. But was he a lawyer after all?

The investigation had begun.

The magistrate had thought it advisable not to put one of these men of

the band of Patron Minette in close confinement, in the hope that he

would chatter. This man was Brujon, the long-haired man of the Rue du

Petit-Banquier. He had been let loose in the Charlemagne courtyard, and

the eyes of the watchers were fixed on him.

This name of Brujon is one of the souvenirs of La Force. In that

hideous courtyard, called the court of the Bâtiment-Neuf (New

Building), which the administration called the court Saint-Bernard, and

which the robbers called the Fosse-aux-Lions (The Lion’s Ditch), on

that wall covered with scales and leprosy, which rose on the left to a

level with the roofs, near an old door of rusty iron which led to the

ancient chapel of the ducal residence of La Force, then turned in a

dormitory for ruffians, there could still be seen, twelve years ago, a

sort of fortress roughly carved in the stone with a nail, and beneath

it this signature:—

BRUJON, 1811.

The Brujon of 1811 was the father of the Brujon of 1832.

The latter, of whom the reader caught but a glimpse at the Gorbeau

house, was a very cunning and very adroit young spark, with a

bewildered and plaintive air. It was in consequence of this plaintive

air that the magistrate had released him, thinking him more useful in

the Charlemagne yard than in close confinement.

Robbers do not interrupt their profession because they are in the hands

of justice. They do not let themselves be put out by such a trifle as

that. To be in prison for one crime is no reason for not beginning on

another crime. They are artists, who have one picture in the salon, and

who toil, nonetheless, on a new work in their studios.

Brujon seemed to be stupefied by prison. He could sometimes be seen

standing by the hour together in front of the sutler’s window in the

Charlemagne yard, staring like an idiot at the sordid list of prices

which began with: \_garlic\_, 62 \_centimes\_, and ended with: \_cigar\_, 5

\_centimes\_. Or he passed his time in trembling, chattering his teeth,

saying that he had a fever, and inquiring whether one of the eight and

twenty beds in the fever ward was vacant.

All at once, towards the end of February, 1832, it was discovered that

Brujon, that somnolent fellow, had had three different commissions

executed by the errand-men of the establishment, not under his own

name, but in the name of three of his comrades; and they had cost him

in all fifty sous, an exorbitant outlay which attracted the attention

of the prison corporal.

Inquiries were instituted, and on consulting the tariff of commissions

posted in the convict’s parlor, it was learned that the fifty sous

could be analyzed as follows: three commissions; one to the Panthéon,

ten sous; one to Val-de-Grâce, fifteen sous; and one to the Barrière de

Grenelle, twenty-five sous. This last was the dearest of the whole

tariff. Now, at the Panthéon, at the Val-de-Grâce, and at the Barrière

de Grenelle were situated the domiciles of the three very redoubtable

prowlers of the barriers, Kruideniers, alias Bizarro, Glorieux, an

ex-convict, and Barre-Carosse, upon whom the attention of the police

was directed by this incident. It was thought that these men were

members of Patron Minette; two of those leaders, Babet and Gueulemer,

had been captured. It was supposed that the messages, which had been

addressed, not to houses, but to people who were waiting for them in

the street, must have contained information with regard to some crime

that had been plotted. They were in possession of other indications;

they laid hand on the three prowlers, and supposed that they had

circumvented some one or other of Brujon’s machinations.

About a week after these measures had been taken, one night, as the

superintendent of the watch, who had been inspecting the lower

dormitory in the Bâtiment-Neuf, was about to drop his chestnut in the

box—this was the means adopted to make sure that the watchmen performed

their duties punctually; every hour a chestnut must be dropped into all

the boxes nailed to the doors of the dormitories—a watchman looked

through the peep-hole of the dormitory and beheld Brujon sitting on his

bed and writing something by the light of the hall-lamp. The guardian

entered, Brujon was put in a solitary cell for a month, but they were

not able to seize what he had written. The police learned nothing

further about it.

What is certain is, that on the following morning, a “postilion” was

flung from the Charlemagne yard into the Lions’ Ditch, over the

five-story building which separated the two court-yards.

What prisoners call a “postilion” is a pallet of bread artistically

moulded, which is sent \_into Ireland\_, that is to say, over the roofs

of a prison, from one courtyard to another. Etymology: over England;

from one land to another; \_into Ireland\_. This little pellet falls in

the yard. The man who picks it up opens it and finds in it a note

addressed to some prisoner in that yard. If it is a prisoner who finds

the treasure, he forwards the note to its destination; if it is a

keeper, or one of the prisoners secretly sold who are called \_sheep\_ in

prisons and \_foxes\_ in the galleys, the note is taken to the office and

handed over to the police.

On this occasion, the postilion reached its address, although the

person to whom it was addressed was, at that moment, in solitary

confinement. This person was no other than Babet, one of the four heads

of Patron Minette.

The postilion contained a roll of paper on which only these two lines

were written:—

“Babet. There is an affair in the Rue Plumet. A gate on a garden.”

This is what Brujon had written the night before.

In spite of male and female searchers, Babet managed to pass the note

on from La Force to the Salpêtrière, to a “good friend” whom he had and

who was shut up there. This woman in turn transmitted the note to

another woman of her acquaintance, a certain Magnon, who was strongly

suspected by the police, though not yet arrested. This Magnon, whose

name the reader has already seen, had relations with the Thénardier,

which will be described in detail later on, and she could, by going to

see Éponine, serve as a bridge between the Salpêtrière and Les

Madelonettes.

It happened, that at precisely that moment, as proofs were wanting in

the investigation directed against Thénardier in the matter of his

daughters, Éponine and Azelma were released. When Éponine came out,

Magnon, who was watching the gate of the Madelonettes, handed her

Brujon’s note to Babet, charging her to look into the matter.

Éponine went to the Rue Plumet, recognized the gate and the garden,

observed the house, spied, lurked, and, a few days later, brought to

Magnon, who delivers in the Rue Clocheperce, a biscuit, which Magnon

transmitted to Babet’s mistress in the Salpêtrière. A biscuit, in the

shady symbolism of prisons, signifies: Nothing to be done.

So that in less than a week from that time, as Brujon and Babet met in

the circle of La Force, the one on his way to the examination, the

other on his way from it:—

“Well?” asked Brujon, “the Rue P.?”

“Biscuit,” replied Babet. Thus did the fœtus of crime engendered by

Brujon in La Force miscarry.

This miscarriage had its consequences, however, which were perfectly

distinct from Brujon’s programme. The reader will see what they were.

Often when we think we are knotting one thread, we are tying quite

another.

CHAPTER III—APPARITION TO FATHER MABEUF

Marius no longer went to see any one, but he sometimes encountered

Father Mabeuf by chance.

While Marius was slowly descending those melancholy steps which may be

called the cellar stairs, and which lead to places without light, where

the happy can be heard walking overhead, M. Mabeuf was descending on

his side.

The \_Flora of Cauteretz\_ no longer sold at all. The experiments on

indigo had not been successful in the little garden of Austerlitz,

which had a bad exposure. M. Mabeuf could cultivate there only a few

plants which love shade and dampness. Nevertheless, he did not become

discouraged. He had obtained a corner in the Jardin des Plantes, with a

good exposure, to make his trials with indigo “at his own expense.” For

this purpose he had pawned his copperplates of the \_Flora\_. He had

reduced his breakfast to two eggs, and he left one of these for his old

servant, to whom he had paid no wages for the last fifteen months. And

often his breakfast was his only meal. He no longer smiled with his

infantile smile, he had grown morose and no longer received visitors.

Marius did well not to dream of going thither. Sometimes, at the hour

when M. Mabeuf was on his way to the Jardin des Plantes, the old man

and the young man passed each other on the Boulevard de l’Hôpital. They

did not speak, and only exchanged a melancholy sign of the head. A

heart-breaking thing it is that there comes a moment when misery looses

bonds! Two men who have been friends become two chance passers-by.

Royol the bookseller was dead. M. Mabeuf no longer knew his books, his

garden, or his indigo: these were the three forms which happiness,

pleasure, and hope had assumed for him. This sufficed him for his

living. He said to himself: “When I shall have made my balls of

blueing, I shall be rich, I will withdraw my copperplates from the

pawn-shop, I will put my \_Flora\_ in vogue again with trickery, plenty

of money and advertisements in the newspapers and I will buy, I know

well where, a copy of Pierre de Médine’s \_Art de Naviguer\_, with

wood-cuts, edition of 1655.” In the meantime, he toiled all day over

his plot of indigo, and at night he returned home to water his garden,

and to read his books. At that epoch, M. Mabeuf was nearly eighty years

of age.

One evening he had a singular apparition.

He had returned home while it was still broad daylight. Mother

Plutarque, whose health was declining, was ill and in bed. He had dined

on a bone, on which a little meat lingered, and a bit of bread that he

had found on the kitchen table, and had seated himself on an overturned

stone post, which took the place of a bench in his garden.

Near this bench there rose, after the fashion in orchard-gardens, a

sort of large chest, of beams and planks, much dilapidated, a

rabbit-hutch on the ground floor, a fruit-closet on the first. There

was nothing in the hutch, but there were a few apples in the

fruit-closet,—the remains of the winter’s provision.

M. Mabeuf had set himself to turning over and reading, with the aid of

his glasses, two books of which he was passionately fond and in which,

a serious thing at his age, he was interested. His natural timidity

rendered him accessible to the acceptance of superstitions in a certain

degree. The first of these books was the famous treatise of President

Delancre, \_De l’Inconstance des Démons\_; the other was a quarto by

Mutor de la Rubaudière, \_Sur les Diables de Vauvert et les Gobelins de

la Bièvre\_. This last-mentioned old volume interested him all the more,

because his garden had been one of the spots haunted by goblins in

former times. The twilight had begun to whiten what was on high and to

blacken all below. As he read, over the top of the book which he held

in his hand, Father Mabeuf was surveying his plants, and among others a

magnificent rhododendron which was one of his consolations; four days

of heat, wind, and sun without a drop of rain, had passed; the stalks

were bending, the buds drooping, the leaves falling; all this needed

water, the rhododendron was particularly sad. Father Mabeuf was one of

those persons for whom plants have souls. The old man had toiled all

day over his indigo plot, he was worn out with fatigue, but he rose,

laid his books on the bench, and walked, all bent over and with

tottering footsteps, to the well, but when he had grasped the chain, he

could not even draw it sufficiently to unhook it. Then he turned round

and cast a glance of anguish toward heaven which was becoming studded

with stars.

The evening had that serenity which overwhelms the troubles of man

beneath an indescribably mournful and eternal joy. The night promised

to be as arid as the day had been.

“Stars everywhere!” thought the old man; “not the tiniest cloud! Not a

drop of water!”

And his head, which had been upraised for a moment, fell back upon his

breast.

He raised it again, and once more looked at the sky, murmuring:—

“A tear of dew! A little pity!”

He tried again to unhook the chain of the well, and could not.

At that moment, he heard a voice saying:—

“Father Mabeuf, would you like to have me water your garden for you?”

At the same time, a noise as of a wild animal passing became audible in

the hedge, and he beheld emerging from the shrubbery a sort of tall,

slender girl, who drew herself up in front of him and stared boldly at

him. She had less the air of a human being than of a form which had

just blossomed forth from the twilight.

Before Father Mabeuf, who was easily terrified, and who was, as we have

said, quick to take alarm, was able to reply by a single syllable, this

being, whose movements had a sort of odd abruptness in the darkness,

had unhooked the chain, plunged in and withdrawn the bucket, and filled

the watering-pot, and the goodman beheld this apparition, which had

bare feet and a tattered petticoat, running about among the flower-beds

distributing life around her. The sound of the watering-pot on the

leaves filled Father Mabeuf’s soul with ecstasy. It seemed to him that

the rhododendron was happy now.

The first bucketful emptied, the girl drew a second, then a third. She

watered the whole garden.

There was something about her, as she thus ran about among paths, where

her outline appeared perfectly black, waving her angular arms, and with

her fichu all in rags, that resembled a bat.

When she had finished, Father Mabeuf approached her with tears in his

eyes, and laid his hand on her brow.

“God will bless you,” said he, “you are an angel since you take care of

the flowers.”

“No,” she replied. “I am the devil, but that’s all the same to me.”

The old man exclaimed, without either waiting for or hearing her

response:—

“What a pity that I am so unhappy and so poor, and that I can do

nothing for you!”

“You can do something,” said she.

“What?”

“Tell me where M. Marius lives.”

The old man did not understand. “What Monsieur Marius?”

He raised his glassy eyes and seemed to be seeking something that had

vanished.

“A young man who used to come here.”

In the meantime, M. Mabeuf had searched his memory.

“Ah! yes—” he exclaimed. “I know what you mean. Wait! Monsieur

Marius—the Baron Marius Pontmercy, parbleu! He lives,—or rather, he no

longer lives,—ah well, I don’t know.”

As he spoke, he had bent over to train a branch of rhododendron, and he

continued:—

“Hold, I know now. He very often passes along the boulevard, and goes

in the direction of the Glacière, Rue Croulebarbe. The meadow of the

Lark. Go there. It is not hard to meet him.”

When M. Mabeuf straightened himself up, there was no longer any one

there; the girl had disappeared.

He was decidedly terrified.

“Really,” he thought, “if my garden had not been watered, I should

think that she was a spirit.”

An hour later, when he was in bed, it came back to him, and as he fell

asleep, at that confused moment when thought, like that fabulous bird

which changes itself into a fish in order to cross the sea, little by

little assumes the form of a dream in order to traverse slumber, he

said to himself in a bewildered way:—

“In sooth, that greatly resembles what Rubaudière narrates of the

goblins. Could it have been a goblin?”

CHAPTER IV—AN APPARITION TO MARIUS

Some days after this visit of a “spirit” to Farmer Mabeuf, one

morning,—it was on a Monday, the day when Marius borrowed the

hundred-sou piece from Courfeyrac for Thénardier—Marius had put this

coin in his pocket, and before carrying it to the clerk’s office, he

had gone “to take a little stroll,” in the hope that this would make

him work on his return. It was always thus, however. As soon as he

rose, he seated himself before a book and a sheet of paper in order to

scribble some translation; his task at that epoch consisted in turning

into French a celebrated quarrel between Germans, the Gans and Savigny

controversy; he took Savigny, he took Gans, read four lines, tried to

write one, could not, saw a star between him and his paper, and rose

from his chair, saying: “I shall go out. That will put me in spirits.”

And off he went to the Lark’s meadow.

There he beheld more than ever the star, and less than ever Savigny and

Gans.

He returned home, tried to take up his work again, and did not succeed;

there was no means of re-knotting a single one of the threads which

were broken in his brain; then he said to himself: “I will not go out

to-morrow. It prevents my working.” And he went out every day.

He lived in the Lark’s meadow more than in Courfeyrac’s lodgings. That

was his real address: Boulevard de la Santé, at the seventh tree from

the Rue Croulebarbe.

That morning he had quitted the seventh tree and had seated himself on

the parapet of the River des Gobelins. A cheerful sunlight penetrated

the freshly unfolded and luminous leaves.

He was dreaming of “Her.” And his meditation turning to a reproach,

fell back upon himself; he reflected dolefully on his idleness, his

paralysis of soul, which was gaining on him, and of that night which

was growing more dense every moment before him, to such a point that he

no longer even saw the sun.

Nevertheless, athwart this painful extrication of indistinct ideas

which was not even a monologue, so feeble had action become in him, and

he had no longer the force to care to despair, athwart this melancholy

absorption, sensations from without did reach him. He heard behind him,

beneath him, on both banks of the river, the laundresses of the

Gobelins beating their linen, and above his head, the birds chattering

and singing in the elm-trees. On the one hand, the sound of liberty,

the careless happiness of the leisure which has wings; on the other,

the sound of toil. What caused him to meditate deeply, and almost

reflect, were two cheerful sounds.

All at once, in the midst of his dejected ecstasy, he heard a familiar

voice saying:—

“Come! Here he is!”

He raised his eyes, and recognized that wretched child who had come to

him one morning, the elder of the Thénardier daughters, Éponine; he

knew her name now. Strange to say, she had grown poorer and prettier,

two steps which it had not seemed within her power to take. She had

accomplished a double progress, towards the light and towards distress.

She was barefooted and in rags, as on the day when she had so

resolutely entered his chamber, only her rags were two months older

now, the holes were larger, the tatters more sordid. It was the same

harsh voice, the same brow dimmed and wrinkled with tan, the same free,

wild, and vacillating glance. She had besides, more than formerly, in

her face that indescribably terrified and lamentable something which

sojourn in a prison adds to wretchedness.

She had bits of straw and hay in her hair, not like Ophelia through

having gone mad from the contagion of Hamlet’s madness, but because she

had slept in the loft of some stable.

And in spite of it all, she was beautiful. What a star art thou, O

youth!

In the meantime, she had halted in front of Marius with a trace of joy

in her livid countenance, and something which resembled a smile.

She stood for several moments as though incapable of speech.

“So I have met you at last!” she said at length. “Father Mabeuf was

right, it was on this boulevard! How I have hunted for you! If you only

knew! Do you know? I have been in the jug. A fortnight! They let me

out! seeing that there was nothing against me, and that, moreover, I

had not reached years of discretion. I lack two months of it. Oh! how I

have hunted for you! These six weeks! So you don’t live down there any

more?”

“No,” said Marius.

“Ah! I understand. Because of that affair. Those take-downs are

disagreeable. You cleared out. Come now! Why do you wear old hats like

this! A young man like you ought to have fine clothes. Do you know,

Monsieur Marius, Father Mabeuf calls you Baron Marius, I don’t know

what. It isn’t true that you are a baron? Barons are old fellows, they

go to the Luxembourg, in front of the château, where there is the most

sun, and they read the \_Quotidienne\_ for a sou. I once carried a letter

to a baron of that sort. He was over a hundred years old. Say, where do

you live now?”

Marius made no reply.

“Ah!” she went on, “you have a hole in your shirt. I must sew it up for

you.”

She resumed with an expression which gradually clouded over:—

“You don’t seem glad to see me.”

Marius held his peace; she remained silent for a moment, then

exclaimed:—

“But if I choose, nevertheless, I could force you to look glad!”

“What?” demanded Marius. “What do you mean?”

“Ah! you used to call me \_thou\_,” she retorted.

“Well, then, what dost thou mean?”

She bit her lips; she seemed to hesitate, as though a prey to some sort

of inward conflict. At last she appeared to come to a decision.

“So much the worse, I don’t care. You have a melancholy air, I want you

to be pleased. Only promise me that you will smile. I want to see you

smile and hear you say: ‘Ah, well, that’s good.’ Poor Mr. Marius! you

know? You promised me that you would give me anything I like—”

“Yes! Only speak!”

She looked Marius full in the eye, and said:—

“I have the address.”

Marius turned pale. All the blood flowed back to his heart.

“What address?”

“The address that you asked me to get!”

She added, as though with an effort:—

“The address—you know very well!”

“Yes!” stammered Marius.

“Of that young lady.”

This word uttered, she sighed deeply.

Marius sprang from the parapet on which he had been sitting and seized

her hand distractedly.

“Oh! Well! lead me thither! Tell me! Ask of me anything you wish! Where

is it?”

“Come with me,” she responded. “I don’t know the street or number very

well; it is in quite the other direction from here, but I know the

house well, I will take you to it.”

She withdrew her hand and went on, in a tone which could have rent the

heart of an observer, but which did not even graze Marius in his

intoxicated and ecstatic state:—

“Oh! how glad you are!”

A cloud swept across Marius’ brow. He seized Éponine by the arm:—

“Swear one thing to me!”

“Swear!” said she, “what does that mean? Come! You want me to swear?”

And she laughed.

“Your father! promise me, Éponine! Swear to me that you will not give

this address to your father!”

She turned to him with a stupefied air.

“Éponine! How do you know that my name is Éponine?”

“Promise what I tell you!”

But she did not seem to hear him.

“That’s nice! You have called me Éponine!”

Marius grasped both her arms at once.

“But answer me, in the name of Heaven! pay attention to what I am

saying to you, swear to me that you will not tell your father this

address that you know!”

“My father!” said she. “Ah yes, my father! Be at ease. He’s in close

confinement. Besides, what do I care for my father!”

“But you do not promise me!” exclaimed Marius.

“Let go of me!” she said, bursting into a laugh, “how you do shake me!

Yes! Yes! I promise that! I swear that to you! What is that to me? I

will not tell my father the address. There! Is that right? Is that it?”

“Nor to any one?” said Marius.

“Nor to any one.”

“Now,” resumed Marius, “take me there.”

“Immediately?”

“Immediately.”

“Come along. Ah! how pleased he is!” said she.

After a few steps she halted.

“You are following me too closely, Monsieur Marius. Let me go on ahead,

and follow me so, without seeming to do it. A nice young man like you

must not be seen with a woman like me.”

No tongue can express all that lay in that word, \_woman\_, thus

pronounced by that child.

She proceeded a dozen paces and then halted once more; Marius joined

her. She addressed him sideways, and without turning towards him:—

“By the way, you know that you promised me something?”

Marius fumbled in his pocket. All that he owned in the world was the

five francs intended for Thénardier the father. He took them and laid

them in Éponine’s hand.

She opened her fingers and let the coin fall to the ground, and gazed

at him with a gloomy air.

“I don’t want your money,” said she.

BOOK THIRD—THE HOUSE IN THE RUE PLUMET

CHAPTER I—THE HOUSE WITH A SECRET

About the middle of the last century, a chief justice in the Parliament

of Paris having a mistress and concealing the fact, for at that period

the grand seignors displayed their mistresses, and the bourgeois

concealed them, had “a little house” built in the Faubourg

Saint-Germain, in the deserted Rue Blomet, which is now called Rue

Plumet, not far from the spot which was then designated as \_Combat des

Animaux\_.

This house was composed of a single-storied pavilion; two rooms on the

ground floor, two chambers on the first floor, a kitchen downstairs, a

boudoir upstairs, an attic under the roof, the whole preceded by a

garden with a large gate opening on the street. This garden was about

an acre and a half in extent. This was all that could be seen by

passers-by; but behind the pavilion there was a narrow courtyard, and

at the end of the courtyard a low building consisting of two rooms and

a cellar, a sort of preparation destined to conceal a child and nurse

in case of need. This building communicated in the rear by a masked

door which opened by a secret spring, with a long, narrow, paved

winding corridor, open to the sky, hemmed in with two lofty walls,

which, hidden with wonderful art, and lost as it were between garden

enclosures and cultivated land, all of whose angles and detours it

followed, ended in another door, also with a secret lock which opened a

quarter of a league away, almost in another quarter, at the solitary

extremity of the Rue du Babylone.

Through this the chief justice entered, so that even those who were

spying on him and following him would merely have observed that the

justice betook himself every day in a mysterious way somewhere, and

would never have suspected that to go to the Rue de Babylone was to go

to the Rue Blomet. Thanks to clever purchasers of land, the magistrate

had been able to make a secret, sewer-like passage on his own property,

and consequently, without interference. Later on, he had sold in little

parcels, for gardens and market gardens, the lots of ground adjoining

the corridor, and the proprietors of these lots on both sides thought

they had a party wall before their eyes, and did not even suspect the

long, paved ribbon winding between two walls amid their flower-beds and

their orchards. Only the birds beheld this curiosity. It is probable

that the linnets and tomtits of the last century gossiped a great deal

about the chief justice.

The pavilion, built of stone in the taste of Mansard, wainscoted and

furnished in the Watteau style, rocaille on the inside, old-fashioned

on the outside, walled in with a triple hedge of flowers, had something

discreet, coquettish, and solemn about it, as befits a caprice of love

and magistracy.

This house and corridor, which have now disappeared, were in existence

fifteen years ago. In ’93 a coppersmith had purchased the house with

the idea of demolishing it, but had not been able to pay the price; the

nation made him bankrupt. So that it was the house which demolished the

coppersmith. After that, the house remained uninhabited, and fell

slowly to ruin, as does every dwelling to which the presence of man

does not communicate life. It had remained fitted with its old

furniture, was always for sale or to let, and the ten or a dozen people

who passed through the Rue Plumet were warned of the fact by a yellow

and illegible bit of writing which had hung on the garden wall since

1819.

Towards the end of the Restoration, these same passers-by might have

noticed that the bill had disappeared, and even that the shutters on

the first floor were open. The house was occupied, in fact. The windows

had short curtains, a sign that there was a woman about.

In the month of October, 1829, a man of a certain age had presented

himself and had hired the house just as it stood, including, of course,

the back building and the lane which ended in the Rue de Babylone. He

had had the secret openings of the two doors to this passage repaired.

The house, as we have just mentioned, was still very nearly furnished

with the justice’s old fitting; the new tenant had ordered some

repairs, had added what was lacking here and there, had replaced the

paving-stones in the yard, bricks in the floors, steps in the stairs,

missing bits in the inlaid floors and the glass in the lattice windows,

and had finally installed himself there with a young girl and an

elderly maid-servant, without commotion, rather like a person who is

slipping in than like a man who is entering his own house. The

neighbors did not gossip about him, for the reason that there were no

neighbors.

This unobtrusive tenant was Jean Valjean, the young girl was Cosette.

The servant was a woman named Toussaint, whom Jean Valjean had saved

from the hospital and from wretchedness, and who was elderly, a

stammerer, and from the provinces, three qualities which had decided

Jean Valjean to take her with him. He had hired the house under the

name of M. Fauchelevent, independent gentleman. In all that has been

related heretofore, the reader has, doubtless, been no less prompt than

Thénardier to recognize Jean Valjean.

Why had Jean Valjean quitted the convent of the Petit-Picpus? What had

happened?

Nothing had happened.

It will be remembered that Jean Valjean was happy in the convent, so

happy that his conscience finally took the alarm. He saw Cosette every

day, he felt paternity spring up and develop within him more and more,

he brooded over the soul of that child, he said to himself that she was

his, that nothing could take her from him, that this would last

indefinitely, that she would certainly become a nun, being thereto

gently incited every day, that thus the convent was henceforth the

universe for her as it was for him, that he should grow old there, and

that she would grow up there, that she would grow old there, and that

he should die there; that, in short, delightful hope, no separation was

possible. On reflecting upon this, he fell into perplexity. He

interrogated himself. He asked himself if all that happiness were

really his, if it were not composed of the happiness of another, of the

happiness of that child which he, an old man, was confiscating and

stealing; if that were not theft? He said to himself, that this child

had a right to know life before renouncing it, that to deprive her in

advance, and in some sort without consulting her, of all joys, under

the pretext of saving her from all trials, to take advantage of her

ignorance of her isolation, in order to make an artificial vocation

germinate in her, was to rob a human creature of its nature and to lie

to God. And who knows if, when she came to be aware of all this some

day, and found herself a nun to her sorrow, Cosette would not come to

hate him? A last, almost selfish thought, and less heroic than the

rest, but which was intolerable to him. He resolved to quit the

convent.

He resolved on this; he recognized with anguish, the fact that it was

necessary. As for objections, there were none. Five years’ sojourn

between these four walls and of disappearance had necessarily destroyed

or dispersed the elements of fear. He could return tranquilly among

men. He had grown old, and all had undergone a change. Who would

recognize him now? And then, to face the worst, there was danger only

for himself, and he had no right to condemn Cosette to the cloister for

the reason that he had been condemned to the galleys. Besides, what is

danger in comparison with the right? Finally, nothing prevented his

being prudent and taking his precautions.

As for Cosette’s education, it was almost finished and complete.

His determination once taken, he awaited an opportunity. It was not

long in presenting itself. Old Fauchelevent died.

Jean Valjean demanded an audience with the revered prioress and told

her that, having come into a little inheritance at the death of his

brother, which permitted him henceforth to live without working, he

should leave the service of the convent and take his daughter with him;

but that, as it was not just that Cosette, since she had not taken the

vows, should have received her education gratuitously, he humbly begged

the Reverend Prioress to see fit that he should offer to the community,

as indemnity, for the five years which Cosette had spent there, the sum

of five thousand francs.

It was thus that Jean Valjean quitted the convent of the Perpetual

Adoration.

On leaving the convent, he took in his own arms the little valise the

key to which he still wore on his person, and would permit no porter to

touch it. This puzzled Cosette, because of the odor of embalming which

proceeded from it.

Let us state at once, that this trunk never quitted him more. He always

had it in his chamber. It was the first and only thing sometimes, that

he carried off in his moving when he moved about. Cosette laughed at

it, and called this valise his \_inseparable\_, saying: “I am jealous of

it.”

Nevertheless, Jean Valjean did not reappear in the open air without

profound anxiety.

He discovered the house in the Rue Plumet, and hid himself from sight

there. Henceforth he was in the possession of the name:—Ultime

Fauchelevent.

At the same time he hired two other apartments in Paris, in order that

he might attract less attention than if he were to remain always in the

same quarter, and so that he could, at need, take himself off at the

slightest disquietude which should assail him, and in short, so that he

might not again be caught unprovided as on the night when he had so

miraculously escaped from Javert. These two apartments were very

pitiable, poor in appearance, and in two quarters which were far remote

from each other, the one in the Rue de l’Ouest, the other in the Rue de

l’Homme Armé.

He went from time to time, now to the Rue de l’Homme Armé, now to the

Rue de l’Ouest, to pass a month or six weeks, without taking Toussaint.

He had himself served by the porters, and gave himself out as a

gentleman from the suburbs, living on his funds, and having a little

temporary resting-place in town. This lofty virtue had three domiciles

in Paris for the sake of escaping from the police.

CHAPTER II—JEAN VALJEAN AS A NATIONAL GUARD

However, properly speaking, he lived in the Rue Plumet, and he had

arranged his existence there in the following fashion:—

Cosette and the servant occupied the pavilion; she had the big

sleeping-room with the painted pier-glasses, the boudoir with the

gilded fillets, the justice’s drawing-room furnished with tapestries

and vast armchairs; she had the garden. Jean Valjean had a canopied bed

of antique damask in three colors and a beautiful Persian rug purchased

in the Rue du Figuier-Saint-Paul at Mother Gaucher’s, put into

Cosette’s chamber, and, in order to redeem the severity of these

magnificent old things, he had amalgamated with this bric-à-brac all

the gay and graceful little pieces of furniture suitable to young

girls, an étagère, a bookcase filled with gilt-edged books, an

inkstand, a blotting-book, paper, a work-table incrusted with mother of

pearl, a silver-gilt dressing-case, a toilet service in Japanese

porcelain. Long damask curtains with a red foundation and three colors,

like those on the bed, hung at the windows of the first floor. On the

ground floor, the curtains were of tapestry. All winter long, Cosette’s

little house was heated from top to bottom. Jean Valjean inhabited the

sort of porter’s lodge which was situated at the end of the back

courtyard, with a mattress on a folding-bed, a white wood table, two

straw chairs, an earthenware water-jug, a few old volumes on a shelf,

his beloved valise in one corner, and never any fire. He dined with

Cosette, and he had a loaf of black bread on the table for his own use.

When Toussaint came, he had said to her: “It is the young lady who is

the mistress of this house.”—“And you, monsieur?” Toussaint replied in

amazement.—“I am a much better thing than the master, I am the father.”

Cosette had been taught housekeeping in the convent, and she regulated

their expenditure, which was very modest. Every day, Jean Valjean put

his arm through Cosette’s and took her for a walk. He led her to the

Luxembourg, to the least frequented walk, and every Sunday he took her

to mass at Saint-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas, because that was a long way off.

As it was a very poor quarter, he bestowed alms largely there, and the

poor people surrounded him in church, which had drawn down upon him

Thénardier’s epistle: “To the benevolent gentleman of the church of

Saint-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas.” He was fond of taking Cosette to visit the

poor and the sick. No stranger ever entered the house in the Rue

Plumet. Toussaint brought their provisions, and Jean Valjean went

himself for water to a fountain nearby on the boulevard. Their wood and

wine were put into a half-subterranean hollow lined with rock-work

which lay near the Rue de Babylone and which had formerly served the

chief-justice as a grotto; for at the epoch of follies and “Little

Houses” no love was without a grotto.

In the door opening on the Rue de Babylone, there was a box destined

for the reception of letters and papers; only, as the three inhabitants

of the pavilion in the Rue Plumet received neither papers nor letters,

the entire usefulness of that box, formerly the go-between of a love

affair, and the confidant of a love-lorn lawyer, was now limited to the

tax-collector’s notices, and the summons of the guard. For M.

Fauchelevent, independent gentleman, belonged to the national guard; he

had not been able to escape through the fine meshes of the census of

1831. The municipal information collected at that time had even reached

the convent of the Petit-Picpus, a sort of impenetrable and holy cloud,

whence Jean Valjean had emerged in venerable guise, and, consequently,

worthy of mounting guard in the eyes of the town-hall.

Three or four times a year, Jean Valjean donned his uniform and mounted

guard; he did this willingly, however; it was a correct disguise which

mixed him with every one, and yet left him solitary. Jean Valjean had

just attained his sixtieth birthday, the age of legal exemption; but he

did not appear to be over fifty; moreover, he had no desire to escape

his sergeant-major nor to quibble with Comte de Lobau; he possessed no

civil status, he was concealing his name, he was concealing his

identity, so he concealed his age, he concealed everything; and, as we

have just said, he willingly did his duty as a national guard; the sum

of his ambition lay in resembling any other man who paid his taxes.

This man had for his ideal, within, the angel, without, the bourgeois.

Let us note one detail, however; when Jean Valjean went out with

Cosette, he dressed as the reader has already seen, and had the air of

a retired officer. When he went out alone, which was generally at

night, he was always dressed in a workingman’s trousers and blouse, and

wore a cap which concealed his face. Was this precaution or humility?

Both. Cosette was accustomed to the enigmatical side of her destiny,

and hardly noticed her father’s peculiarities. As for Toussaint, she

venerated Jean Valjean, and thought everything he did right.

One day, her butcher, who had caught a glimpse of Jean Valjean, said to

her: “That’s a queer fish.” She replied: “He’s a saint.”

Neither Jean Valjean nor Cosette nor Toussaint ever entered or emerged

except by the door on the Rue de Babylone. Unless seen through the

garden gate it would have been difficult to guess that they lived in

the Rue Plumet. That gate was always closed. Jean Valjean had left the

garden uncultivated, in order not to attract attention.

In this, possibly, he made a mistake.

CHAPTER III—FOLIIS AC FRONDIBUS

The garden thus left to itself for more than half a century had become

extraordinary and charming. The passers-by of forty years ago halted to

gaze at it, without a suspicion of the secrets which it hid in its

fresh and verdant depths. More than one dreamer of that epoch often

allowed his thoughts and his eyes to penetrate indiscreetly between the

bars of that ancient, padlocked gate, twisted, tottering, fastened to

two green and moss-covered pillars, and oddly crowned with a pediment

of undecipherable arabesque.

There was a stone bench in one corner, one or two mouldy statues,

several lattices which had lost their nails with time, were rotting on

the wall, and there were no walks nor turf; but there was enough grass

everywhere. Gardening had taken its departure, and nature had returned.

Weeds abounded, which was a great piece of luck for a poor corner of

land. The festival of gilliflowers was something splendid. Nothing in

this garden obstructed the sacred effort of things towards life;

venerable growth reigned there among them. The trees had bent over

towards the nettles, the plant had sprung upward, the branch had

inclined, that which crawls on the earth had gone in search of that

which expands in the air, that which floats on the wind had bent over

towards that which trails in the moss; trunks, boughs, leaves, fibres,

clusters, tendrils, shoots, spines, thorns, had mingled, crossed,

married, confounded themselves in each other; vegetation in a deep and

close embrace, had celebrated and accomplished there, under the

well-pleased eye of the Creator, in that enclosure three hundred feet

square, the holy mystery of fraternity, symbol of the human fraternity.

This garden was no longer a garden, it was a colossal thicket, that is

to say, something as impenetrable as a forest, as peopled as a city,

quivering like a nest, sombre like a cathedral, fragrant like a

bouquet, solitary as a tomb, living as a throng.

In Floréal34 this enormous thicket, free behind its gate and within its

four walls, entered upon the secret labor of germination, quivered in

the rising sun, almost like an animal which drinks in the breaths of

cosmic love, and which feels the sap of April rising and boiling in its

veins, and shakes to the wind its enormous wonderful green locks,

sprinkled on the damp earth, on the defaced statues, on the crumbling

steps of the pavilion, and even on the pavement of the deserted street,

flowers like stars, dew like pearls, fecundity, beauty, life, joy,

perfumes. At midday, a thousand white butterflies took refuge there,

and it was a divine spectacle to see that living summer snow whirling

about there in flakes amid the shade. There, in those gay shadows of

verdure, a throng of innocent voices spoke sweetly to the soul, and

what the twittering forgot to say the humming completed. In the

evening, a dreamy vapor exhaled from the garden and enveloped it; a

shroud of mist, a calm and celestial sadness covered it; the

intoxicating perfume of the honeysuckles and convolvulus poured out

from every part of it, like an exquisite and subtle poison; the last

appeals of the woodpeckers and the wagtails were audible as they dozed

among the branches; one felt the sacred intimacy of the birds and the

trees; by day the wings rejoice the leaves, by night the leaves protect

the wings.

In winter the thicket was black, dripping, bristling, shivering, and

allowed some glimpse of the house. Instead of flowers on the branches

and dew in the flowers, the long silvery tracks of the snails were

visible on the cold, thick carpet of yellow leaves; but in any fashion,

under any aspect, at all seasons, spring, winter, summer, autumn, this

tiny enclosure breathed forth melancholy, contemplation, solitude,

liberty, the absence of man, the presence of God; and the rusty old

gate had the air of saying: “This garden belongs to me.”

It was of no avail that the pavements of Paris were there on every

side, the classic and splendid hotels of the Rue de Varennes a couple

of paces away, the dome of the Invalides close at hand, the Chamber of

Deputies not far off; the carriages of the Rue de Bourgogne and of the

Rue Saint-Dominique rumbled luxuriously, in vain, in the vicinity, in

vain did the yellow, brown, white, and red omnibuses cross each other’s

course at the neighboring crossroads; the Rue Plumet was the desert;

and the death of the former proprietors, the revolution which had

passed over it, the crumbling away of ancient fortunes, absence,

forgetfulness, forty years of abandonment and widowhood, had sufficed

to restore to this privileged spot ferns, mulleins, hemlock, yarrow,

tall weeds, great crimped plants, with large leaves of pale green

cloth, lizards, beetles, uneasy and rapid insects; to cause to spring

forth from the depths of the earth and to reappear between those four

walls a certain indescribable and savage grandeur; and for nature,

which disconcerts the petty arrangements of man, and which sheds

herself always thoroughly where she diffuses herself at all, in the ant

as well as in the eagle, to blossom out in a petty little Parisian

garden with as much rude force and majesty as in a virgin forest of the

New World.

Nothing is small, in fact; any one who is subject to the profound and

penetrating influence of nature knows this. Although no absolute

satisfaction is given to philosophy, either to circumscribe the cause

or to limit the effect, the contemplator falls into those unfathomable

ecstasies caused by these decompositions of force terminating in unity.

Everything toils at everything.

Algebra is applied to the clouds; the radiation of the star profits the

rose; no thinker would venture to affirm that the perfume of the

hawthorn is useless to the constellations. Who, then, can calculate the

course of a molecule? How do we know that the creation of worlds is not

determined by the fall of grains of sand? Who knows the reciprocal ebb

and flow of the infinitely great and the infinitely little, the

reverberations of causes in the precipices of being, and the avalanches

of creation? The tiniest worm is of importance; the great is little,

the little is great; everything is balanced in necessity; alarming

vision for the mind. There are marvellous relations between beings and

things; in that inexhaustible whole, from the sun to the grub, nothing

despises the other; all have need of each other. The light does not

bear away terrestrial perfumes into the azure depths, without knowing

what it is doing; the night distributes stellar essences to the

sleeping flowers. All birds that fly have round their leg the thread of

the infinite. Germination is complicated with the bursting forth of a

meteor and with the peck of a swallow cracking its egg, and it places

on one level the birth of an earthworm and the advent of Socrates.

Where the telescope ends, the microscope begins. Which of the two

possesses the larger field of vision? Choose. A bit of mould is a

pleiad of flowers; a nebula is an ant-hill of stars. The same

promiscuousness, and yet more unprecedented, exists between the things

of the intelligence and the facts of substance. Elements and principles

mingle, combine, wed, multiply with each other, to such a point that

the material and the moral world are brought eventually to the same

clearness. The phenomenon is perpetually returning upon itself. In the

vast cosmic exchanges the universal life goes and comes in unknown

quantities, rolling entirely in the invisible mystery of effluvia,

employing everything, not losing a single dream, not a single slumber,

sowing an animalcule here, crumbling to bits a planet there,

oscillating and winding, making of light a force and of thought an

element, disseminated and invisible, dissolving all, except that

geometrical point, the \_I\_; bringing everything back to the soul-atom;

expanding everything in God, entangling all activity, from summit to

base, in the obscurity of a dizzy mechanism, attaching the flight of an

insect to the movement of the earth, subordinating, who knows? Were it

only by the identity of the law, the evolution of the comet in the

firmament to the whirling of the infusoria in the drop of water. A

machine made of mind. Enormous gearing, the prime motor of which is the

gnat, and whose final wheel is the zodiac.

CHAPTER IV—CHANGE OF GATE

It seemed that this garden, created in olden days to conceal wanton

mysteries, had been transformed and become fitted to shelter chaste

mysteries. There were no longer either arbors, or bowling greens, or

tunnels, or grottos; there was a magnificent, dishevelled obscurity

falling like a veil over all. Paphos had been made over into Eden. It

is impossible to say what element of repentance had rendered this

retreat wholesome. This flower-girl now offered her blossom to the

soul. This coquettish garden, formerly decidedly compromised, had

returned to virginity and modesty. A justice assisted by a gardener, a

goodman who thought that he was a continuation of Lamoignon, and

another goodman who thought that he was a continuation of Lenôtre, had

turned it about, cut, ruffled, decked, moulded it to gallantry; nature

had taken possession of it once more, had filled it with shade, and had

arranged it for love.

There was, also, in this solitude, a heart which was quite ready. Love

had only to show himself; he had here a temple composed of verdure,

grass, moss, the sight of birds, tender shadows, agitated branches, and

a soul made of sweetness, of faith, of candor, of hope, of aspiration,

and of illusion.

Cosette had left the convent when she was still almost a child; she was

a little more than fourteen, and she was at the “ungrateful age”; we

have already said, that with the exception of her eyes, she was homely

rather than pretty; she had no ungraceful feature, but she was awkward,

thin, timid and bold at once, a grown-up little girl, in short.

Her education was finished, that is to say, she has been taught

religion, and even and above all, devotion; then “history,” that is to

say the thing that bears that name in convents, geography, grammar, the

participles, the kings of France, a little music, a little drawing,

etc.; but in all other respects she was utterly ignorant, which is a

great charm and a great peril. The soul of a young girl should not be

left in the dark; later on, mirages that are too abrupt and too lively

are formed there, as in a dark chamber. She should be gently and

discreetly enlightened, rather with the reflection of realities than

with their harsh and direct light. A useful and graciously austere

half-light which dissipates puerile fears and obviates falls. There is

nothing but the maternal instinct, that admirable intuition composed of

the memories of the virgin and the experience of the woman, which knows

how this half-light is to be created and of what it should consist.

Nothing supplies the place of this instinct. All the nuns in the world

are not worth as much as one mother in the formation of a young girl’s

soul.

Cosette had had no mother. She had only had many mothers, in the

plural.

As for Jean Valjean, he was, indeed, all tenderness, all solicitude;

but he was only an old man and he knew nothing at all.

Now, in this work of education, in this grave matter of preparing a

woman for life, what science is required to combat that vast ignorance

which is called innocence!

Nothing prepares a young girl for passions like the convent. The

convent turns the thoughts in the direction of the unknown. The heart,

thus thrown back upon itself, works downward within itself, since it

cannot overflow, and grows deep, since it cannot expand. Hence visions,

suppositions, conjectures, outlines of romances, a desire for

adventures, fantastic constructions, edifices built wholly in the inner

obscurity of the mind, sombre and secret abodes where the passions

immediately find a lodgement as soon as the open gate permits them to

enter. The convent is a compression which, in order to triumph over the

human heart, should last during the whole life.

On quitting the convent, Cosette could have found nothing more sweet

and more dangerous than the house in the Rue Plumet. It was the

continuation of solitude with the beginning of liberty; a garden that

was closed, but a nature that was acrid, rich, voluptuous, and

fragrant; the same dreams as in the convent, but with glimpses of young

men; a grating, but one that opened on the street.

Still, when she arrived there, we repeat, she was only a child. Jean

Valjean gave this neglected garden over to her. “Do what you like with

it,” he said to her. This amused Cosette; she turned over all the

clumps and all the stones, she hunted for “beasts”; she played in it,

while awaiting the time when she would dream in it; she loved this

garden for the insects that she found beneath her feet amid the grass,

while awaiting the day when she would love it for the stars that she

would see through the boughs above her head.

And then, she loved her father, that is to say, Jean Valjean, with all

her soul, with an innocent filial passion which made the goodman a

beloved and charming companion to her. It will be remembered that M.

Madeleine had been in the habit of reading a great deal. Jean Valjean

had continued this practice; he had come to converse well; he possessed

the secret riches and the eloquence of a true and humble mind which has

spontaneously cultivated itself. He retained just enough sharpness to

season his kindness; his mind was rough and his heart was soft. During

their conversations in the Luxembourg, he gave her explanations of

everything, drawing on what he had read, and also on what he had

suffered. As she listened to him, Cosette’s eyes wandered vaguely

about.

This simple man sufficed for Cosette’s thought, the same as the wild

garden sufficed for her eyes. When she had had a good chase after the

butterflies, she came panting up to him and said: “Ah! How I have run!”

He kissed her brow.

Cosette adored the goodman. She was always at his heels. Where Jean

Valjean was, there happiness was. Jean Valjean lived neither in the

pavilion nor the garden; she took greater pleasure in the paved back

courtyard, than in the enclosure filled with flowers, and in his little

lodge furnished with straw-seated chairs than in the great drawing-room

hung with tapestry, against which stood tufted easy-chairs. Jean

Valjean sometimes said to her, smiling at his happiness in being

importuned: “Do go to your own quarters! Leave me alone a little!”

She gave him those charming and tender scoldings which are so graceful

when they come from a daughter to her father.

“Father, I am very cold in your rooms; why don’t you have a carpet here

and a stove?”

“Dear child, there are so many people who are better than I and who

have not even a roof over their heads.”

“Then why is there a fire in my rooms, and everything that is needed?”

“Because you are a woman and a child.”

“Bah! must men be cold and feel uncomfortable?”

“Certain men.”

“That is good, I shall come here so often that you will be obliged to

have a fire.”

And again she said to him:—

“Father, why do you eat horrible bread like that?”

“Because, my daughter.”

“Well, if you eat it, I will eat it too.”

Then, in order to prevent Cosette eating black bread, Jean Valjean ate

white bread.

Cosette had but a confused recollection of her childhood. She prayed

morning and evening for her mother whom she had never known. The

Thénardiers had remained with her as two hideous figures in a dream.

She remembered that she had gone “one day, at night,” to fetch water in

a forest. She thought that it had been very far from Paris. It seemed

to her that she had begun to live in an abyss, and that it was Jean

Valjean who had rescued her from it. Her childhood produced upon her

the effect of a time when there had been nothing around her but

millepeds, spiders, and serpents. When she meditated in the evening,

before falling asleep, as she had not a very clear idea that she was

Jean Valjean’s daughter, and that he was her father, she fancied that

the soul of her mother had passed into that good man and had come to

dwell near her.

When he was seated, she leaned her cheek against his white hair, and

dropped a silent tear, saying to herself: “Perhaps this man is my

mother.”

Cosette, although this is a strange statement to make, in the profound

ignorance of a girl brought up in a convent,—maternity being also

absolutely unintelligible to virginity,—had ended by fancying that she

had had as little mother as possible. She did not even know her

mother’s name. Whenever she asked Jean Valjean, Jean Valjean remained

silent. If she repeated her question, he responded with a smile. Once

she insisted; the smile ended in a tear.

This silence on the part of Jean Valjean covered Fantine with darkness.

Was it prudence? Was it respect? Was it a fear that he should deliver

this name to the hazards of another memory than his own?

So long as Cosette had been small, Jean Valjean had been willing to

talk to her of her mother; when she became a young girl, it was

impossible for him to do so. It seemed to him that he no longer dared.

Was it because of Cosette? Was it because of Fantine? He felt a certain

religious horror at letting that shadow enter Cosette’s thought; and of

placing a third in their destiny. The more sacred this shade was to

him, the more did it seem that it was to be feared. He thought of

Fantine, and felt himself overwhelmed with silence.

Through the darkness, he vaguely perceived something which appeared to

have its finger on its lips. Had all the modesty which had been in

Fantine, and which had violently quitted her during her lifetime,

returned to rest upon her after her death, to watch in indignation over

the peace of that dead woman, and in its shyness, to keep her in her

grave? Was Jean Valjean unconsciously submitting to the pressure? We

who believe in death, are not among the number who will reject this

mysterious explanation.

Hence the impossibility of uttering, even for Cosette, that name of

Fantine.

One day Cosette said to him:—

“Father, I saw my mother in a dream last night. She had two big wings.

My mother must have been almost a saint during her life.”

“Through martyrdom,” replied Jean Valjean.

However, Jean Valjean was happy.

When Cosette went out with him, she leaned on his arm, proud and happy,

in the plenitude of her heart. Jean Valjean felt his heart melt within

him with delight, at all these sparks of a tenderness so exclusive, so

wholly satisfied with himself alone. The poor man trembled, inundated

with angelic joy; he declared to himself ecstatically that this would

last all their lives; he told himself that he really had not suffered

sufficiently to merit so radiant a bliss, and he thanked God, in the

depths of his soul, for having permitted him to be loved thus, he, a

wretch, by that innocent being.

CHAPTER V—THE ROSE PERCEIVES THAT IT IS AN ENGINE OF WAR

One day, Cosette chanced to look at herself in her mirror, and she said

to herself: “Really!” It seemed to her almost that she was pretty. This

threw her in a singularly troubled state of mind. Up to that moment she

had never thought of her face. She saw herself in her mirror, but she

did not look at herself. And then, she had so often been told that she

was homely; Jean Valjean alone said gently: “No indeed! no indeed!” At

all events, Cosette had always thought herself homely, and had grown up

in that belief with the easy resignation of childhood. And here, all at

once, was her mirror saying to her, as Jean Valjean had said: “No

indeed!” That night, she did not sleep. “What if I were pretty!” she

thought. “How odd it would be if I were pretty!” And she recalled those

of her companions whose beauty had produced a sensation in the convent,

and she said to herself: “What! Am I to be like Mademoiselle

So-and-So?”

The next morning she looked at herself again, not by accident this

time, and she was assailed with doubts: “Where did I get such an idea?”

said she; “no, I am ugly.” She had not slept well, that was all, her

eyes were sunken and she was pale. She had not felt very joyous on the

preceding evening in the belief that she was beautiful, but it made her

very sad not to be able to believe in it any longer. She did not look

at herself again, and for more than a fortnight she tried to dress her

hair with her back turned to the mirror.

In the evening, after dinner, she generally embroidered in wool or did

some convent needlework in the drawing-room, and Jean Valjean read

beside her. Once she raised her eyes from her work, and was rendered

quite uneasy by the manner in which her father was gazing at her.

On another occasion, she was passing along the street, and it seemed to

her that some one behind her, whom she did not see, said: “A pretty

woman! but badly dressed.” “Bah!” she thought, “he does not mean me. I

am well dressed and ugly.” She was then wearing a plush hat and her

merino gown.

At last, one day when she was in the garden, she heard poor old

Toussaint saying: “Do you notice how pretty Cosette is growing, sir?”

Cosette did not hear her father’s reply, but Toussaint’s words caused a

sort of commotion within her. She fled from the garden, ran up to her

room, flew to the looking-glass,—it was three months since she had

looked at herself,—and gave vent to a cry. She had just dazzled

herself.

She was beautiful and lovely; she could not help agreeing with

Toussaint and her mirror. Her figure was formed, her skin had grown

white, her hair was lustrous, an unaccustomed splendor had been lighted

in her blue eyes. The consciousness of her beauty burst upon her in an

instant, like the sudden advent of daylight; other people noticed it

also, Toussaint had said so, it was evidently she of whom the passer-by

had spoken, there could no longer be any doubt of that; she descended

to the garden again, thinking herself a queen, imagining that she heard

the birds singing, though it was winter, seeing the sky gilded, the sun

among the trees, flowers in the thickets, distracted, wild, in

inexpressible delight.

Jean Valjean, on his side, experienced a deep and undefinable

oppression at heart.

In fact, he had, for some time past, been contemplating with terror

that beauty which seemed to grow more radiant every day on Cosette’s

sweet face. The dawn that was smiling for all was gloomy for him.

Cosette had been beautiful for a tolerably long time before she became

aware of it herself. But, from the very first day, that unexpected

light which was rising slowly and enveloping the whole of the young

girl’s person, wounded Jean Valjean’s sombre eye. He felt that it was a

change in a happy life, a life so happy that he did not dare to move

for fear of disarranging something. This man, who had passed through

all manner of distresses, who was still all bleeding from the bruises

of fate, who had been almost wicked and who had become almost a saint,

who, after having dragged the chain of the galleys, was now dragging

the invisible but heavy chain of indefinite misery, this man whom the

law had not released from its grasp and who could be seized at any

moment and brought back from the obscurity of his virtue to the broad

daylight of public opprobrium, this man accepted all, excused all,

pardoned all, and merely asked of Providence, of man, of the law, of

society, of nature, of the world, one thing, that Cosette might love

him!

That Cosette might continue to love him! That God would not prevent the

heart of the child from coming to him, and from remaining with him!

Beloved by Cosette, he felt that he was healed, rested, appeased,

loaded with benefits, recompensed, crowned. Beloved by Cosette, it was

well with him! He asked nothing more! Had any one said to him: “Do you

want anything better?” he would have answered: “No.” God might have

said to him: “Do you desire heaven?” and he would have replied: “I

should lose by it.”

Everything which could affect this situation, if only on the surface,

made him shudder like the beginning of something new. He had never

known very distinctly himself what the beauty of a woman means; but he

understood instinctively, that it was something terrible.

He gazed with terror on this beauty, which was blossoming out ever more

triumphant and superb beside him, beneath his very eyes, on the

innocent and formidable brow of that child, from the depths of her

homeliness, of his old age, of his misery, of his reprobation.

He said to himself: “How beautiful she is! What is to become of me?”

There, moreover, lay the difference between his tenderness and the

tenderness of a mother. What he beheld with anguish, a mother would

have gazed upon with joy.

The first symptoms were not long in making their appearance.

On the very morrow of the day on which she had said to herself:

“Decidedly I am beautiful!” Cosette began to pay attention to her

toilet. She recalled the remark of that passer-by: “Pretty, but badly

dressed,” the breath of an oracle which had passed beside her and had

vanished, after depositing in her heart one of the two germs which are

destined, later on, to fill the whole life of woman, coquetry. Love is

the other.

With faith in her beauty, the whole feminine soul expanded within her.

She conceived a horror for her merinos, and shame for her plush hat.

Her father had never refused her anything. She at once acquired the

whole science of the bonnet, the gown, the mantle, the boot, the cuff,

the stuff which is in fashion, the color which is becoming, that

science which makes of the Parisian woman something so charming, so

deep, and so dangerous. The words \_heady woman\_ were invented for the

Parisienne.

In less than a month, little Cosette, in that Thebaid of the Rue de

Babylone, was not only one of the prettiest, but one of the “best

dressed” women in Paris, which means a great deal more.

She would have liked to encounter her “passer-by,” to see what he would

say, and to “teach him a lesson!” The truth is, that she was ravishing

in every respect, and that she distinguished the difference between a

bonnet from Gérard and one from Herbaut in the most marvellous way.

Jean Valjean watched these ravages with anxiety. He who felt that he

could never do anything but crawl, walk at the most, beheld wings

sprouting on Cosette.

Moreover, from the mere inspection of Cosette’s toilet, a woman would

have recognized the fact that she had no mother. Certain little

proprieties, certain special conventionalities, were not observed by

Cosette. A mother, for instance, would have told her that a young girl

does not dress in damask.

The first day that Cosette went out in her black damask gown and

mantle, and her white crape bonnet, she took Jean Valjean’s arm, gay,

radiant, rosy, proud, dazzling. “Father,” she said, “how do you like me

in this guise?” Jean Valjean replied in a voice which resembled the

bitter voice of an envious man: “Charming!” He was the same as usual

during their walk. On their return home, he asked Cosette:—

“Won’t you put on that other gown and bonnet again,—you know the ones I

mean?”

This took place in Cosette’s chamber. Cosette turned towards the

wardrobe where her cast-off schoolgirl’s clothes were hanging.

“That disguise!” said she. “Father, what do you want me to do with it?

Oh no, the idea! I shall never put on those horrors again. With that

machine on my head, I have the air of Madame Mad-dog.”

Jean Valjean heaved a deep sigh.

From that moment forth, he noticed that Cosette, who had always

heretofore asked to remain at home, saying: “Father, I enjoy myself

more here with you,” now was always asking to go out. In fact, what is

the use of having a handsome face and a delicious costume if one does

not display them?

He also noticed that Cosette had no longer the same taste for the back

garden. Now she preferred the garden, and did not dislike to promenade

back and forth in front of the railed fence. Jean Valjean, who was shy,

never set foot in the garden. He kept to his back yard, like a dog.

Cosette, in gaining the knowledge that she was beautiful, lost the

grace of ignoring it. An exquisite grace, for beauty enhanced by

ingenuousness is ineffable, and nothing is so adorable as a dazzling

and innocent creature who walks along, holding in her hand the key to

paradise without being conscious of it. But what she had lost in

ingenuous grace, she gained in pensive and serious charm. Her whole

person, permeated with the joy of youth, of innocence, and of beauty,

breathed forth a splendid melancholy.

It was at this epoch that Marius, after the lapse of six months, saw

her once more at the Luxembourg.

CHAPTER VI—THE BATTLE BEGUN

Cosette in her shadow, like Marius in his, was all ready to take fire.

Destiny, with its mysterious and fatal patience, slowly drew together

these two beings, all charged and all languishing with the stormy

electricity of passion, these two souls which were laden with love as

two clouds are laden with lightning, and which were bound to overflow

and mingle in a look like the clouds in a flash of fire.

The glance has been so much abused in love romances that it has finally

fallen into disrepute. One hardly dares to say, nowadays, that two

beings fell in love because they looked at each other. That is the way

people do fall in love, nevertheless, and the only way. The rest is

nothing, but the rest comes afterwards. Nothing is more real than these

great shocks which two souls convey to each other by the exchange of

that spark.

At that particular hour when Cosette unconsciously darted that glance

which troubled Marius, Marius had no suspicion that he had also

launched a look which disturbed Cosette.

He caused her the same good and the same evil.

She had been in the habit of seeing him for a long time, and she had

scrutinized him as girls scrutinize and see, while looking elsewhere.

Marius still considered Cosette ugly, when she had already begun to

think Marius handsome. But as he paid no attention to her, the young

man was nothing to her.

Still, she could not refrain from saying to herself that he had

beautiful hair, beautiful eyes, handsome teeth, a charming tone of

voice when she heard him conversing with his comrades, that he held

himself badly when he walked, if you like, but with a grace that was

all his own, that he did not appear to be at all stupid, that his whole

person was noble, gentle, simple, proud, and that, in short, though he

seemed to be poor, yet his air was fine.

On the day when their eyes met at last, and said to each other those

first, obscure, and ineffable things which the glance lisps, Cosette

did not immediately understand. She returned thoughtfully to the house

in the Rue de l’Ouest, where Jean Valjean, according to his custom, had

come to spend six weeks. The next morning, on waking, she thought of

that strange young man, so long indifferent and icy, who now seemed to

pay attention to her, and it did not appear to her that this attention

was the least in the world agreeable to her. She was, on the contrary,

somewhat incensed at this handsome and disdainful individual. A

substratum of war stirred within her. It struck her, and the idea

caused her a wholly childish joy, that she was going to take her

revenge at last.

Knowing that she was beautiful, she was thoroughly conscious, though in

an indistinct fashion, that she possessed a weapon. Women play with

their beauty as children do with a knife. They wound themselves.

The reader will recall Marius’ hesitations, his palpitations, his

terrors. He remained on his bench and did not approach. This vexed

Cosette. One day, she said to Jean Valjean: “Father, let us stroll

about a little in that direction.” Seeing that Marius did not come to

her, she went to him. In such cases, all women resemble Mahomet. And

then, strange to say, the first symptom of true love in a young man is

timidity; in a young girl it is boldness. This is surprising, and yet

nothing is more simple. It is the two sexes tending to approach each

other and assuming, each the other’s qualities.

That day, Cosette’s glance drove Marius beside himself, and Marius’

glance set Cosette to trembling. Marius went away confident, and

Cosette uneasy. From that day forth, they adored each other.

The first thing that Cosette felt was a confused and profound

melancholy. It seemed to her that her soul had become black since the

day before. She no longer recognized it. The whiteness of soul in young

girls, which is composed of coldness and gayety, resembles snow. It

melts in love, which is its sun.

Cosette did not know what love was. She had never heard the word

uttered in its terrestrial sense. On the books of profane music which

entered the convent, \_amour\_ (love) was replaced by \_tambour\_ (drum) or

\_pandour\_. This created enigmas which exercised the imaginations of the

\_big girls\_, such as: \_Ah, how delightful is the drum! \_ or, \_Pity is

not a pandour\_. But Cosette had left the convent too early to have

occupied herself much with the “drum.” Therefore, she did not know what

name to give to what she now felt. Is any one the less ill because one

does not know the name of one’s malady?

She loved with all the more passion because she loved ignorantly. She

did not know whether it was a good thing or a bad thing, useful or

dangerous, eternal or temporary, allowable or prohibited; she loved.

She would have been greatly astonished, had any one said to her: “You

do not sleep? But that is forbidden! You do not eat? Why, that is very

bad! You have oppressions and palpitations of the heart? That must not

be! You blush and turn pale, when a certain being clad in black appears

at the end of a certain green walk? But that is abominable!” She would

not have understood, and she would have replied: “What fault is there

of mine in a matter in which I have no power and of which I know

nothing?”

It turned out that the love which presented itself was exactly suited

to the state of her soul. It was a sort of admiration at a distance, a

mute contemplation, the deification of a stranger. It was the

apparition of youth to youth, the dream of nights become a reality yet

remaining a dream, the longed-for phantom realized and made flesh at

last, but having as yet, neither name, nor fault, nor spot, nor

exigence, nor defect; in a word, the distant lover who lingered in the

ideal, a chimæra with a form. Any nearer and more palpable meeting

would have alarmed Cosette at this first stage, when she was still half

immersed in the exaggerated mists of the cloister. She had all the

fears of children and all the fears of nuns combined. The spirit of the

convent, with which she had been permeated for the space of five years,

was still in the process of slow evaporation from her person, and made

everything tremble around her. In this situation he was not a lover, he

was not even an admirer, he was a vision. She set herself to adoring

Marius as something charming, luminous, and impossible.

As extreme innocence borders on extreme coquetry, she smiled at him

with all frankness.

Every day, she looked forward to the hour for their walk with

impatience, she found Marius there, she felt herself unspeakably happy,

and thought in all sincerity that she was expressing her whole thought

when she said to Jean Valjean:—

“What a delicious garden that Luxembourg is!”

Marius and Cosette were in the dark as to one another. They did not

address each other, they did not salute each other, they did not know

each other; they saw each other; and like stars of heaven which are

separated by millions of leagues, they lived by gazing at each other.

It was thus that Cosette gradually became a woman and developed,

beautiful and loving, with a consciousness of her beauty, and in

ignorance of her love. She was a coquette to boot through her

ignorance.

CHAPTER VII—TO ONE SADNESS OPPOSE A SADNESS AND A HALF

All situations have their instincts. Old and eternal Mother Nature

warned Jean Valjean in a dim way of the presence of Marius. Jean

Valjean shuddered to the very bottom of his soul. Jean Valjean saw

nothing, knew nothing, and yet he scanned with obstinate attention, the

darkness in which he walked, as though he felt on one side of him

something in process of construction, and on the other, something which

was crumbling away. Marius, also warned, and, in accordance with the

deep law of God, by that same Mother Nature, did all he could to keep

out of sight of “the father.” Nevertheless, it came to pass that Jean

Valjean sometimes espied him. Marius’ manners were no longer in the

least natural. He exhibited ambiguous prudence and awkward daring. He

no longer came quite close to them as formerly. He seated himself at a

distance and pretended to be reading; why did he pretend that? Formerly

he had come in his old coat, now he wore his new one every day; Jean

Valjean was not sure that he did not have his hair curled, his eyes

were very queer, he wore gloves; in short, Jean Valjean cordially

detested this young man.

Cosette allowed nothing to be divined. Without knowing just what was

the matter with her she was convinced that there was something in it,

and that it must be concealed.

There was a coincidence between the taste for the toilet which had

recently come to Cosette, and the habit of new clothes developed by

that stranger which was very repugnant to Jean Valjean. It might be

accidental, no doubt, certainly, but it was a menacing accident.

He never opened his mouth to Cosette about this stranger. One day,

however, he could not refrain from so doing, and, with that vague

despair which suddenly casts the lead into the depths of its despair,

he said to her: “What a very pedantic air that young man has!”

Cosette, but a year before only an indifferent little girl, would have

replied: “Why, no, he is charming.” Ten years later, with the love of

Marius in her heart, she would have answered: “A pedant, and

insufferable to the sight! You are right!”—At the moment in life and

the heart which she had then attained, she contented herself with

replying, with supreme calmness: “That young man!”

As though she now beheld him for the first time in her life.

“How stupid I am!” thought Jean Valjean. “She had not noticed him. It

is I who have pointed him out to her.”

Oh, simplicity of the old! oh, the depth of children!

It is one of the laws of those fresh years of suffering and trouble, of

those vivacious conflicts between a first love and the first obstacles,

that the young girl does not allow herself to be caught in any trap

whatever, and that the young man falls into every one. Jean Valjean had

instituted an undeclared war against Marius, which Marius, with the

sublime stupidity of his passion and his age, did not divine. Jean

Valjean laid a host of ambushes for him; he changed his hour, he

changed his bench, he forgot his handkerchief, he came alone to the

Luxembourg; Marius dashed headlong into all these snares; and to all

the interrogation marks planted by Jean Valjean in his pathway, he

ingenuously answered “yes.” But Cosette remained immured in her

apparent unconcern and in her imperturbable tranquillity, so that Jean

Valjean arrived at the following conclusion: “That ninny is madly in

love with Cosette, but Cosette does not even know that he exists.”

Nonetheless did he bear in his heart a mournful tremor. The minute when

Cosette would love might strike at any moment. Does not everything

begin with indifference?

Only once did Cosette make a mistake and alarm him. He rose from his

seat to depart, after a stay of three hours, and she said: “What,

already?”

Jean Valjean had not discontinued his trips to the Luxembourg, as he

did not wish to do anything out of the way, and as, above all things,

he feared to arouse Cosette; but during the hours which were so sweet

to the lovers, while Cosette was sending her smile to the intoxicated

Marius, who perceived nothing else now, and who now saw nothing in all

the world but an adored and radiant face, Jean Valjean was fixing on

Marius flashing and terrible eyes. He, who had finally come to believe

himself incapable of a malevolent feeling, experienced moments when

Marius was present, in which he thought he was becoming savage and

ferocious once more, and he felt the old depths of his soul, which had

formerly contained so much wrath, opening once more and rising up

against that young man. It almost seemed to him that unknown craters

were forming in his bosom.

What! he was there, that creature! What was he there for? He came

creeping about, smelling out, examining, trying! He came, saying: “Hey!

Why not?” He came to prowl about his, Jean Valjean’s, life! to prowl

about his happiness, with the purpose of seizing it and bearing it

away!

Jean Valjean added: “Yes, that’s it! What is he in search of? An

adventure! What does he want? A love affair! A love affair! And I?

What! I have been first, the most wretched of men, and then the most

unhappy, and I have traversed sixty years of life on my knees, I have

suffered everything that man can suffer, I have grown old without

having been young, I have lived without a family, without relatives,

without friends, without life, without children, I have left my blood

on every stone, on every bramble, on every mile-post, along every wall,

I have been gentle, though others have been hard to me, and kind,

although others have been malicious, I have become an honest man once

more, in spite of everything, I have repented of the evil that I have

done and have forgiven the evil that has been done to me, and at the

moment when I receive my recompense, at the moment when it is all over,

at the moment when I am just touching the goal, at the moment when I

have what I desire, it is well, it is good, I have paid, I have earned

it, all this is to take flight, all this will vanish, and I shall lose

Cosette, and I shall lose my life, my joy, my soul, because it has

pleased a great booby to come and lounge at the Luxembourg.”

Then his eyes were filled with a sad and extraordinary gleam.

It was no longer a man gazing at a man; it was no longer an enemy

surveying an enemy. It was a dog scanning a thief.

The reader knows the rest. Marius pursued his senseless course. One day

he followed Cosette to the Rue de l’Ouest. Another day he spoke to the

porter. The porter, on his side, spoke, and said to Jean Valjean:

“Monsieur, who is that curious young man who is asking for you?” On the

morrow Jean Valjean bestowed on Marius that glance which Marius at last

perceived. A week later, Jean Valjean had taken his departure. He swore

to himself that he would never again set foot either in the Luxembourg

or in the Rue de l’Ouest. He returned to the Rue Plumet.

Cosette did not complain, she said nothing, she asked no questions, she

did not seek to learn his reasons; she had already reached the point

where she was afraid of being divined, and of betraying herself. Jean

Valjean had no experience of these miseries, the only miseries which

are charming and the only ones with which he was not acquainted; the

consequence was that he did not understand the grave significance of

Cosette’s silence.

He merely noticed that she had grown sad, and he grew gloomy. On his

side and on hers, inexperience had joined issue.

Once he made a trial. He asked Cosette:—

“Would you like to come to the Luxembourg?”

A ray illuminated Cosette’s pale face.

“Yes,” said she.

They went thither. Three months had elapsed. Marius no longer went

there. Marius was not there.

On the following day, Jean Valjean asked Cosette again:—

“Would you like to come to the Luxembourg?”

She replied, sadly and gently:—

“No.”

Jean Valjean was hurt by this sadness, and heart-broken at this

gentleness.

What was going on in that mind which was so young and yet already so

impenetrable? What was on its way there within? What was taking place

in Cosette’s soul? Sometimes, instead of going to bed, Jean Valjean

remained seated on his pallet, with his head in his hands, and he

passed whole nights asking himself: “What has Cosette in her mind?” and

in thinking of the things that she might be thinking about.

Oh! at such moments, what mournful glances did he cast towards that

cloister, that chaste peak, that abode of angels, that inaccessible

glacier of virtue! How he contemplated, with despairing ecstasy, that

convent garden, full of ignored flowers and cloistered virgins, where

all perfumes and all souls mount straight to heaven! How he adored that

Eden forever closed against him, whence he had voluntarily and madly

emerged! How he regretted his abnegation and his folly in having

brought Cosette back into the world, poor hero of sacrifice, seized and

hurled to the earth by his very self-devotion! How he said to himself,

“What have I done?”

However, nothing of all this was perceptible to Cosette. No ill-temper,

no harshness. His face was always serene and kind. Jean Valjean’s

manners were more tender and more paternal than ever. If anything could

have betrayed his lack of joy, it was his increased suavity.

On her side, Cosette languished. She suffered from the absence of

Marius as she had rejoiced in his presence, peculiarly, without exactly

being conscious of it. When Jean Valjean ceased to take her on their

customary strolls, a feminine instinct murmured confusedly, at the

bottom of her heart, that she must not seem to set store on the

Luxembourg garden, and that if this proved to be a matter of

indifference to her, her father would take her thither once more. But

days, weeks, months, elapsed. Jean Valjean had tacitly accepted

Cosette’s tacit consent. She regretted it. It was too late. So Marius

had disappeared; all was over. The day on which she returned to the

Luxembourg, Marius was no longer there. What was to be done? Should she

ever find him again? She felt an anguish at her heart, which nothing

relieved, and which augmented every day; she no longer knew whether it

was winter or summer, whether it was raining or shining, whether the

birds were singing, whether it was the season for dahlias or daisies,

whether the Luxembourg was more charming than the Tuileries, whether

the linen which the laundress brought home was starched too much or not

enough, whether Toussaint had done “her marketing” well or ill; and she

remained dejected, absorbed, attentive to but a single thought, her

eyes vague and staring as when one gazes by night at a black and

fathomless spot where an apparition has vanished.

However, she did not allow Jean Valjean to perceive anything of this,

except her pallor.

She still wore her sweet face for him.

This pallor sufficed but too thoroughly to trouble Jean Valjean.

Sometimes he asked her:—

“What is the matter with you?”

She replied: “There is nothing the matter with me.”

And after a silence, when she divined that he was sad also, she would

add:—

“And you, father—is there anything wrong with you?”

“With me? Nothing,” said he.

These two beings who had loved each other so exclusively, and with so

touching an affection, and who had lived so long for each other now

suffered side by side, each on the other’s account; without

acknowledging it to each other, without anger towards each other, and

with a smile.

CHAPTER VIII—THE CHAIN-GANG

Jean Valjean was the more unhappy of the two. Youth, even in its

sorrows, always possesses its own peculiar radiance.

At times, Jean Valjean suffered so greatly that he became puerile. It

is the property of grief to cause the childish side of man to reappear.

He had an unconquerable conviction that Cosette was escaping from him.

He would have liked to resist, to retain her, to arouse her enthusiasm

by some external and brilliant matter. These ideas, puerile, as we have

just said, and at the same time senile, conveyed to him, by their very

childishness, a tolerably just notion of the influence of gold lace on

the imaginations of young girls. He once chanced to see a general on

horseback, in full uniform, pass along the street, Comte Coutard, the

commandant of Paris. He envied that gilded man; what happiness it would

be, he said to himself, if he could put on that suit which was an

incontestable thing; and if Cosette could behold him thus, she would be

dazzled, and when he had Cosette on his arm and passed the gates of the

Tuileries, the guard would present arms to him, and that would suffice

for Cosette, and would dispel her idea of looking at young men.

An unforeseen shock was added to these sad reflections.

In the isolated life which they led, and since they had come to dwell

in the Rue Plumet, they had contracted one habit. They sometimes took a

pleasure trip to see the sun rise, a mild species of enjoyment which

befits those who are entering life and those who are quitting it.

For those who love solitude, a walk in the early morning is equivalent

to a stroll by night, with the cheerfulness of nature added. The

streets are deserted and the birds are singing. Cosette, a bird

herself, liked to rise early. These matutinal excursions were planned

on the preceding evening. He proposed, and she agreed. It was arranged

like a plot, they set out before daybreak, and these trips were so many

small delights for Cosette. These innocent eccentricities please young

people.

Jean Valjean’s inclination led him, as we have seen, to the least

frequented spots, to solitary nooks, to forgotten places. There then

existed, in the vicinity of the barriers of Paris, a sort of poor

meadows, which were almost confounded with the city, where grew in

summer sickly grain, and which, in autumn, after the harvest had been

gathered, presented the appearance, not of having been reaped, but

peeled. Jean Valjean loved to haunt these fields. Cosette was not bored

there. It meant solitude to him and liberty to her. There, she became a

little girl once more, she could run and almost play; she took off her

hat, laid it on Jean Valjean’s knees, and gathered bunches of flowers.

She gazed at the butterflies on the flowers, but did not catch them;

gentleness and tenderness are born with love, and the young girl who

cherishes within her breast a trembling and fragile ideal has mercy on

the wing of a butterfly. She wove garlands of poppies, which she placed

on her head, and which, crossed and penetrated with sunlight, glowing

until they flamed, formed for her rosy face a crown of burning embers.

Even after their life had grown sad, they kept up their custom of early

strolls.

One morning in October, therefore, tempted by the serene perfection of

the autumn of 1831, they set out, and found themselves at break of day

near the Barrière du Maine. It was not dawn, it was daybreak; a

delightful and stern moment. A few constellations here and there in the

deep, pale azure, the earth all black, the heavens all white, a quiver

amid the blades of grass, everywhere the mysterious chill of twilight.

A lark, which seemed mingled with the stars, was carolling at a

prodigious height, and one would have declared that that hymn of

pettiness calmed immensity. In the East, the Val-de-Grâce projected its

dark mass on the clear horizon with the sharpness of steel; Venus

dazzlingly brilliant was rising behind that dome and had the air of a

soul making its escape from a gloomy edifice.

All was peace and silence; there was no one on the road; a few stray

laborers, of whom they caught barely a glimpse, were on their way to

their work along the side-paths.

Jean Valjean was sitting in a cross-walk on some planks deposited at

the gate of a timber-yard. His face was turned towards the highway, his

back towards the light; he had forgotten the sun which was on the point

of rising; he had sunk into one of those profound absorptions in which

the mind becomes concentrated, which imprison even the eye, and which

are equivalent to four walls. There are meditations which may be called

vertical; when one is at the bottom of them, time is required to return

to earth. Jean Valjean had plunged into one of these reveries. He was

thinking of Cosette, of the happiness that was possible if nothing came

between him and her, of the light with which she filled his life, a

light which was but the emanation of her soul. He was almost happy in

his reverie. Cosette, who was standing beside him, was gazing at the

clouds as they turned rosy.

All at once Cosette exclaimed: “Father, I should think some one was

coming yonder.” Jean Valjean raised his eyes.

Cosette was right. The causeway which leads to the ancient Barrière du

Maine is a prolongation, as the reader knows, of the Rue de Sèvres, and

is cut at right angles by the inner boulevard. At the elbow of the

causeway and the boulevard, at the spot where it branches, they heard a

noise which it was difficult to account for at that hour, and a sort of

confused pile made its appearance. Some shapeless thing which was

coming from the boulevard was turning into the road.

It grew larger, it seemed to move in an orderly manner, though it was

bristling and quivering; it seemed to be a vehicle, but its load could

not be distinctly made out. There were horses, wheels, shouts; whips

were cracking. By degrees the outlines became fixed, although bathed in

shadows. It was a vehicle, in fact, which had just turned from the

boulevard into the highway, and which was directing its course towards

the barrier near which sat Jean Valjean; a second, of the same aspect,

followed, then a third, then a fourth; seven chariots made their

appearance in succession, the heads of the horses touching the rear of

the wagon in front. Figures were moving on these vehicles, flashes were

visible through the dusk as though there were naked swords there, a

clanking became audible which resembled the rattling of chains, and as

this something advanced, the sound of voices waxed louder, and it

turned into a terrible thing such as emerges from the cave of dreams.

As it drew nearer, it assumed a form, and was outlined behind the trees

with the pallid hue of an apparition; the mass grew white; the day,

which was slowly dawning, cast a wan light on this swarming heap which

was at once both sepulchral and living, the heads of the figures turned

into the faces of corpses, and this is what it proved to be:—

Seven wagons were driving in a file along the road. The first six were

singularly constructed. They resembled coopers’ drays; they consisted

of long ladders placed on two wheels and forming barrows at their rear

extremities. Each dray, or rather let us say, each ladder, was attached

to four horses harnessed tandem. On these ladders strange clusters of

men were being drawn. In the faint light, these men were to be divined

rather than seen. Twenty-four on each vehicle, twelve on a side, back

to back, facing the passers-by, their legs dangling in the air,—this

was the manner in which these men were travelling, and behind their

backs they had something which clanked, and which was a chain, and on

their necks something which shone, and which was an iron collar. Each

man had his collar, but the chain was for all; so that if these four

and twenty men had occasion to alight from the dray and walk, they were

seized with a sort of inexorable unity, and were obliged to wind over

the ground with the chain for a backbone, somewhat after the fashion of

millepeds. In the back and front of each vehicle, two men armed with

muskets stood erect, each holding one end of the chain under his foot.

The iron necklets were square. The seventh vehicle, a huge rack-sided

baggage wagon, without a hood, had four wheels and six horses, and

carried a sonorous pile of iron boilers, cast-iron pots, braziers, and

chains, among which were mingled several men who were pinioned and

stretched at full length, and who seemed to be ill. This wagon, all

lattice-work, was garnished with dilapidated hurdles which appeared to

have served for former punishments. These vehicles kept to the middle

of the road. On each side marched a double hedge of guards of infamous

aspect, wearing three-cornered hats, like the soldiers under the

Directory, shabby, covered with spots and holes, muffled in uniforms of

veterans and the trousers of undertakers’ men, half gray, half blue,

which were almost hanging in rags, with red epaulets, yellow shoulder

belts, short sabres, muskets, and cudgels; they were a species of

soldier-blackguards. These myrmidons seemed composed of the abjectness

of the beggar and the authority of the executioner. The one who

appeared to be their chief held a postilion’s whip in his hand. All

these details, blurred by the dimness of dawn, became more and more

clearly outlined as the light increased. At the head and in the rear of

the convoy rode mounted gendarmes, serious and with sword in fist.

This procession was so long that when the first vehicle reached the

barrier, the last was barely debauching from the boulevard. A throng,

sprung, it is impossible to say whence, and formed in a twinkling, as

is frequently the case in Paris, pressed forward from both sides of the

road and looked on. In the neighboring lanes the shouts of people

calling to each other and the wooden shoes of market-gardeners

hastening up to gaze were audible.

The men massed upon the drays allowed themselves to be jolted along in

silence. They were livid with the chill of morning. They all wore linen

trousers, and their bare feet were thrust into wooden shoes. The rest

of their costume was a fantasy of wretchedness. Their accoutrements

were horribly incongruous; nothing is more funereal than the harlequin

in rags. Battered felt hats, tarpaulin caps, hideous woollen nightcaps,

and, side by side with a short blouse, a black coat broken at the

elbow; many wore women’s headgear, others had baskets on their heads;

hairy breasts were visible, and through the rent in their garments

tattooed designs could be descried; temples of Love, flaming hearts,

Cupids; eruptions and unhealthy red blotches could also be seen. Two or

three had a straw rope attached to the cross-bar of the dray, and

suspended under them like a stirrup, which supported their feet. One of

them held in his hand and raised to his mouth something which had the

appearance of a black stone and which he seemed to be gnawing; it was

bread which he was eating. There were no eyes there which were not

either dry, dulled, or flaming with an evil light. The escort troop

cursed, the men in chains did not utter a syllable; from time to time

the sound of a blow became audible as the cudgels descended on

shoulder-blades or skulls; some of these men were yawning; their rags

were terrible; their feet hung down, their shoulders oscillated, their

heads clashed together, their fetters clanked, their eyes glared

ferociously, their fists clenched or fell open inertly like the hands

of corpses; in the rear of the convoy ran a band of children screaming

with laughter.

This file of vehicles, whatever its nature was, was mournful. It was

evident that to-morrow, that an hour hence, a pouring rain might

descend, that it might be followed by another and another, and that

their dilapidated garments would be drenched, that once soaked, these

men would not get dry again, that once chilled, they would not again

get warm, that their linen trousers would be glued to their bones by

the downpour, that the water would fill their shoes, that no lashes

from the whips would be able to prevent their jaws from chattering,

that the chain would continue to bind them by the neck, that their legs

would continue to dangle, and it was impossible not to shudder at the

sight of these human beings thus bound and passive beneath the cold

clouds of autumn, and delivered over to the rain, to the blast, to all

the furies of the air, like trees and stones.

Blows from the cudgel were not omitted even in the case of the sick

men, who lay there knotted with ropes and motionless on the seventh

wagon, and who appeared to have been tossed there like sacks filled

with misery.

Suddenly, the sun made its appearance; the immense light of the Orient

burst forth, and one would have said that it had set fire to all those

ferocious heads. Their tongues were unloosed; a conflagration of grins,

oaths, and songs exploded. The broad horizontal sheet of light severed

the file in two parts, illuminating heads and bodies, leaving feet and

wheels in the obscurity. Thoughts made their appearance on these faces;

it was a terrible moment; visible demons with their masks removed,

fierce souls laid bare. Though lighted up, this wild throng remained in

gloom. Some, who were gay, had in their mouths quills through which

they blew vermin over the crowd, picking out the women; the dawn

accentuated these lamentable profiles with the blackness of its

shadows; there was not one of these creatures who was not deformed by

reason of wretchedness; and the whole was so monstrous that one would

have said that the sun’s brilliancy had been changed into the glare of

the lightning. The wagon-load which headed the line had struck up a

song, and were shouting at the top of their voices with a haggard

joviality, a pot-pourri by Desaugiers, then famous, called \_The

Vestal\_; the trees shivered mournfully; in the cross-lanes,

countenances of bourgeois listened in an idiotic delight to these

coarse strains droned by spectres.

All sorts of distress met in this procession as in chaos; here were to

be found the facial angles of every sort of beast, old men, youths,

bald heads, gray beards, cynical monstrosities, sour resignation,

savage grins, senseless attitudes, snouts surmounted by caps, heads

like those of young girls with corkscrew curls on the temples,

infantile visages, and by reason of that, horrible thin skeleton faces,

to which death alone was lacking. On the first cart was a negro, who

had been a slave, in all probability, and who could make a comparison

of his chains. The frightful leveller from below, shame, had passed

over these brows; at that degree of abasement, the last transformations

were suffered by all in their extremest depths, and ignorance,

converted into dulness, was the equal of intelligence converted into

despair. There was no choice possible between these men who appeared to

the eye as the flower of the mud. It was evident that the person who

had had the ordering of that unclean procession had not classified

them. These beings had been fettered and coupled pell-mell, in

alphabetical disorder, probably, and loaded hap-hazard on those carts.

Nevertheless, horrors, when grouped together, always end by evolving a

result; all additions of wretched men give a sum total, each chain

exhaled a common soul, and each dray-load had its own physiognomy. By

the side of the one where they were singing, there was one where they

were howling; a third where they were begging; one could be seen in

which they were gnashing their teeth; another load menaced the

spectators, another blasphemed God; the last was as silent as the tomb.

Dante would have thought that he beheld his seven circles of hell on

the march. The march of the damned to their tortures, performed in

sinister wise, not on the formidable and flaming chariot of the

Apocalypse, but, what was more mournful than that, on the gibbet cart.

One of the guards, who had a hook on the end of his cudgel, made a

pretence from time to time, of stirring up this mass of human filth. An

old woman in the crowd pointed them out to her little boy five years

old, and said to him: “Rascal, let that be a warning to you!”

As the songs and blasphemies increased, the man who appeared to be the

captain of the escort cracked his whip, and at that signal a fearful

dull and blind flogging, which produced the sound of hail, fell upon

the seven dray-loads; many roared and foamed at the mouth; which

redoubled the delight of the street urchins who had hastened up, a

swarm of flies on these wounds.

Jean Valjean’s eyes had assumed a frightful expression. They were no

longer eyes; they were those deep and glassy objects which replace the

glance in the case of certain wretched men, which seem unconscious of

reality, and in which flames the reflection of terrors and of

catastrophes. He was not looking at a spectacle, he was seeing a

vision. He tried to rise, to flee, to make his escape; he could not

move his feet. Sometimes, the things that you see seize upon you and

hold you fast. He remained nailed to the spot, petrified, stupid,

asking himself, athwart confused and inexpressible anguish, what this

sepulchral persecution signified, and whence had come that pandemonium

which was pursuing him. All at once, he raised his hand to his brow, a

gesture habitual to those whose memory suddenly returns; he remembered

that this was, in fact, the usual itinerary, that it was customary to

make this detour in order to avoid all possibility of encountering

royalty on the road to Fontainebleau, and that, five and thirty years

before, he had himself passed through that barrier.

Cosette was no less terrified, but in a different way. She did not

understand; what she beheld did not seem to her to be possible; at

length she cried:—

“Father! What are those men in those carts?”

Jean Valjean replied: “Convicts.”

“Whither are they going?”

“To the galleys.”

At that moment, the cudgelling, multiplied by a hundred hands, became

zealous, blows with the flat of the sword were mingled with it, it was

a perfect storm of whips and clubs; the convicts bent before it, a

hideous obedience was evoked by the torture, and all held their peace,

darting glances like chained wolves.

Cosette trembled in every limb; she resumed:—

“Father, are they still men?”

“Sometimes,” answered the unhappy man.

It was the chain-gang, in fact, which had set out before daybreak from

Bicêtre, and had taken the road to Mans in order to avoid

Fontainebleau, where the King then was. This caused the horrible

journey to last three or four days longer; but torture may surely be

prolonged with the object of sparing the royal personage a sight of it.

Jean Valjean returned home utterly overwhelmed. Such encounters are

shocks, and the memory that they leave behind them resembles a thorough

shaking up.

Nevertheless, Jean Valjean did not observe that, on his way back to the

Rue de Babylone with Cosette, the latter was plying him with other

questions on the subject of what they had just seen; perhaps he was too

much absorbed in his own dejection to notice her words and reply to

them. But when Cosette was leaving him in the evening, to betake

herself to bed, he heard her say in a low voice, and as though talking

to herself: “It seems to me, that if I were to find one of those men in

my pathway, oh, my God, I should die merely from the sight of him close

at hand.”

Fortunately, chance ordained that on the morrow of that tragic day,

there was some official solemnity apropos of I know not what,—fêtes in

Paris, a review in the Champ de Mars, jousts on the Seine, theatrical

performances in the Champs-Élysées, fireworks at the Arc de l’Étoile,

illuminations everywhere. Jean Valjean did violence to his habits, and

took Cosette to see these rejoicings, for the purpose of diverting her

from the memory of the day before, and of effacing, beneath the smiling

tumult of all Paris, the abominable thing which had passed before her.

The review with which the festival was spiced made the presence of

uniforms perfectly natural; Jean Valjean donned his uniform of a

national guard with the vague inward feeling of a man who is betaking

himself to shelter. However, this trip seemed to attain its object.

Cosette, who made it her law to please her father, and to whom,

moreover, all spectacles were a novelty, accepted this diversion with

the light and easy good grace of youth, and did not pout too

disdainfully at that flutter of enjoyment called a public fête; so that

Jean Valjean was able to believe that he had succeeded, and that no

trace of that hideous vision remained.

Some days later, one morning, when the sun was shining brightly, and

they were both on the steps leading to the garden, another infraction

of the rules which Jean Valjean seemed to have imposed upon himself,

and to the custom of remaining in her chamber which melancholy had

caused Cosette to adopt, Cosette, in a wrapper, was standing erect in

that negligent attire of early morning which envelops young girls in an

adorable way and which produces the effect of a cloud drawn over a

star; and, with her head bathed in light, rosy after a good sleep,

submitting to the gentle glances of the tender old man, she was picking

a daisy to pieces. Cosette did not know the delightful legend, \_I love

a little, passionately, etc\_.—who was there who could have taught her?

She was handling the flower instinctively, innocently, without a

suspicion that to pluck a daisy apart is to do the same by a heart. If

there were a fourth, and smiling Grace called Melancholy, she would

have worn the air of that Grace. Jean Valjean was fascinated by the

contemplation of those tiny fingers on that flower, and forgetful of

everything in the radiance emitted by that child. A red-breast was

warbling in the thicket, on one side. White cloudlets floated across

the sky, so gayly, that one would have said that they had just been set

at liberty. Cosette went on attentively tearing the leaves from her

flower; she seemed to be thinking about something; but whatever it was,

it must be something charming; all at once she turned her head over her

shoulder with the delicate languor of a swan, and said to Jean Valjean:

“Father, what are the galleys like?”

BOOK FOURTH—SUCCOR FROM BELOW MAY TURN OUT TO BE SUCCOR FROM ON HIGH

CHAPTER I—A WOUND WITHOUT, HEALING WITHIN

Thus their life clouded over by degrees.

But one diversion, which had formerly been a happiness, remained to

them, which was to carry bread to those who were hungry, and clothing

to those who were cold. Cosette often accompanied Jean Valjean on these

visits to the poor, on which they recovered some remnants of their

former free intercourse; and sometimes, when the day had been a good

one, and they had assisted many in distress, and cheered and warmed

many little children, Cosette was rather merry in the evening. It was

at this epoch that they paid their visit to the Jondrette den.

On the day following that visit, Jean Valjean made his appearance in

the pavilion in the morning, calm as was his wont, but with a large

wound on his left arm which was much inflamed, and very angry, which

resembled a burn, and which he explained in some way or other. This

wound resulted in his being detained in the house for a month with

fever. He would not call in a doctor. When Cosette urged him, “Call the

dog-doctor,” said he.

Cosette dressed the wound morning and evening with so divine an air and

such angelic happiness at being of use to him, that Jean Valjean felt

all his former joy returning, his fears and anxieties dissipating, and

he gazed at Cosette, saying: “Oh! what a kindly wound! Oh! what a good

misfortune!”

Cosette on perceiving that her father was ill, had deserted the

pavilion and again taken a fancy to the little lodging and the back

courtyard. She passed nearly all her days beside Jean Valjean and read

to him the books which he desired. Generally they were books of travel.

Jean Valjean was undergoing a new birth; his happiness was reviving in

these ineffable rays; the Luxembourg, the prowling young stranger,

Cosette’s coldness,—all these clouds upon his soul were growing dim. He

had reached the point where he said to himself: “I imagined all that. I

am an old fool.”

His happiness was so great that the horrible discovery of the

Thénardiers made in the Jondrette hovel, unexpected as it was, had,

after a fashion, glided over him unnoticed. He had succeeded in making

his escape; all trace of him was lost—what more did he care for! he

only thought of those wretched beings to pity them. “Here they are in

prison, and henceforth they will be incapacitated for doing any harm,”

he thought, “but what a lamentable family in distress!”

As for the hideous vision of the Barrière du Maine, Cosette had not

referred to it again.

Sister Sainte-Mechtilde had taught Cosette music in the convent;

Cosette had the voice of a linnet with a soul, and sometimes, in the

evening, in the wounded man’s humble abode, she warbled melancholy

songs which delighted Jean Valjean.

Spring came; the garden was so delightful at that season of the year,

that Jean Valjean said to Cosette:—

“You never go there; I want you to stroll in it.”

“As you like, father,” said Cosette.

And for the sake of obeying her father, she resumed her walks in the

garden, generally alone, for, as we have mentioned, Jean Valjean, who

was probably afraid of being seen through the fence, hardly ever went

there.

Jean Valjean’s wound had created a diversion.

When Cosette saw that her father was suffering less, that he was

convalescing, and that he appeared to be happy, she experienced a

contentment which she did not even perceive, so gently and naturally

had it come. Then, it was in the month of March, the days were growing

longer, the winter was departing, the winter always bears away with it

a portion of our sadness; then came April, that daybreak of summer,

fresh as dawn always is, gay like every childhood; a little inclined to

weep at times like the new-born being that it is. In that month, nature

has charming gleams which pass from the sky, from the trees, from the

meadows and the flowers into the heart of man.

Cosette was still too young to escape the penetrating influence of that

April joy which bore so strong a resemblance to herself. Insensibly,

and without her suspecting the fact, the blackness departed from her

spirit. In spring, sad souls grow light, as light falls into cellars at

midday. Cosette was no longer sad. However, though this was so, she did

not account for it to herself. In the morning, about ten o’clock, after

breakfast, when she had succeeded in enticing her father into the

garden for a quarter of an hour, and when she was pacing up and down in

the sunlight in front of the steps, supporting his left arm for him,

she did not perceive that she laughed every moment and that she was

happy.

Jean Valjean, intoxicated, beheld her growing fresh and rosy once more.

“Oh! What a good wound!” he repeated in a whisper.

And he felt grateful to the Thénardiers.

His wound once healed, he resumed his solitary twilight strolls.

It is a mistake to suppose that a person can stroll alone in that

fashion in the uninhabited regions of Paris without meeting with some

adventure.

CHAPTER II—MOTHER PLUTARQUE FINDS NO DIFFICULTY IN EXPLAINING A

PHENOMENON

One evening, little Gavroche had had nothing to eat; he remembered that

he had not dined on the preceding day either; this was becoming

tiresome. He resolved to make an effort to secure some supper. He

strolled out beyond the Salpêtrière into deserted regions; that is

where windfalls are to be found; where there is no one, one always

finds something. He reached a settlement which appeared to him to be

the village of Austerlitz.

In one of his preceding lounges he had noticed there an old garden

haunted by an old man and an old woman, and in that garden, a passable

apple-tree. Beside the apple-tree stood a sort of fruit-house, which

was not securely fastened, and where one might contrive to get an

apple. One apple is a supper; one apple is life. That which was Adam’s

ruin might prove Gavroche’s salvation. The garden abutted on a

solitary, unpaved lane, bordered with brushwood while awaiting the

arrival of houses; the garden was separated from it by a hedge.

Gavroche directed his steps towards this garden; he found the lane, he

recognized the apple-tree, he verified the fruit-house, he examined the

hedge; a hedge means merely one stride. The day was declining, there

was not even a cat in the lane, the hour was propitious. Gavroche began

the operation of scaling the hedge, then suddenly paused. Some one was

talking in the garden. Gavroche peeped through one of the breaks in the

hedge.

[Illustration: Succor from Below]

A couple of paces distant, at the foot of the hedge on the other side,

exactly at the point where the gap which he was meditating would have

been made, there was a sort of recumbent stone which formed a bench,

and on this bench was seated the old man of the garden, while the old

woman was standing in front of him. The old woman was grumbling.

Gavroche, who was not very discreet, listened.

“Monsieur Mabeuf!” said the old woman.

“Mabeuf!” thought Gavroche, “that name is a perfect farce.”

The old man who was thus addressed, did not stir. The old woman

repeated:—

“Monsieur Mabeuf!”

The old man, without raising his eyes from the ground, made up his mind

to answer:—

“What is it, Mother Plutarque?”

“Mother Plutarque!” thought Gavroche, “another farcical name.”

Mother Plutarque began again, and the old man was forced to accept the

conversation:—

“The landlord is not pleased.”

“Why?”

“We owe three quarters rent.”

“In three months, we shall owe him for four quarters.”

“He says that he will turn you out to sleep.”

“I will go.”

“The green-grocer insists on being paid. She will no longer leave her

fagots. What will you warm yourself with this winter? We shall have no

wood.”

“There is the sun.”

“The butcher refuses to give credit; he will not let us have any more

meat.”

“That is quite right. I do not digest meat well. It is too heavy.”

“What shall we have for dinner?”

“Bread.”

“The baker demands a settlement, and says, ‘no money, no bread.’”

“That is well.”

“What will you eat?”

“We have apples in the apple-room.”

“But, Monsieur, we can’t live like that without money.”

“I have none.”

The old woman went away, the old man remained alone. He fell into

thought. Gavroche became thoughtful also. It was almost dark.

The first result of Gavroche’s meditation was, that instead of scaling

the hedge, he crouched down under it. The branches stood apart a little

at the foot of the thicket.

“Come,” exclaimed Gavroche mentally, “here’s a nook!” and he curled up

in it. His back was almost in contact with Father Mabeuf’s bench. He

could hear the octogenarian breathe.

Then, by way of dinner, he tried to sleep.

It was a cat-nap, with one eye open. While he dozed, Gavroche kept on

the watch.

The twilight pallor of the sky blanched the earth, and the lane formed

a livid line between two rows of dark bushes.

All at once, in this whitish band, two figures made their appearance.

One was in front, the other some distance in the rear.

“There come two creatures,” muttered Gavroche.

The first form seemed to be some elderly bourgeois, who was bent and

thoughtful, dressed more than plainly, and who was walking slowly

because of his age, and strolling about in the open evening air.

The second was straight, firm, slender. It regulated its pace by that

of the first; but in the voluntary slowness of its gait, suppleness and

agility were discernible. This figure had also something fierce and

disquieting about it, the whole shape was that of what was then called

\_an elegant\_; the hat was of good shape, the coat black, well cut,

probably of fine cloth, and well fitted in at the waist. The head was

held erect with a sort of robust grace, and beneath the hat the pale

profile of a young man could be made out in the dim light. The profile

had a rose in its mouth. This second form was well known to Gavroche;

it was Montparnasse.

He could have told nothing about the other, except that he was a

respectable old man.

Gavroche immediately began to take observations.

One of these two pedestrians evidently had a project connected with the

other. Gavroche was well placed to watch the course of events. The

bedroom had turned into a hiding-place at a very opportune moment.

Montparnasse on the hunt at such an hour, in such a place, betokened

something threatening. Gavroche felt his gamin’s heart moved with

compassion for the old man.

What was he to do? Interfere? One weakness coming to the aid of

another! It would be merely a laughing matter for Montparnasse.

Gavroche did not shut his eyes to the fact that the old man, in the

first place, and the child in the second, would make but two mouthfuls

for that redoubtable ruffian eighteen years of age.

While Gavroche was deliberating, the attack took place, abruptly and

hideously. The attack of the tiger on the wild ass, the attack of the

spider on the fly. Montparnasse suddenly tossed away his rose, bounded

upon the old man, seized him by the collar, grasped and clung to him,

and Gavroche with difficulty restrained a scream. A moment later one of

these men was underneath the other, groaning, struggling, with a knee

of marble upon his breast. Only, it was not just what Gavroche had

expected. The one who lay on the earth was Montparnasse; the one who

was on top was the old man. All this took place a few paces distant

from Gavroche.

The old man had received the shock, had returned it, and that in such a

terrible fashion, that in a twinkling, the assailant and the assailed

had exchanged rôles.

“Here’s a hearty veteran!” thought Gavroche.

He could not refrain from clapping his hands. But it was applause

wasted. It did not reach the combatants, absorbed and deafened as they

were, each by the other, as their breath mingled in the struggle.

Silence ensued. Montparnasse ceased his struggles. Gavroche indulged in

this aside: “Can he be dead!”

The goodman had not uttered a word, nor given vent to a cry. He rose to

his feet, and Gavroche heard him say to Montparnasse:—

“Get up.”

Montparnasse rose, but the goodman held him fast. Montparnasse’s

attitude was the humiliated and furious attitude of the wolf who has

been caught by a sheep.

Gavroche looked on and listened, making an effort to reinforce his eyes

with his ears. He was enjoying himself immensely.

He was repaid for his conscientious anxiety in the character of a

spectator. He was able to catch on the wing a dialogue which borrowed

from the darkness an indescribably tragic accent. The goodman

questioned, Montparnasse replied.

“How old are you?”

“Nineteen.”

“You are strong and healthy. Why do you not work?”

“It bores me.”

“What is your trade?”

“An idler.”

“Speak seriously. Can anything be done for you? What would you like to

be?”

“A thief.”

A pause ensued. The old man seemed absorbed in profound thought. He

stood motionless, and did not relax his hold on Montparnasse.

Every moment the vigorous and agile young ruffian indulged in the

twitchings of a wild beast caught in a snare. He gave a jerk, tried a

crook of the knee, twisted his limbs desperately, and made efforts to

escape.

The old man did not appear to notice it, and held both his arms with

one hand, with the sovereign indifference of absolute force.

The old man’s reverie lasted for some time, then, looking steadily at

Montparnasse, he addressed to him in a gentle voice, in the midst of

the darkness where they stood, a solemn harangue, of which Gavroche did

not lose a single syllable:—

“My child, you are entering, through indolence, on one of the most

laborious of lives. Ah! You declare yourself to be an idler! prepare to

toil. There is a certain formidable machine, have you seen it? It is

the rolling-mill. You must be on your guard against it, it is crafty

and ferocious; if it catches hold of the skirt of your coat, you will

be drawn in bodily. That machine is laziness. Stop while there is yet

time, and save yourself! Otherwise, it is all over with you; in a short

time you will be among the gearing. Once entangled, hope for nothing

more. Toil, lazybones! there is no more repose for you! The iron hand

of implacable toil has seized you. You do not wish to earn your living,

to have a task, to fulfil a duty! It bores you to be like other men?

Well! You will be different. Labor is the law; he who rejects it will

find ennui his torment. You do not wish to be a workingman, you will be

a slave. Toil lets go of you on one side only to grasp you again on the

other. You do not desire to be its friend, you shall be its negro

slave. Ah! You would have none of the honest weariness of men, you

shall have the sweat of the damned. Where others sing, you will rattle

in your throat. You will see afar off, from below, other men at work;

it will seem to you that they are resting. The laborer, the harvester,

the sailor, the blacksmith, will appear to you in glory like the

blessed spirits in paradise. What radiance surrounds the forge! To

guide the plough, to bind the sheaves, is joy. The bark at liberty in

the wind, what delight! Do you, lazy idler, delve, drag on, roll,

march! Drag your halter. You are a beast of burden in the team of hell!

Ah! To do nothing is your object. Well, not a week, not a day, not an

hour shall you have free from oppression. You will be able to lift

nothing without anguish. Every minute that passes will make your

muscles crack. What is a feather to others will be a rock to you. The

simplest things will become steep acclivities. Life will become

monstrous all about you. To go, to come, to breathe, will be just so

many terrible labors. Your lungs will produce on you the effect of

weighing a hundred pounds. Whether you shall walk here rather than

there, will become a problem that must be solved. Any one who wants to

go out simply gives his door a push, and there he is in the open air.

If you wish to go out, you will be obliged to pierce your wall. What

does every one who wants to step into the street do? He goes

downstairs; you will tear up your sheets, little by little you will

make of them a rope, then you will climb out of your window, and you

will suspend yourself by that thread over an abyss, and it will be

night, amid storm, rain, and the hurricane, and if the rope is too

short, but one way of descending will remain to you, to fall. To drop

hap-hazard into the gulf, from an unknown height, on what? On what is

beneath, on the unknown. Or you will crawl up a chimney-flue, at the

risk of burning; or you will creep through a sewer-pipe, at the risk of

drowning; I do not speak of the holes that you will be obliged to mask,

of the stones which you will have to take up and replace twenty times a

day, of the plaster that you will have to hide in your straw pallet. A

lock presents itself; the bourgeois has in his pocket a key made by a

locksmith. If you wish to pass out, you will be condemned to execute a

terrible work of art; you will take a large sou, you will cut it in two

plates; with what tools? You will have to invent them. That is your

business. Then you will hollow out the interior of these plates, taking

great care of the outside, and you will make on the edges a thread, so

that they can be adjusted one upon the other like a box and its cover.

The top and bottom thus screwed together, nothing will be suspected. To

the overseers it will be only a sou; to you it will be a box. What will

you put in this box? A small bit of steel. A watch-spring, in which you

will have cut teeth, and which will form a saw. With this saw, as long

as a pin, and concealed in a sou, you will cut the bolt of the lock,

you will sever bolts, the padlock of your chain, and the bar at your

window, and the fetter on your leg. This masterpiece finished, this

prodigy accomplished, all these miracles of art, address, skill, and

patience executed, what will be your recompense if it becomes known

that you are the author? The dungeon. There is your future. What

precipices are idleness and pleasure! Do you know that to do nothing is

a melancholy resolution? To live in idleness on the property of

society! to be useless, that is to say, pernicious! This leads straight

to the depth of wretchedness. Woe to the man who desires to be a

parasite! He will become vermin! Ah! So it does not please you to work?

Ah! You have but one thought, to drink well, to eat well, to sleep

well. You will drink water, you will eat black bread, you will sleep on

a plank with a fetter whose cold touch you will feel on your flesh all

night long, riveted to your limbs. You will break those fetters, you

will flee. That is well. You will crawl on your belly through the

brushwood, and you will eat grass like the beasts of the forest. And

you will be recaptured. And then you will pass years in a dungeon,

riveted to a wall, groping for your jug that you may drink, gnawing at

a horrible loaf of darkness which dogs would not touch, eating beans

that the worms have eaten before you. You will be a wood-louse in a

cellar. Ah! Have pity on yourself, you miserable young child, who were

sucking at nurse less than twenty years ago, and who have, no doubt, a

mother still alive! I conjure you, listen to me, I entreat you. You

desire fine black cloth, varnished shoes, to have your hair curled and

sweet-smelling oils on your locks, to please low women, to be handsome.

You will be shaven clean, and you will wear a red blouse and wooden

shoes. You want rings on your fingers, you will have an iron necklet on

your neck. If you glance at a woman, you will receive a blow. And you

will enter there at the age of twenty. And you will come out at fifty!

You will enter young, rosy, fresh, with brilliant eyes, and all your

white teeth, and your handsome, youthful hair; you will come out

broken, bent, wrinkled, toothless, horrible, with white locks! Ah! my

poor child, you are on the wrong road; idleness is counselling you

badly; the hardest of all work is thieving. Believe me, do not

undertake that painful profession of an idle man. It is not comfortable

to become a rascal. It is less disagreeable to be an honest man. Now

go, and ponder on what I have said to you. By the way, what did you

want of me? My purse? Here it is.”

And the old man, releasing Montparnasse, put his purse in the latter’s

hand; Montparnasse weighed it for a moment, after which he allowed it

to slide gently into the back pocket of his coat, with the same

mechanical precaution as though he had stolen it.

All this having been said and done, the goodman turned his back and

tranquilly resumed his stroll.

“The blockhead!” muttered Montparnasse.

Who was this goodman? The reader has, no doubt, already divined.

Montparnasse watched him with amazement, as he disappeared in the dusk.

This contemplation was fatal to him.

While the old man was walking away, Gavroche drew near.

Gavroche had assured himself, with a sidelong glance, that Father

Mabeuf was still sitting on his bench, probably sound asleep. Then the

gamin emerged from his thicket, and began to crawl after Montparnasse

in the dark, as the latter stood there motionless. In this manner he

came up to Montparnasse without being seen or heard, gently insinuated

his hand into the back pocket of that frock-coat of fine black cloth,

seized the purse, withdrew his hand, and having recourse once more to

his crawling, he slipped away like an adder through the shadows.

Montparnasse, who had no reason to be on his guard, and who was engaged

in thought for the first time in his life, perceived nothing. When

Gavroche had once more attained the point where Father Mabeuf was, he

flung the purse over the hedge, and fled as fast as his legs would

carry him.

The purse fell on Father Mabeuf’s foot. This commotion roused him.

He bent over and picked up the purse.

He did not understand in the least, and opened it.

The purse had two compartments; in one of them there was some small

change; in the other lay six napoleons.

M. Mabeuf, in great alarm, referred the matter to his housekeeper.

“That has fallen from heaven,” said Mother Plutarque.

BOOK FIFTH—THE END OF WHICH DOES NOT RESEMBLE THE BEGINNING

CHAPTER I—SOLITUDE AND THE BARRACKS COMBINED

Cosette’s grief, which had been so poignant and lively four or five

months previously, had, without her being conscious of the fact,

entered upon its convalescence. Nature, spring, youth, love for her

father, the gayety of the birds and flowers, caused something almost

resembling forgetfulness to filter gradually, drop by drop, into that

soul, which was so virgin and so young. Was the fire wholly extinct

there? Or was it merely that layers of ashes had formed? The truth is,

that she hardly felt the painful and burning spot any longer.

One day she suddenly thought of Marius: “Why!” said she, “I no longer

think of him.”

That same week, she noticed a very handsome officer of lancers, with a

wasp-like waist, a delicious uniform, the cheeks of a young girl, a

sword under his arm, waxed moustaches, and a glazed schapka, passing

the gate. Moreover, he had light hair, prominent blue eyes, a round

face, was vain, insolent and good-looking; quite the reverse of Marius.

He had a cigar in his mouth. Cosette thought that this officer

doubtless belonged to the regiment in barracks in the Rue de Babylone.

On the following day, she saw him pass again. She took note of the

hour.

From that time forth, was it chance? she saw him pass nearly every day.

The officer’s comrades perceived that there was, in that “badly kept”

garden, behind that malicious rococo fence, a very pretty creature, who

was almost always there when the handsome lieutenant,—who is not

unknown to the reader, and whose name was Théodule Gillenormand,—passed

by.

“See here!” they said to him, “there’s a little creature there who is

making eyes at you, look.”

“Have I the time,” replied the lancer, “to look at all the girls who

look at me?”

This was at the precise moment when Marius was descending heavily

towards agony, and was saying: “If I could but see her before I

die!”—Had his wish been realized, had he beheld Cosette at that moment

gazing at the lancer, he would not have been able to utter a word, and

he would have expired with grief.

Whose fault was it? No one’s.

Marius possessed one of those temperaments which bury themselves in

sorrow and there abide; Cosette was one of those persons who plunge

into sorrow and emerge from it again.

Cosette was, moreover, passing through that dangerous period, the fatal

phase of feminine reverie abandoned to itself, in which the isolated

heart of a young girl resembles the tendrils of the vine which cling,

as chance directs, to the capital of a marble column or to the post of

a wine-shop: A rapid and decisive moment, critical for every orphan, be

she rich or poor, for wealth does not prevent a bad choice;

misalliances are made in very high circles, real misalliance is that of

souls; and as many an unknown young man, without name, without birth,

without fortune, is a marble column which bears up a temple of grand

sentiments and grand ideas, so such and such a man of the world

satisfied and opulent, who has polished boots and varnished words, if

looked at not outside, but inside, a thing which is reserved for his

wife, is nothing more than a block obscurely haunted by violent,

unclean, and vinous passions; the post of a drinking-shop.

What did Cosette’s soul contain? Passion calmed or lulled to sleep;

something limpid, brilliant, troubled to a certain depth, and gloomy

lower down. The image of the handsome officer was reflected in the

surface. Did a souvenir linger in the depths?—Quite at the

bottom?—Possibly. Cosette did not know.

A singular incident supervened.

CHAPTER II—COSETTE’S APPREHENSIONS

During the first fortnight in April, Jean Valjean took a journey. This,

as the reader knows, happened from time to time, at very long

intervals. He remained absent a day or two days at the utmost. Where

did he go? No one knew, not even Cosette. Once only, on the occasion of

one of these departures, she had accompanied him in a hackney-coach as

far as a little blind-alley at the corner of which she read: \_Impasse

de la Planchette\_. There he alighted, and the coach took Cosette back

to the Rue de Babylone. It was usually when money was lacking in the

house that Jean Valjean took these little trips.

So Jean Valjean was absent. He had said: “I shall return in three

days.”

That evening, Cosette was alone in the drawing-room. In order to get

rid of her ennui, she had opened her piano-organ, and had begun to

sing, accompanying herself the while, the chorus from \_Euryanthe\_:

“Hunters astray in the wood!” which is probably the most beautiful

thing in all the sphere of music. When she had finished, she remained

wrapped in thought.

All at once, it seemed to her that she heard the sound of footsteps in

the garden.

It could not be her father, he was absent; it could not be Toussaint,

she was in bed, and it was ten o’clock at night.

She stepped to the shutter of the drawing-room, which was closed, and

laid her ear against it.

It seemed to her that it was the tread of a man, and that he was

walking very softly.

She mounted rapidly to the first floor, to her own chamber, opened a

small wicket in her shutter, and peeped into the garden. The moon was

at the full. Everything could be seen as plainly as by day.

There was no one there.

She opened the window. The garden was absolutely calm, and all that was

visible was that the street was deserted as usual.

Cosette thought that she had been mistaken. She thought that she had

heard a noise. It was a hallucination produced by the melancholy and

magnificent chorus of Weber, which lays open before the mind terrified

depths, which trembles before the gaze like a dizzy forest, and in

which one hears the crackling of dead branches beneath the uneasy tread

of the huntsmen of whom one catches a glimpse through the twilight.

She thought no more about it.

Moreover, Cosette was not very timid by nature. There flowed in her

veins some of the blood of the bohemian and the adventuress who runs

barefoot. It will be remembered that she was more of a lark than a

dove. There was a foundation of wildness and bravery in her.

On the following day, at an earlier hour, towards nightfall, she was

strolling in the garden. In the midst of the confused thoughts which

occupied her, she fancied that she caught for an instant a sound

similar to that of the preceding evening, as though some one were

walking beneath the trees in the dusk, and not very far from her; but

she told herself that nothing so closely resembles a step on the grass

as the friction of two branches which have moved from side to side, and

she paid no heed to it. Besides, she could see nothing.

She emerged from “the thicket”; she had still to cross a small lawn to

regain the steps.

The moon, which had just risen behind her, cast Cosette’s shadow in

front of her upon this lawn, as she came out from the shrubbery.

Cosette halted in alarm.

Beside her shadow, the moon outlined distinctly upon the turf another

shadow, which was particularly startling and terrible, a shadow which

had a round hat.

It was the shadow of a man, who must have been standing on the border

of the clump of shrubbery, a few paces in the rear of Cosette.

She stood for a moment without the power to speak, or cry, or call, or

stir, or turn her head.

Then she summoned up all her courage, and turned round resolutely.

There was no one there.

She glanced on the ground. The figure had disappeared.

She re-entered the thicket, searched the corners boldly, went as far as

the gate, and found nothing.

She felt herself absolutely chilled with terror. Was this another

hallucination? What! Two days in succession! One hallucination might

pass, but two hallucinations? The disquieting point about it was, that

the shadow had assuredly not been a phantom. Phantoms do not wear round

hats.

On the following day Jean Valjean returned. Cosette told him what she

thought she had heard and seen. She wanted to be reassured and to see

her father shrug his shoulders and say to her: “You are a little

goose.”

Jean Valjean grew anxious.

“It cannot be anything,” said he.

He left her under some pretext, and went into the garden, and she saw

him examining the gate with great attention.

During the night she woke up; this time she was sure, and she

distinctly heard some one walking close to the flight of steps beneath

her window. She ran to her little wicket and opened it. In point of

fact, there was a man in the garden, with a large club in his hand.

Just as she was about to scream, the moon lighted up the man’s profile.

It was her father. She returned to her bed, saying to herself: “He is

very uneasy!”

Jean Valjean passed that night and the two succeeding nights in the

garden. Cosette saw him through the hole in her shutter.

On the third night, the moon was on the wane, and had begun to rise

later; at one o’clock in the morning, possibly, she heard a loud burst

of laughter and her father’s voice calling her:—

“Cosette!”

She jumped out of bed, threw on her dressing-gown, and opened her

window.

Her father was standing on the grass-plot below.

“I have waked you for the purpose of reassuring you,” said he; “look,

there is your shadow with the round hat.”

And he pointed out to her on the turf a shadow cast by the moon, and

which did indeed, bear considerable resemblance to the spectre of a man

wearing a round hat. It was the shadow produced by a chimney-pipe of

sheet iron, with a hood, which rose above a neighboring roof.

Cosette joined in his laughter, all her lugubrious suppositions were

allayed, and the next morning, as she was at breakfast with her father,

she made merry over the sinister garden haunted by the shadows of iron

chimney-pots.

Jean Valjean became quite tranquil once more; as for Cosette, she did

not pay much attention to the question whether the chimney-pot was

really in the direction of the shadow which she had seen, or thought

she had seen, and whether the moon had been in the same spot in the

sky.

She did not question herself as to the peculiarity of a chimney-pot

which is afraid of being caught in the act, and which retires when some

one looks at its shadow, for the shadow had taken the alarm when

Cosette had turned round, and Cosette had thought herself very sure of

this. Cosette’s serenity was fully restored. The proof appeared to her

to be complete, and it quite vanished from her mind, whether there

could possibly be any one walking in the garden during the evening or

at night.

A few days later, however, a fresh incident occurred.

CHAPTER III—ENRICHED WITH COMMENTARIES BY TOUSSAINT

In the garden, near the railing on the street, there was a stone bench,

screened from the eyes of the curious by a plantation of yoke-elms, but

which could, in case of necessity, be reached by an arm from the

outside, past the trees and the gate.

One evening during that same month of April, Jean Valjean had gone out;

Cosette had seated herself on this bench after sundown. The breeze was

blowing briskly in the trees, Cosette was meditating; an objectless

sadness was taking possession of her little by little, that invincible

sadness evoked by the evening, and which arises, perhaps, who knows,

from the mystery of the tomb which is ajar at that hour.

Perhaps Fantine was within that shadow.

Cosette rose, slowly made the tour of the garden, walking on the grass

drenched in dew, and saying to herself, through the species of

melancholy somnambulism in which she was plunged: “Really, one needs

wooden shoes for the garden at this hour. One takes cold.”

She returned to the bench.

As she was about to resume her seat there, she observed on the spot

which she had quitted, a tolerably large stone which had, evidently,

not been there a moment before.

Cosette gazed at the stone, asking herself what it meant. All at once

the idea occurred to her that the stone had not reached the bench all

by itself, that some one had placed it there, that an arm had been

thrust through the railing, and this idea appeared to alarm her. This

time, the fear was genuine; the stone was there. No doubt was possible;

she did not touch it, fled without glancing behind her, took refuge in

the house, and immediately closed with shutter, bolt, and bar the

door-like window opening on the flight of steps. She inquired of

Toussaint:—

“Has my father returned yet?”

“Not yet, Mademoiselle.”

[We have already noted once for all the fact that Toussaint stuttered.

May we be permitted to dispense with it for the future. The musical

notation of an infirmity is repugnant to us.]

Jean Valjean, a thoughtful man, and given to nocturnal strolls, often

returned quite late at night.

“Toussaint,” went on Cosette, “are you careful to thoroughly barricade

the shutters opening on the garden, at least with bars, in the evening,

and to put the little iron things in the little rings that close them?”

“Oh! be easy on that score, Miss.”

Toussaint did not fail in her duty, and Cosette was well aware of the

fact, but she could not refrain from adding:—

“It is so solitary here.”

“So far as that is concerned,” said Toussaint, “it is true. We might be

assassinated before we had time to say \_ouf!\_ And Monsieur does not

sleep in the house, to boot. But fear nothing, Miss, I fasten the

shutters up like prisons. Lone women! That is enough to make one

shudder, I believe you! Just imagine, what if you were to see men enter

your chamber at night and say: ‘Hold your tongue!’ and begin to cut

your throat. It’s not the dying so much; you die, for one must die, and

that’s all right; it’s the abomination of feeling those people touch

you. And then, their knives; they can’t be able to cut well with them!

Ah, good gracious!”

“Be quiet,” said Cosette. “Fasten everything thoroughly.”

Cosette, terrified by the melodrama improvised by Toussaint, and

possibly, also, by the recollection of the apparitions of the past

week, which recurred to her memory, dared not even say to her: “Go and

look at the stone which has been placed on the bench!” for fear of

opening the garden gate and allowing “the men” to enter. She saw that

all the doors and windows were carefully fastened, made Toussaint go

all over the house from garret to cellar, locked herself up in her own

chamber, bolted her door, looked under her couch, went to bed and slept

badly. All night long she saw that big stone, as large as a mountain

and full of caverns.

At sunrise,—the property of the rising sun is to make us laugh at all

our terrors of the past night, and our laughter is in direct proportion

to our terror which they have caused,—at sunrise Cosette, when she

woke, viewed her fright as a nightmare, and said to herself: “What have

I been thinking of? It is like the footsteps that I thought I heard a

week or two ago in the garden at night! It is like the shadow of the

chimney-pot! Am I becoming a coward?” The sun, which was glowing

through the crevices in her shutters, and turning the damask curtains

crimson, reassured her to such an extent that everything vanished from

her thoughts, even the stone.

“There was no more a stone on the bench than there was a man in a round

hat in the garden; I dreamed about the stone, as I did all the rest.”

She dressed herself, descended to the garden, ran to the bench, and

broke out in a cold perspiration. The stone was there.

But this lasted only for a moment. That which is terror by night is

curiosity by day.

“Bah!” said she, “come, let us see what it is.”

She lifted the stone, which was tolerably large. Beneath it was

something which resembled a letter. It was a white envelope. Cosette

seized it. There was no address on one side, no seal on the other. Yet

the envelope, though unsealed, was not empty. Papers could be seen

inside.

Cosette examined it. It was no longer alarm, it was no longer

curiosity; it was a beginning of anxiety.

Cosette drew from the envelope its contents, a little notebook of

paper, each page of which was numbered and bore a few lines in a very

fine and rather pretty handwriting, as Cosette thought.

Cosette looked for a name; there was none. To whom was this addressed?

To her, probably, since a hand had deposited the packet on her bench.

From whom did it come? An irresistible fascination took possession of

her; she tried to turn away her eyes from the leaflets which were

trembling in her hand, she gazed at the sky, the street, the acacias

all bathed in light, the pigeons fluttering over a neighboring roof,

and then her glance suddenly fell upon the manuscript, and she said to

herself that she must know what it contained.

This is what she read.

CHAPTER IV—A HEART BENEATH A STONE

[Illustration: Cosette With Letter]

The reduction of the universe to a single being, the expansion of a

single being even to God, that is love.

Love is the salutation of the angels to the stars.

How sad is the soul, when it is sad through love!

What a void in the absence of the being who, by herself alone fills the

world! Oh! how true it is that the beloved being becomes God. One could

comprehend that God might be jealous of this had not God the Father of

all evidently made creation for the soul, and the soul for love.

The glimpse of a smile beneath a white crape bonnet with a lilac

curtain is sufficient to cause the soul to enter into the palace of

dreams.

God is behind everything, but everything hides God. Things are black,

creatures are opaque. To love a being is to render that being

transparent.

Certain thoughts are prayers. There are moments when, whatever the

attitude of the body may be, the soul is on its knees.

Parted lovers beguile absence by a thousand chimerical devices, which

possess, however, a reality of their own. They are prevented from

seeing each other, they cannot write to each other; they discover a

multitude of mysterious means to correspond. They send each other the

song of the birds, the perfume of the flowers, the smiles of children,

the light of the sun, the sighings of the breeze, the rays of stars,

all creation. And why not? All the works of God are made to serve love.

Love is sufficiently potent to charge all nature with its messages.

Oh Spring! Thou art a letter that I write to her.

The future belongs to hearts even more than it does to minds. Love,

that is the only thing that can occupy and fill eternity. In the

infinite, the inexhaustible is requisite.

Love participates of the soul itself. It is of the same nature. Like

it, it is the divine spark; like it, it is incorruptible, indivisible,

imperishable. It is a point of fire that exists within us, which is

immortal and infinite, which nothing can confine, and which nothing can

extinguish. We feel it burning even to the very marrow of our bones,

and we see it beaming in the very depths of heaven.

Oh Love! Adorations! voluptuousness of two minds which understand each

other, of two hearts which exchange with each other, of two glances

which penetrate each other! You will come to me, will you not, bliss!

strolls by twos in the solitudes! Blessed and radiant days! I have

sometimes dreamed that from time to time hours detached themselves from

the lives of the angels and came here below to traverse the destinies

of men.

God can add nothing to the happiness of those who love, except to give

them endless duration. After a life of love, an eternity of love is, in

fact, an augmentation; but to increase in intensity even the ineffable

felicity which love bestows on the soul even in this world, is

impossible, even to God. God is the plenitude of heaven; love is the

plenitude of man.

You look at a star for two reasons, because it is luminous, and because

it is impenetrable. You have beside you a sweeter radiance and a

greater mystery, woman.

All of us, whoever we may be, have our respirable beings. We lack air

and we stifle. Then we die. To die for lack of love is horrible.

Suffocation of the soul.

When love has fused and mingled two beings in a sacred and angelic

unity, the secret of life has been discovered so far as they are

concerned; they are no longer anything more than the two boundaries of

the same destiny; they are no longer anything but the two wings of the

same spirit. Love, soar.

On the day when a woman as she passes before you emits light as she

walks, you are lost, you love. But one thing remains for you to do: to

think of her so intently that she is constrained to think of you.

What love commences can be finished by God alone.

True love is in despair and is enchanted over a glove lost or a

handkerchief found, and eternity is required for its devotion and its

hopes. It is composed both of the infinitely great and the infinitely

little.

If you are a stone, be adamant; if you are a plant, be the sensitive

plant; if you are a man, be love.

Nothing suffices for love. We have happiness, we desire paradise; we

possess paradise, we desire heaven.

Oh ye who love each other, all this is contained in love. Understand

how to find it there. Love has contemplation as well as heaven, and

more than heaven, it has voluptuousness.

“Does she still come to the Luxembourg?” “No, sir.” “This is the church

where she attends mass, is it not?” “She no longer comes here.” “Does

she still live in this house?” “She has moved away.” “Where has she

gone to dwell?”

“She did not say.”

What a melancholy thing not to know the address of one’s soul!

Love has its childishness, other passions have their pettinesses. Shame

on the passions which belittle man! Honor to the one which makes a

child of him!

There is one strange thing, do you know it? I dwell in the night. There

is a being who carried off my sky when she went away.

Oh! would that we were lying side by side in the same grave, hand in

hand, and from time to time, in the darkness, gently caressing a

finger,—that would suffice for my eternity!

Ye who suffer because ye love, love yet more. To die of love, is to

live in it.

Love. A sombre and starry transfiguration is mingled with this torture.

There is ecstasy in agony.

Oh joy of the birds! It is because they have nests that they sing.

Love is a celestial respiration of the air of paradise.

Deep hearts, sage minds, take life as God has made it; it is a long

trial, an incomprehensible preparation for an unknown destiny. This

destiny, the true one, begins for a man with the first step inside the

tomb. Then something appears to him, and he begins to distinguish the

definitive. The definitive, meditate upon that word. The living

perceive the infinite; the definitive permits itself to be seen only by

the dead. In the meanwhile, love and suffer, hope and contemplate. Woe,

alas! to him who shall have loved only bodies, forms, appearances!

Death will deprive him of all. Try to love souls, you will find them

again.

I encountered in the street, a very poor young man who was in love. His

hat was old, his coat was worn, his elbows were in holes; water

trickled through his shoes, and the stars through his soul.

What a grand thing it is to be loved! What a far grander thing it is to

love! The heart becomes heroic, by dint of passion. It is no longer

composed of anything but what is pure; it no longer rests on anything

that is not elevated and great. An unworthy thought can no more

germinate in it, than a nettle on a glacier. The serene and lofty soul,

inaccessible to vulgar passions and emotions, dominating the clouds and

the shades of this world, its follies, its lies, its hatreds, its

vanities, its miseries, inhabits the blue of heaven, and no longer

feels anything but profound and subterranean shocks of destiny, as the

crests of mountains feel the shocks of earthquake.

If there did not exist some one who loved, the sun would become

extinct.

CHAPTER V—COSETTE AFTER THE LETTER

As Cosette read, she gradually fell into thought. At the very moment

when she raised her eyes from the last line of the note-book, the

handsome officer passed triumphantly in front of the gate,—it was his

hour; Cosette thought him hideous.

She resumed her contemplation of the book. It was written in the most

charming of chirography, thought Cosette; in the same hand, but with

divers inks, sometimes very black, again whitish, as when ink has been

added to the inkstand, and consequently on different days. It was,

then, a mind which had unfolded itself there, sigh by sigh,

irregularly, without order, without choice, without object, hap-hazard.

Cosette had never read anything like it. This manuscript, in which she

already perceived more light than obscurity, produced upon her the

effect of a half-open sanctuary. Each one of these mysterious lines

shone before her eyes and inundated her heart with a strange radiance.

The education which she had received had always talked to her of the

soul, and never of love, very much as one might talk of the firebrand

and not of the flame. This manuscript of fifteen pages suddenly and

sweetly revealed to her all of love, sorrow, destiny, life, eternity,

the beginning, the end. It was as if a hand had opened and suddenly

flung upon her a handful of rays of light. In these few lines she felt

a passionate, ardent, generous, honest nature, a sacred will, an

immense sorrow, and an immense despair, a suffering heart, an ecstasy

fully expanded. What was this manuscript? A letter. A letter without

name, without address, without date, without signature, pressing and

disinterested, an enigma composed of truths, a message of love made to

be brought by an angel and read by a virgin, an appointment made beyond

the bounds of earth, the love-letter of a phantom to a shade. It was an

absent one, tranquil and dejected, who seemed ready to take refuge in

death and who sent to the absent love, his lady, the secret of fate,

the key of life, love. This had been written with one foot in the grave

and one finger in heaven. These lines, which had fallen one by one on

the paper, were what might be called drops of soul.

Now, from whom could these pages come? Who could have penned them?

Cosette did not hesitate a moment. One man only.

He!

Day had dawned once more in her spirit; all had reappeared. She felt an

unheard-of joy, and a profound anguish. It was he! he who had written!

he was there! it was he whose arm had been thrust through that railing!

While she was forgetful of him, he had found her again! But had she

forgotten him? No, never! She was foolish to have thought so for a

single moment. She had always loved him, always adored him. The fire

had been smothered, and had smouldered for a time, but she saw all

plainly now; it had but made headway, and now it had burst forth

afresh, and had inflamed her whole being. This note-book was like a

spark which had fallen from that other soul into hers. She felt the

conflagration starting up once more.

She imbued herself thoroughly with every word of the manuscript: “Oh

yes!” said she, “how perfectly I recognize all that! That is what I had

already read in his eyes.” As she was finishing it for the third time,

Lieutenant Théodule passed the gate once more, and rattled his spurs

upon the pavement. Cosette was forced to raise her eyes. She thought

him insipid, silly, stupid, useless, foppish, displeasing, impertinent,

and extremely ugly. The officer thought it his duty to smile at her.

She turned away as in shame and indignation. She would gladly have

thrown something at his head.

She fled, re-entered the house, and shut herself up in her chamber to

peruse the manuscript once more, to learn it by heart, and to dream.

When she had thoroughly mastered it she kissed it and put it in her

bosom.

All was over, Cosette had fallen back into deep, seraphic love. The

abyss of Eden had yawned once more.

All day long, Cosette remained in a sort of bewilderment. She scarcely

thought, her ideas were in the state of a tangled skein in her brain,

she could not manage to conjecture anything, she hoped through a

tremor, what? vague things. She dared make herself no promises, and she

did not wish to refuse herself anything. Flashes of pallor passed over

her countenance, and shivers ran through her frame. It seemed to her,

at intervals, that she was entering the land of chimæras; she said to

herself: “Is this reality?” Then she felt of the dear paper within her

bosom under her gown, she pressed it to her heart, she felt its angles

against her flesh; and if Jean Valjean had seen her at the moment, he

would have shuddered in the presence of that luminous and unknown joy,

which overflowed from beneath her eyelids.—“Oh yes!” she thought, “it

is certainly he! This comes from him, and is for me!”

And she told herself that an intervention of the angels, a celestial

chance, had given him back to her.

Oh transfiguration of love! Oh dreams! That celestial chance, that

intervention of the angels, was a pellet of bread tossed by one thief

to another thief, from the Charlemagne Courtyard to the Lion’s Ditch,

over the roofs of La Force.

CHAPTER VI—OLD PEOPLE ARE MADE TO GO OUT OPPORTUNELY

When evening came, Jean Valjean went out; Cosette dressed herself. She

arranged her hair in the most becoming manner, and she put on a dress

whose bodice had received one snip of the scissors too much, and which,

through this slope, permitted a view of the beginning of her throat,

and was, as young girls say, “a trifle indecent.” It was not in the

least indecent, but it was prettier than usual. She made her toilet

thus without knowing why she did so.

Did she mean to go out? No.

Was she expecting a visitor? No.

At dusk, she went down to the garden. Toussaint was busy in her

kitchen, which opened on the back yard.

She began to stroll about under the trees, thrusting aside the branches

from time to time with her hand, because there were some which hung

very low.

In this manner she reached the bench.

The stone was still there.

She sat down, and gently laid her white hand on this stone as though

she wished to caress and thank it.

All at once, she experienced that indefinable impression which one

undergoes when there is some one standing behind one, even when she

does not see the person.

She turned her head and rose to her feet.

It was he.

His head was bare. He appeared to have grown thin and pale. His black

clothes were hardly discernible. The twilight threw a wan light on his

fine brow, and covered his eyes in shadows. Beneath a veil of

incomparable sweetness, he had something about him that suggested death

and night. His face was illuminated by the light of the dying day, and

by the thought of a soul that is taking flight.

He seemed to be not yet a ghost, and he was no longer a man.

He had flung away his hat in the thicket, a few paces distant.

Cosette, though ready to swoon, uttered no cry. She retreated slowly,

for she felt herself attracted. He did not stir. By virtue of something

ineffable and melancholy which enveloped him, she felt the look in his

eyes which she could not see.

Cosette, in her retreat, encountered a tree and leaned against it. Had

it not been for this tree, she would have fallen.

Then she heard his voice, that voice which she had really never heard,

barely rising above the rustle of the leaves, and murmuring:—

“Pardon me, here I am. My heart is full. I could not live on as I was

living, and I have come. Have you read what I placed there on the

bench? Do you recognize me at all? Have no fear of me. It is a long

time, you remember the day, since you looked at me at the Luxembourg,

near the Gladiator. And the day when you passed before me? It was on

the 16th of June and the 2d of July. It is nearly a year ago. I have

not seen you for a long time. I inquired of the woman who let the

chairs, and she told me that she no longer saw you. You lived in the

Rue de l’Ouest, on the third floor, in the front apartments of a new

house,—you see that I know! I followed you. What else was there for me

to do? And then you disappeared. I thought I saw you pass once, while I

was reading the newspapers under the arcade of the Odéon. I ran after

you. But no. It was a person who had a bonnet like yours. At night I

came hither. Do not be afraid, no one sees me. I come to gaze upon your

windows near at hand. I walk very softly, so that you may not hear, for

you might be alarmed. The other evening I was behind you, you turned

round, I fled. Once, I heard you singing. I was happy. Did it affect

you because I heard you singing through the shutters? That could not

hurt you. No, it is not so? You see, you are my angel! Let me come

sometimes; I think that I am going to die. If you only knew! I adore

you. Forgive me, I speak to you, but I do not know what I am saying; I

may have displeased you; have I displeased you?”

“Oh! my mother!” said she.

And she sank down as though on the point of death.

He grasped her, she fell, he took her in his arms, he pressed her

close, without knowing what he was doing. He supported her, though he

was tottering himself. It was as though his brain were full of smoke;

lightnings darted between his lips; his ideas vanished; it seemed to

him that he was accomplishing some religious act, and that he was

committing a profanation. Moreover, he had not the least passion for

this lovely woman whose force he felt against his breast. He was beside

himself with love.

She took his hand and laid it on her heart. He felt the paper there, he

stammered:—

“You love me, then?”

She replied in a voice so low that it was no longer anything more than

a barely audible breath:—

“Hush! Thou knowest it!”

And she hid her blushing face on the breast of the superb and

intoxicated young man.

He fell upon the bench, and she beside him. They had no words more. The

stars were beginning to gleam. How did it come to pass that their lips

met? How comes it to pass that the birds sing, that snow melts, that

the rose unfolds, that May expands, that the dawn grows white behind

the black trees on the shivering crest of the hills?

A kiss, and that was all.

Both started, and gazed into the darkness with sparkling eyes.

They felt neither the cool night, nor the cold stone, nor the damp

earth, nor the wet grass; they looked at each other, and their hearts

were full of thoughts. They had clasped hands unconsciously.

She did not ask him, she did not even wonder, how he had entered there,

and how he had made his way into the garden. It seemed so simple to her

that he should be there!

From time to time, Marius’ knee touched Cosette’s knee, and both

shivered.

At intervals, Cosette stammered a word. Her soul fluttered on her lips

like a drop of dew on a flower.

Little by little they began to talk to each other. Effusion followed

silence, which is fulness. The night was serene and splendid overhead.

These two beings, pure as spirits, told each other everything, their

dreams, their intoxications, their ecstasies, their chimæras, their

weaknesses, how they had adored each other from afar, how they had

longed for each other, their despair when they had ceased to see each

other. They confided to each other in an ideal intimacy, which nothing

could augment, their most secret and most mysterious thoughts. They

related to each other, with candid faith in their illusions, all that

love, youth, and the remains of childhood which still lingered about

them, suggested to their minds. Their two hearts poured themselves out

into each other in such wise, that at the expiration of a quarter of an

hour, it was the young man who had the young girl’s soul, and the young

girl who had the young man’s soul. Each became permeated with the

other, they were enchanted with each other, they dazzled each other.

When they had finished, when they had told each other everything, she

laid her head on his shoulder and asked him:—

“What is your name?”

“My name is Marius,” said he. “And yours?”

“My name is Cosette.”

BOOK SIXTH—LITTLE GAVROCHE

CHAPTER I—THE MALICIOUS PLAYFULNESS OF THE WIND

Since 1823, when the tavern of Montfermeil was on the way to shipwreck

and was being gradually engulfed, not in the abyss of a bankruptcy, but

in the cesspool of petty debts, the Thénardier pair had had two other

children; both males. That made five; two girls and three boys.

Madame Thénardier had got rid of the last two, while they were still

young and very small, with remarkable luck.

\_Got rid of\_ is the word. There was but a mere fragment of nature in

that woman. A phenomenon, by the way, of which there is more than one

example extant. Like the Maréchale de La Mothe-Houdancourt, the

Thénardier was a mother to her daughters only. There her maternity

ended. Her hatred of the human race began with her own sons. In the

direction of her sons her evil disposition was uncompromising, and her

heart had a lugubrious wall in that quarter. As the reader has seen,

she detested the eldest; she cursed the other two. Why? Because. The

most terrible of motives, the most unanswerable of retorts—Because. “I

have no need of a litter of squalling brats,” said this mother.

Let us explain how the Thénardiers had succeeded in getting rid of

their last two children; and even in drawing profit from the operation.

The woman Magnon, who was mentioned a few pages further back, was the

same one who had succeeded in making old Gillenormand support the two

children which she had had. She lived on the Quai des Célestins, at the

corner of this ancient street of the Petit-Musc which afforded her the

opportunity of changing her evil repute into good odor. The reader will

remember the great epidemic of croup which ravaged the river districts

of the Seine in Paris thirty-five years ago, and of which science took

advantage to make experiments on a grand scale as to the efficacy of

inhalations of alum, so beneficially replaced at the present day by the

external tincture of iodine. During this epidemic, the Magnon lost both

her boys, who were still very young, one in the morning, the other in

the evening of the same day. This was a blow. These children were

precious to their mother; they represented eighty francs a month. These

eighty francs were punctually paid in the name of M. Gillenormand, by

collector of his rents, M. Barge, a retired tip-staff, in the Rue du

Roi-de-Sicile. The children dead, the income was at an end. The Magnon

sought an expedient. In that dark free-masonry of evil of which she

formed a part, everything is known, all secrets are kept, and all lend

mutual aid. Magnon needed two children; the Thénardiers had two. The

same sex, the same age. A good arrangement for the one, a good

investment for the other. The little Thénardiers became little Magnons.

Magnon quitted the Quai des Célestins and went to live in the Rue

Clocheperce. In Paris, the identity which binds an individual to

himself is broken between one street and another.

The registry office being in no way warned, raised no objections, and

the substitution was effected in the most simple manner in the world.

Only, the Thénardier exacted for this loan of her children, ten francs

a month, which Magnon promised to pay, and which she actually did pay.

It is unnecessary to add that M. Gillenormand continued to perform his

compact. He came to see the children every six months. He did not

perceive the change. “Monsieur,” Magnon said to him, “how much they

resemble you!”

Thénardier, to whom avatars were easy, seized this occasion to become

Jondrette. His two daughters and Gavroche had hardly had time to

discover that they had two little brothers. When a certain degree of

misery is reached, one is overpowered with a sort of spectral

indifference, and one regards human beings as though they were

spectres. Your nearest relations are often no more for you than vague

shadowy forms, barely outlined against a nebulous background of life

and easily confounded again with the invisible.

On the evening of the day when she had handed over her two little ones

to Magnon, with express intention of renouncing them forever, the

Thénardier had felt, or had appeared to feel, a scruple. She said to

her husband: “But this is abandoning our children!” Thénardier,

masterful and phlegmatic, cauterized the scruple with this saying:

“Jean Jacques Rousseau did even better!” From scruples, the mother

proceeded to uneasiness: “But what if the police were to annoy us? Tell

me, Monsieur Thénardier, is what we have done permissible?” Thénardier

replied: “Everything is permissible. No one will see anything but true

blue in it. Besides, no one has any interest in looking closely after

children who have not a sou.”

Magnon was a sort of fashionable woman in the sphere of crime. She was

careful about her toilet. She shared her lodgings, which were furnished

in an affected and wretched style, with a clever gallicized English

thief. This English woman, who had become a naturalized Parisienne,

recommended by very wealthy relations, intimately connected with the

medals in the Library and Mademoiselle Mar’s diamonds, became

celebrated later on in judicial accounts. She was called \_Mamselle

Miss\_.

The two little creatures who had fallen to Magnon had no reason to

complain of their lot. Recommended by the eighty francs, they were well

cared for, as is everything from which profit is derived; they were

neither badly clothed, nor badly fed; they were treated almost like

“little gentlemen,”—better by their false mother than by their real

one. Magnon played the lady, and talked no thieves’ slang in their

presence.

Thus passed several years. Thénardier augured well from the fact. One

day, he chanced to say to Magnon as she handed him his monthly stipend

of ten francs: “The father must give them some education.”

All at once, these two poor children, who had up to that time been

protected tolerably well, even by their evil fate, were abruptly hurled

into life and forced to begin it for themselves.

A wholesale arrest of malefactors, like that in the Jondrette garret,

necessarily complicated by investigations and subsequent

incarcerations, is a veritable disaster for that hideous and occult

counter-society which pursues its existence beneath public society; an

adventure of this description entails all sorts of catastrophes in that

sombre world. The Thénardier catastrophe involved the catastrophe of

Magnon.

One day, a short time after Magnon had handed to Éponine the note

relating to the Rue Plumet, a sudden raid was made by the police in the

Rue Clocheperce; Magnon was seized, as was also Mamselle Miss; and all

the inhabitants of the house, which was of a suspicious character, were

gathered into the net. While this was going on, the two little boys

were playing in the back yard, and saw nothing of the raid. When they

tried to enter the house again, they found the door fastened and the

house empty. A cobbler opposite called them to him, and delivered to

them a paper which “their mother” had left for them. On this paper

there was an address: \_M. Barge, collector of rents, Rue du

Roi-de-Sicile, No\_. 8. The proprietor of the stall said to them: “You

cannot live here any longer. Go there. It is nearby. The first street

on the left. Ask your way from this paper.”

The children set out, the elder leading the younger, and holding in his

hand the paper which was to guide them. It was cold, and his benumbed

little fingers could not close very firmly, and they did not keep a

very good hold on the paper. At the corner of the Rue Clocheperce, a

gust of wind tore it from him, and as night was falling, the child was

not able to find it again.

They began to wander aimlessly through the streets.

CHAPTER II—IN WHICH LITTLE GAVROCHE EXTRACTS PROFIT FROM NAPOLEON THE

GREAT

Spring in Paris is often traversed by harsh and piercing breezes which

do not precisely chill but freeze one; these north winds which sadden

the most beautiful days produce exactly the effect of those puffs of

cold air which enter a warm room through the cracks of a badly fitting

door or window. It seems as though the gloomy door of winter had

remained ajar, and as though the wind were pouring through it. In the

spring of 1832, the epoch when the first great epidemic of this century

broke out in Europe, these north gales were more harsh and piercing

than ever. It was a door even more glacial than that of winter which

was ajar. It was the door of the sepulchre. In these winds one felt the

breath of the cholera.

From a meteorological point of view, these cold winds possessed this

peculiarity, that they did not preclude a strong electric tension.

Frequent storms, accompanied by thunder and lightning, burst forth at

this epoch.

One evening, when these gales were blowing rudely, to such a degree

that January seemed to have returned and that the bourgeois had resumed

their cloaks, Little Gavroche, who was always shivering gayly under his

rags, was standing as though in ecstasy before a wig-maker’s shop in

the vicinity of the Orme-Saint-Gervais. He was adorned with a woman’s

woollen shawl, picked up no one knows where, and which he had converted

into a neck comforter. Little Gavroche appeared to be engaged in intent

admiration of a wax bride, in a low-necked dress, and crowned with

orange-flowers, who was revolving in the window, and displaying her

smile to passers-by, between two argand lamps; but in reality, he was

taking an observation of the shop, in order to discover whether he

could not “prig” from the shop-front a cake of soap, which he would

then proceed to sell for a sou to a “hair-dresser” in the suburbs. He

had often managed to breakfast off of such a roll. He called his

species of work, for which he possessed special aptitude, “shaving

barbers.”

While contemplating the bride, and eyeing the cake of soap, he muttered

between his teeth: “Tuesday. It was not Tuesday. Was it Tuesday?

Perhaps it was Tuesday. Yes, it was Tuesday.”

No one has ever discovered to what this monologue referred.

Yes, perchance, this monologue had some connection with the last

occasion on which he had dined, three days before, for it was now

Friday.

The barber in his shop, which was warmed by a good stove, was shaving a

customer and casting a glance from time to time at the enemy, that

freezing and impudent street urchin both of whose hands were in his

pockets, but whose mind was evidently unsheathed.

While Gavroche was scrutinizing the shop-window and the cakes of

windsor soap, two children of unequal stature, very neatly dressed, and

still smaller than himself, one apparently about seven years of age,

the other five, timidly turned the handle and entered the shop, with a

request for something or other, alms possibly, in a plaintive murmur

which resembled a groan rather than a prayer. They both spoke at once,

and their words were unintelligible because sobs broke the voice of the

younger, and the teeth of the elder were chattering with cold. The

barber wheeled round with a furious look, and without abandoning his

razor, thrust back the elder with his left hand and the younger with

his knee, and slammed his door, saying: “The idea of coming in and

freezing everybody for nothing!”

The two children resumed their march in tears. In the meantime, a cloud

had risen; it had begun to rain.

Little Gavroche ran after them and accosted them:—

“What’s the matter with you, brats?”

“We don’t know where we are to sleep,” replied the elder.

“Is that all?” said Gavroche. “A great matter, truly. The idea of

bawling about that. They must be greenies!”

And adopting, in addition to his superiority, which was rather

bantering, an accent of tender authority and gentle patronage:—

“Come along with me, young ’uns!”

“Yes, sir,” said the elder.

And the two children followed him as they would have followed an

archbishop. They had stopped crying.

Gavroche led them up the Rue Saint-Antoine in the direction of the

Bastille.

As Gavroche walked along, he cast an indignant backward glance at the

barber’s shop.

“That fellow has no heart, the whiting,”35 he muttered. “He’s an

Englishman.”

A woman who caught sight of these three marching in a file, with

Gavroche at their head, burst into noisy laughter. This laugh was

wanting in respect towards the group.

“Good day, Mamselle Omnibus,” said Gavroche to her.

An instant later, the wig-maker occurred to his mind once more, and he

added:—

“I am making a mistake in the beast; he’s not a whiting, he’s a

serpent. Barber, I’ll go and fetch a locksmith, and I’ll have a bell

hung to your tail.”

This wig-maker had rendered him aggressive. As he strode over a gutter,

he apostrophized a bearded portress who was worthy to meet Faust on the

Brocken, and who had a broom in her hand.

“Madam,” said he, “so you are going out with your horse?”

And thereupon, he spattered the polished boots of a pedestrian.

“You scamp!” shouted the furious pedestrian.

Gavroche elevated his nose above his shawl.

“Is Monsieur complaining?”

“Of you!” ejaculated the man.

“The office is closed,” said Gavroche, “I do not receive any more

complaints.”

In the meanwhile, as he went on up the street, he perceived a

beggar-girl, thirteen or fourteen years old, and clad in so short a

gown that her knees were visible, lying thoroughly chilled under a

porte-cochère. The little girl was getting to be too old for such a

thing. Growth does play these tricks. The petticoat becomes short at

the moment when nudity becomes indecent.

“Poor girl!” said Gavroche. “She hasn’t even trousers. Hold on, take

this.”

And unwinding all the comfortable woollen which he had around his neck,

he flung it on the thin and purple shoulders of the beggar-girl, where

the scarf became a shawl once more.

The child stared at him in astonishment, and received the shawl in

silence. When a certain stage of distress has been reached in his

misery, the poor man no longer groans over evil, no longer returns

thanks for good.

That done: “Brrr!” said Gavroche, who was shivering more than Saint

Martin, for the latter retained one-half of his cloak.

At this \_brrr!\_ the downpour of rain, redoubled in its spite, became

furious. The wicked skies punish good deeds.

“Ah, come now!” exclaimed Gavroche, “what’s the meaning of this? It’s

re-raining! Good Heavens, if it goes on like this, I shall stop my

subscription.”

And he set out on the march once more.

“It’s all right,” he resumed, casting a glance at the beggar-girl, as

she coiled up under the shawl, “she’s got a famous peel.”

And looking up at the clouds he exclaimed:—

“Caught!”

The two children followed close on his heels.

As they were passing one of these heavy grated lattices, which indicate

a baker’s shop, for bread is put behind bars like gold, Gavroche turned

round:—

“Ah, by the way, brats, have we dined?”

“Monsieur,” replied the elder, “we have had nothing to eat since this

morning.”

“So you have neither father nor mother?” resumed Gavroche majestically.

“Excuse us, sir, we have a papa and a mamma, but we don’t know where

they are.”

“Sometimes that’s better than knowing where they are,” said Gavroche,

who was a thinker.

“We have been wandering about these two hours,” continued the elder,

“we have hunted for things at the corners of the streets, but we have

found nothing.”

“I know,” ejaculated Gavroche, “it’s the dogs who eat everything.”

He went on, after a pause:—

“Ah! we have lost our authors. We don’t know what we have done with

them. This should not be, gamins. It’s stupid to let old people stray

off like that. Come now! we must have a snooze all the same.”

However, he asked them no questions. What was more simple than that

they should have no dwelling place!

The elder of the two children, who had almost entirely recovered the

prompt heedlessness of childhood, uttered this exclamation:—

“It’s queer, all the same. Mamma told us that she would take us to get

a blessed spray on Palm Sunday.”

“Bosh,” said Gavroche.

“Mamma,” resumed the elder, “is a lady who lives with Mamselle Miss.”

“Tanflûte!” retorted Gavroche.

Meanwhile he had halted, and for the last two minutes he had been

feeling and fumbling in all sorts of nooks which his rags contained.

At last he tossed his head with an air intended to be merely satisfied,

but which was triumphant, in reality.

“Let us be calm, young ’uns. Here’s supper for three.”

And from one of his pockets he drew forth a sou.

Without allowing the two urchins time for amazement, he pushed both of

them before him into the baker’s shop, and flung his sou on the

counter, crying:—

“Boy! five centimes’ worth of bread.”

The baker, who was the proprietor in person, took up a loaf and a

knife.

“In three pieces, my boy!” went on Gavroche.

And he added with dignity:—

“There are three of us.”

And seeing that the baker, after scrutinizing the three customers, had

taken down a black loaf, he thrust his finger far up his nose with an

inhalation as imperious as though he had had a pinch of the great

Frederick’s snuff on the tip of his thumb, and hurled this indignant

apostrophe full in the baker’s face:—

“Keksekça?”

Those of our readers who might be tempted to espy in this

interpellation of Gavroche’s to the baker a Russian or a Polish word,

or one of those savage cries which the Yoways and the Botocudos hurl at

each other from bank to bank of a river, athwart the solitudes, are

warned that it is a word which they [our readers] utter every day, and

which takes the place of the phrase: “Qu’est-ce que c’est que cela?”

The baker understood perfectly, and replied:—

“Well! It’s bread, and very good bread of the second quality.”

“You mean \_larton brutal\_ [black bread]!” retorted Gavroche, calmly and

coldly disdainful. “White bread, boy! white bread [\_larton savonné\_]!

I’m standing treat.”

The baker could not repress a smile, and as he cut the white bread he

surveyed them in a compassionate way which shocked Gavroche.

“Come, now, baker’s boy!” said he, “what are you taking our measure

like that for?”

All three of them placed end to end would have hardly made a measure.

When the bread was cut, the baker threw the sou into his drawer, and

Gavroche said to the two children:—

“Grub away.”

The little boys stared at him in surprise.

Gavroche began to laugh.

“Ah! hullo, that’s so! they don’t understand yet, they’re too small.”

And he repeated:—

“Eat away.”

At the same time, he held out a piece of bread to each of them.

And thinking that the elder, who seemed to him the more worthy of his

conversation, deserved some special encouragement and ought to be

relieved from all hesitation to satisfy his appetite, he added, as he

handed him the largest share:—

“Ram that into your muzzle.”

One piece was smaller than the others; he kept this for himself.

The poor children, including Gavroche, were famished. As they tore

their bread apart in big mouthfuls, they blocked up the shop of the

baker, who, now that they had paid their money, looked angrily at them.

“Let’s go into the street again,” said Gavroche.

They set off once more in the direction of the Bastille.

From time to time, as they passed the lighted shop-windows, the

smallest halted to look at the time on a leaden watch which was

suspended from his neck by a cord.

“Well, he is a very green ’un,” said Gavroche.

Then, becoming thoughtful, he muttered between his teeth:—

“All the same, if I had charge of the babes I’d lock ’em up better than

that.”

Just as they were finishing their morsel of bread, and had reached the

angle of that gloomy Rue des Ballets, at the other end of which the low

and threatening wicket of La Force was visible:—

“Hullo, is that you, Gavroche?” said some one.

“Hullo, is that you, Montparnasse?” said Gavroche.

A man had just accosted the street urchin, and the man was no other

than Montparnasse in disguise, with blue spectacles, but recognizable

to Gavroche.

“The bow-wows!” went on Gavroche, “you’ve got a hide the color of a

linseed plaster, and blue specs like a doctor. You’re putting on style,

‘pon my word!”

“Hush!” ejaculated Montparnasse, “not so loud.”

And he drew Gavroche hastily out of range of the lighted shops.

The two little ones followed mechanically, holding each other by the

hand.

When they were ensconced under the arch of a porte-cochère, sheltered

from the rain and from all eyes:—

“Do you know where I’m going?” demanded Montparnasse.

“To the Abbey of Ascend-with-Regret,”36 replied Gavroche.

“Joker!”

And Montparnasse went on:—

“I’m going to find Babet.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Gavroche, “so her name is Babet.”

Montparnasse lowered his voice:—

“Not she, he.”

“Ah! Babet.”

“Yes, Babet.”

“I thought he was buckled.”

“He has undone the buckle,” replied Montparnasse.

And he rapidly related to the gamin how, on the morning of that very

day, Babet, having been transferred to La Conciergerie, had made his

escape, by turning to the left instead of to the right in “the police

office.”

Gavroche expressed his admiration for this skill.

“What a dentist!” he cried.

Montparnasse added a few details as to Babet’s flight, and ended with:—

“Oh! That’s not all.”

Gavroche, as he listened, had seized a cane that Montparnasse held in

his hand, and mechanically pulled at the upper part, and the blade of a

dagger made its appearance.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, pushing the dagger back in haste, “you have brought

along your gendarme disguised as a bourgeois.”

Montparnasse winked.

“The deuce!” resumed Gavroche, “so you’re going to have a bout with the

bobbies?”

“You can’t tell,” replied Montparnasse with an indifferent air. “It’s

always a good thing to have a pin about one.”

Gavroche persisted:—

“What are you up to to-night?”

Again Montparnasse took a grave tone, and said, mouthing every

syllable: “Things.”

And abruptly changing the conversation:—

“By the way!”

“What?”

“Something happened t’other day. Fancy. I meet a bourgeois. He makes me

a present of a sermon and his purse. I put it in my pocket. A minute

later, I feel in my pocket. There’s nothing there.”

“Except the sermon,” said Gavroche.

“But you,” went on Montparnasse, “where are you bound for now?”

Gavroche pointed to his two protégés, and said:—

“I’m going to put these infants to bed.”

“Whereabouts is the bed?”

“At my house.”

“Where’s your house?”

“At my house.”

“So you have a lodging?”

“Yes, I have.”

“And where is your lodging?”

“In the elephant,” said Gavroche.

Montparnasse, though not naturally inclined to astonishment, could not

restrain an exclamation.

“In the elephant!”

“Well, yes, in the elephant!” retorted Gavroche. “Kekçaa?”

This is another word of the language which no one writes, and which

every one speaks.

Kekçaa signifies: \_Qu’est que c’est que cela a? \_ [What’s the matter

with that?]

The urchin’s profound remark recalled Montparnasse to calmness and good

sense. He appeared to return to better sentiments with regard to

Gavroche’s lodging.

“Of course,” said he, “yes, the elephant. Is it comfortable there?”

“Very,” said Gavroche. “It’s really bully there. There ain’t any

draughts, as there are under the bridges.”

“How do you get in?”

“Oh, I get in.”

“So there is a hole?” demanded Montparnasse.

“Parbleu! I should say so. But you mustn’t tell. It’s between the fore

legs. The bobbies haven’t seen it.”

“And you climb up? Yes, I understand.”

“A turn of the hand, cric, crac, and it’s all over, no one there.”

After a pause, Gavroche added:—

“I shall have a ladder for these children.”

Montparnasse burst out laughing:—

“Where the devil did you pick up those young ’uns?”

Gavroche replied with great simplicity:—

“They are some brats that a wig-maker made me a present of.”

Meanwhile, Montparnasse had fallen to thinking:—

“You recognized me very readily,” he muttered.

He took from his pocket two small objects which were nothing more than

two quills wrapped in cotton, and thrust one up each of his nostrils.

This gave him a different nose.

“That changes you,” remarked Gavroche, “you are less homely so, you

ought to keep them on all the time.”

Montparnasse was a handsome fellow, but Gavroche was a tease.

“Seriously,” demanded Montparnasse, “how do you like me so?”

The sound of his voice was different also. In a twinkling, Montparnasse

had become unrecognizable.

“Oh! Do play Porrichinelle for us!” exclaimed Gavroche.

The two children, who had not been listening up to this point, being

occupied themselves in thrusting their fingers up their noses, drew

near at this name, and stared at Montparnasse with dawning joy and

admiration.

Unfortunately, Montparnasse was troubled.

He laid his hand on Gavroche’s shoulder, and said to him, emphasizing

his words: “Listen to what I tell you, boy! if I were on the square

with my dog, my knife, and my wife, and if you were to squander ten

sous on me, I wouldn’t refuse to work, but this isn’t Shrove Tuesday.”

This odd phrase produced a singular effect on the gamin. He wheeled

round hastily, darted his little sparkling eyes about him with profound

attention, and perceived a police sergeant standing with his back to

them a few paces off. Gavroche allowed an: “Ah! good!” to escape him,

but immediately suppressed it, and shaking Montparnasse’s hand:—

“Well, good evening,” said he, “I’m going off to my elephant with my

brats. Supposing that you should need me some night, you can come and

hunt me up there. I lodge on the entresol. There is no porter. You will

inquire for Monsieur Gavroche.”

“Very good,” said Montparnasse.

And they parted, Montparnasse betaking himself in the direction of the

Grève, and Gavroche towards the Bastille. The little one of five,

dragged along by his brother who was dragged by Gavroche, turned his

head back several times to watch “Porrichinelle” as he went.

The ambiguous phrase by means of which Montparnasse had warned Gavroche

of the presence of the policeman, contained no other talisman than the

assonance \_dig\_ repeated five or six times in different forms. This

syllable, \_dig\_, uttered alone or artistically mingled with the words

of a phrase, means: “Take care, we can no longer talk freely.” There

was besides, in Montparnasse’s sentence, a literary beauty which was

lost upon Gavroche, that is \_mon dogue, ma dague et ma digue\_, a slang

expression of the Temple, which signifies my dog, my knife, and my

wife, greatly in vogue among clowns and the red-tails in the great

century when Molière wrote and Callot drew.

Twenty years ago, there was still to be seen in the southwest corner of

the Place de la Bastille, near the basin of the canal, excavated in the

ancient ditch of the fortress-prison, a singular monument, which has

already been effaced from the memories of Parisians, and which deserved

to leave some trace, for it was the idea of a “member of the Institute,

the General-in-chief of the army of Egypt.”

We say monument, although it was only a rough model. But this model

itself, a marvellous sketch, the grandiose skeleton of an idea of

Napoleon’s, which successive gusts of wind have carried away and

thrown, on each occasion, still further from us, had become historical

and had acquired a certain definiteness which contrasted with its

provisional aspect. It was an elephant forty feet high, constructed of

timber and masonry, bearing on its back a tower which resembled a

house, formerly painted green by some dauber, and now painted black by

heaven, the wind, and time. In this deserted and unprotected corner of

the place, the broad brow of the colossus, his trunk, his tusks, his

tower, his enormous crupper, his four feet, like columns produced, at

night, under the starry heavens, a surprising and terrible form. It was

a sort of symbol of popular force. It was sombre, mysterious, and

immense. It was some mighty, visible phantom, one knew not what,

standing erect beside the invisible spectre of the Bastille.

Few strangers visited this edifice, no passer-by looked at it. It was

falling into ruins; every season the plaster which detached itself from

its sides formed hideous wounds upon it. “The ædiles,” as the

expression ran in elegant dialect, had forgotten it ever since 1814.

There it stood in its corner, melancholy, sick, crumbling, surrounded

by a rotten palisade, soiled continually by drunken coachmen; cracks

meandered athwart its belly, a lath projected from its tail, tall grass

flourished between its legs; and, as the level of the place had been

rising all around it for a space of thirty years, by that slow and

continuous movement which insensibly elevates the soil of large towns,

it stood in a hollow, and it looked as though the ground were giving

way beneath it. It was unclean, despised, repulsive, and superb, ugly

in the eyes of the bourgeois, melancholy in the eyes of the thinker.

There was something about it of the dirt which is on the point of being

swept out, and something of the majesty which is on the point of being

decapitated. As we have said, at night, its aspect changed. Night is

the real element of everything that is dark. As soon as twilight

descended, the old elephant became transfigured; he assumed a tranquil

and redoubtable appearance in the formidable serenity of the shadows.

Being of the past, he belonged to night; and obscurity was in keeping

with his grandeur.

This rough, squat, heavy, hard, austere, almost misshapen, but

assuredly majestic monument, stamped with a sort of magnificent and

savage gravity, has disappeared, and left to reign in peace, a sort of

gigantic stove, ornamented with its pipe, which has replaced the sombre

fortress with its nine towers, very much as the bourgeoisie replaces

the feudal classes. It is quite natural that a stove should be the

symbol of an epoch in which a pot contains power. This epoch will pass

away, people have already begun to understand that, if there can be

force in a boiler, there can be no force except in the brain; in other

words, that which leads and drags on the world, is not locomotives, but

ideas. Harness locomotives to ideas,—that is well done; but do not

mistake the horse for the rider.

At all events, to return to the Place de la Bastille, the architect of

this elephant succeeded in making a grand thing out of plaster; the

architect of the stove has succeeded in making a pretty thing out of

bronze.

This stove-pipe, which has been baptized by a sonorous name, and called

the column of July, this monument of a revolution that miscarried, was

still enveloped in 1832, in an immense shirt of woodwork, which we

regret, for our part, and by a vast plank enclosure, which completed

the task of isolating the elephant.

It was towards this corner of the place, dimly lighted by the

reflection of a distant street lamp, that the gamin guided his two

“brats.”

The reader must permit us to interrupt ourselves here and to remind him

that we are dealing with simple reality, and that twenty years ago, the

tribunals were called upon to judge, under the charge of vagabondage,

and mutilation of a public monument, a child who had been caught asleep

in this very elephant of the Bastille. This fact noted, we proceed.

On arriving in the vicinity of the colossus, Gavroche comprehended the

effect which the infinitely great might produce on the infinitely

small, and said:—

“Don’t be scared, infants.”

Then he entered through a gap in the fence into the elephant’s

enclosure and helped the young ones to clamber through the breach. The

two children, somewhat frightened, followed Gavroche without uttering a

word, and confided themselves to this little Providence in rags which

had given them bread and had promised them a shelter.

There, extended along the fence, lay a ladder which by day served the

laborers in the neighboring timber-yard. Gavroche raised it with

remarkable vigor, and placed it against one of the elephant’s forelegs.

Near the point where the ladder ended, a sort of black hole in the

belly of the colossus could be distinguished.

Gavroche pointed out the ladder and the hole to his guests, and said to

them:—

“Climb up and go in.”

The two little boys exchanged terrified glances.

“You’re afraid, brats!” exclaimed Gavroche.

And he added:—

“You shall see!”

He clasped the rough leg of the elephant, and in a twinkling, without

deigning to make use of the ladder, he had reached the aperture. He

entered it as an adder slips through a crevice, and disappeared within,

and an instant later, the two children saw his head, which looked pale,

appear vaguely, on the edge of the shadowy hole, like a wan and whitish

spectre.

“Well!” he exclaimed, “climb up, young ’uns! You’ll see how snug it is

here! Come up, you!” he said to the elder, “I’ll lend you a hand.”

The little fellows nudged each other, the gamin frightened and inspired

them with confidence at one and the same time, and then, it was raining

very hard. The elder one undertook the risk. The younger, on seeing his

brother climbing up, and himself left alone between the paws of this

huge beast, felt greatly inclined to cry, but he did not dare.

The elder lad climbed, with uncertain steps, up the rungs of the

ladder; Gavroche, in the meanwhile, encouraging him with exclamations

like a fencing-master to his pupils, or a muleteer to his mules.

“Don’t be afraid!—That’s it!—Come on!—Put your feet there!—Give us your

hand here!—Boldly!”

And when the child was within reach, he seized him suddenly and

vigorously by the arm, and pulled him towards him.

“Nabbed!” said he.

The brat had passed through the crack.

“Now,” said Gavroche, “wait for me. Be so good as to take a seat,

Monsieur.”

And making his way out of the hole as he had entered it, he slipped

down the elephant’s leg with the agility of a monkey, landed on his

feet in the grass, grasped the child of five round the body, and

planted him fairly in the middle of the ladder, then he began to climb

up behind him, shouting to the elder:—

“I’m going to boost him, do you tug.”

And in another instant, the small lad was pushed, dragged, pulled,

thrust, stuffed into the hole, before he had time to recover himself,

and Gavroche, entering behind him, and repulsing the ladder with a kick

which sent it flat on the grass, began to clap his hands and to cry:—

“Here we are! Long live General Lafayette!”

This explosion over, he added:—

“Now, young ’uns, you are in my house.”

Gavroche was at home, in fact.

Oh, unforeseen utility of the useless! Charity of great things!

Goodness of giants! This huge monument, which had embodied an idea of

the Emperor’s, had become the box of a street urchin. The brat had been

accepted and sheltered by the colossus. The bourgeois decked out in

their Sunday finery who passed the elephant of the Bastille, were fond

of saying as they scanned it disdainfully with their prominent eyes:

“What’s the good of that?” It served to save from the cold, the frost,

the hail, and rain, to shelter from the winds of winter, to preserve

from slumber in the mud which produces fever, and from slumber in the

snow which produces death, a little being who had no father, no mother,

no bread, no clothes, no refuge. It served to receive the innocent whom

society repulsed. It served to diminish public crime. It was a lair

open to one against whom all doors were shut. It seemed as though the

miserable old mastodon, invaded by vermin and oblivion, covered with

warts, with mould, and ulcers, tottering, worm-eaten, abandoned,

condemned, a sort of mendicant colossus, asking alms in vain with a

benevolent look in the midst of the crossroads, had taken pity on that

other mendicant, the poor pygmy, who roamed without shoes to his feet,

without a roof over his head, blowing on his fingers, clad in rags, fed

on rejected scraps. That was what the elephant of the Bastille was good

for. This idea of Napoleon, disdained by men, had been taken back by

God. That which had been merely illustrious, had become august. In

order to realize his thought, the Emperor should have had porphyry,

brass, iron, gold, marble; the old collection of planks, beams and

plaster sufficed for God. The Emperor had had the dream of a genius; in

that Titanic elephant, armed, prodigious, with trunk uplifted, bearing

its tower and scattering on all sides its merry and vivifying waters,

he wished to incarnate the people. God had done a grander thing with

it, he had lodged a child there.

The hole through which Gavroche had entered was a breach which was

hardly visible from the outside, being concealed, as we have stated,

beneath the elephant’s belly, and so narrow that it was only cats and

homeless children who could pass through it.

“Let’s begin,” said Gavroche, “by telling the porter that we are not at

home.”

And plunging into the darkness with the assurance of a person who is

well acquainted with his apartments, he took a plank and stopped up the

aperture.

Again Gavroche plunged into the obscurity. The children heard the

crackling of the match thrust into the phosphoric bottle. The chemical

match was not yet in existence; at that epoch the Fumade steel

represented progress.

A sudden light made them blink; Gavroche had just managed to ignite one

of those bits of cord dipped in resin which are called \_cellar rats\_.

The \_cellar rat\_, which emitted more smoke than light, rendered the

interior of the elephant confusedly visible.

Gavroche’s two guests glanced about them, and the sensation which they

experienced was something like that which one would feel if shut up in

the great tun of Heidelberg, or, better still, like what Jonah must

have felt in the biblical belly of the whale. An entire and gigantic

skeleton appeared enveloping them. Above, a long brown beam, whence

started at regular distances, massive, arching ribs, represented the

vertebral column with its sides, stalactites of plaster depended from

them like entrails, and vast spiders’ webs stretching from side to

side, formed dirty diaphragms. Here and there, in the corners, were

visible large blackish spots which had the appearance of being alive,

and which changed places rapidly with an abrupt and frightened

movement.

Fragments which had fallen from the elephant’s back into his belly had

filled up the cavity, so that it was possible to walk upon it as on a

floor.

The smaller child nestled up against his brother, and whispered to

him:—

“It’s black.”

This remark drew an exclamation from Gavroche. The petrified air of the

two brats rendered some shock necessary.

“What’s that you are gabbling about there?” he exclaimed. “Are you

scoffing at me? Are you turning up your noses? Do you want the

Tuileries? Are you brutes? Come, say! I warn you that I don’t belong to

the regiment of simpletons. Ah, come now, are you brats from the Pope’s

establishment?”

A little roughness is good in cases of fear. It is reassuring. The two

children drew close to Gavroche.

Gavroche, paternally touched by this confidence, passed from grave to

gentle, and addressing the smaller:—

“Stupid,” said he, accenting the insulting word, with a caressing

intonation, “it’s outside that it is black. Outside it’s raining, here

it does not rain; outside it’s cold, here there’s not an atom of wind;

outside there are heaps of people, here there’s no one; outside there

ain’t even the moon, here there’s my candle, confound it!”

The two children began to look upon the apartment with less terror; but

Gavroche allowed them no more time for contemplation.

“Quick,” said he.

And he pushed them towards what we are very glad to be able to call the

end of the room.

There stood his bed.

Gavroche’s bed was complete; that is to say, it had a mattress, a

blanket, and an alcove with curtains.

The mattress was a straw mat, the blanket a rather large strip of gray

woollen stuff, very warm and almost new. This is what the alcove

consisted of:—

Three rather long poles, thrust into and consolidated, with the rubbish

which formed the floor, that is to say, the belly of the elephant, two

in front and one behind, and united by a rope at their summits, so as

to form a pyramidal bundle. This cluster supported a trellis-work of

brass wire which was simply placed upon it, but artistically applied,

and held by fastenings of iron wire, so that it enveloped all three

holes. A row of very heavy stones kept this network down to the floor

so that nothing could pass under it. This grating was nothing else than

a piece of the brass screens with which aviaries are covered in

menageries. Gavroche’s bed stood as in a cage, behind this net. The

whole resembled an Esquimaux tent.

This trellis-work took the place of curtains.

Gavroche moved aside the stones which fastened the net down in front,

and the two folds of the net which lapped over each other fell apart.

“Down on all fours, brats!” said Gavroche.

He made his guests enter the cage with great precaution, then he

crawled in after them, pulled the stones together, and closed the

opening hermetically again.

All three had stretched out on the mat. Gavroche still had the \_cellar

rat\_ in his hand.

“Now,” said he, “go to sleep! I’m going to suppress the candelabra.”

“Monsieur,” the elder of the brothers asked Gavroche, pointing to the

netting, “what’s that for?”

“That,” answered Gavroche gravely, “is for the rats. Go to sleep!”

Nevertheless, he felt obliged to add a few words of instruction for the

benefit of these young creatures, and he continued:—

“It’s a thing from the Jardin des Plantes. It’s used for fierce

animals. There’s a whole shopful of them there. All you’ve got to do is

to climb over a wall, crawl through a window, and pass through a door.

You can get as much as you want.”

As he spoke, he wrapped the younger one up bodily in a fold of the

blanket, and the little one murmured:—

“Oh! how good that is! It’s warm!”

Gavroche cast a pleased eye on the blanket.

“That’s from the Jardin des Plantes, too,” said he. “I took that from

the monkeys.”

And, pointing out to the eldest the mat on which he was lying, a very

thick and admirably made mat, he added:—

“That belonged to the giraffe.”

After a pause he went on:—

“The beasts had all these things. I took them away from them. It didn’t

trouble them. I told them: ‘It’s for the elephant.’”

He paused, and then resumed:—

“You crawl over the walls and you don’t care a straw for the

government. So there now!”

The two children gazed with timid and stupefied respect on this

intrepid and ingenious being, a vagabond like themselves, isolated like

themselves, frail like themselves, who had something admirable and

all-powerful about him, who seemed supernatural to them, and whose

physiognomy was composed of all the grimaces of an old mountebank,

mingled with the most ingenuous and charming smiles.

“Monsieur,” ventured the elder timidly, “you are not afraid of the

police, then?”

Gavroche contented himself with replying:—

“Brat! Nobody says ‘police,’ they say ‘bobbies.’”

The smaller had his eyes wide open, but he said nothing. As he was on

the edge of the mat, the elder being in the middle, Gavroche tucked the

blanket round him as a mother might have done, and heightened the mat

under his head with old rags, in such a way as to form a pillow for the

child. Then he turned to the elder:—

“Hey! We’re jolly comfortable here, ain’t we?”

“Ah, yes!” replied the elder, gazing at Gavroche with the expression of

a saved angel.

The two poor little children who had been soaked through, began to grow

warm once more.

“Ah, by the way,” continued Gavroche, “what were you bawling about?”

And pointing out the little one to his brother:—

“A mite like that, I’ve nothing to say about, but the idea of a big

fellow like you crying! It’s idiotic; you looked like a calf.”

“Gracious,” replied the child, “we have no lodging.”

“Bother!” retorted Gavroche, “you don’t say ‘lodgings,’ you say

‘crib.’”

“And then, we were afraid of being alone like that at night.”

“You don’t say ‘night,’ you say ‘darkmans.’”

“Thank you, sir,” said the child.

“Listen,” went on Gavroche, “you must never bawl again over anything.

I’ll take care of you. You shall see what fun we’ll have. In summer,

we’ll go to the Glacière with Navet, one of my pals, we’ll bathe in the

Gare, we’ll run stark naked in front of the rafts on the bridge at

Austerlitz,—that makes the laundresses raging. They scream, they get

mad, and if you only knew how ridiculous they are! We’ll go and see the

man-skeleton. And then I’ll take you to the play. I’ll take you to see

Frédérick Lemaître. I have tickets, I know some of the actors, I even

played in a piece once. There were a lot of us fellers, and we ran

under a cloth, and that made the sea. I’ll get you an engagement at my

theatre. We’ll go to see the savages. They ain’t real, those savages

ain’t. They wear pink tights that go all in wrinkles, and you can see

where their elbows have been darned with white. Then, we’ll go to the

Opera. We’ll get in with the hired applauders. The Opera claque is well

managed. I wouldn’t associate with the claque on the boulevard. At the

Opera, just fancy! some of them pay twenty sous, but they’re ninnies.

They’re called dishclouts. And then we’ll go to see the guillotine

work. I’ll show you the executioner. He lives in the Rue des Marais.

Monsieur Sanson. He has a letter-box at his door. Ah! we’ll have famous

fun!”

At that moment a drop of wax fell on Gavroche’s finger, and recalled

him to the realities of life.

“The deuce!” said he, “there’s the wick giving out. Attention! I can’t

spend more than a sou a month on my lighting. When a body goes to bed,

he must sleep. We haven’t the time to read M. Paul de Kock’s romances.

And besides, the light might pass through the cracks of the

porte-cochère, and all the bobbies need to do is to see it.”

“And then,” remarked the elder timidly,—he alone dared talk to

Gavroche, and reply to him, “a spark might fall in the straw, and we

must look out and not burn the house down.”

“People don’t say ‘burn the house down,’” remarked Gavroche, “they say

‘blaze the crib.’”

The storm increased in violence, and the heavy downpour beat upon the

back of the colossus amid claps of thunder. “You’re taken in, rain!”

said Gavroche. “It amuses me to hear the decanter run down the legs of

the house. Winter is a stupid; it wastes its merchandise, it loses its

labor, it can’t wet us, and that makes it kick up a row, old

water-carrier that it is.”

This allusion to the thunder, all the consequences of which Gavroche,

in his character of a philosopher of the nineteenth century, accepted,

was followed by a broad flash of lightning, so dazzling that a hint of

it entered the belly of the elephant through the crack. Almost at the

same instant, the thunder rumbled with great fury. The two little

creatures uttered a shriek, and started up so eagerly that the network

came near being displaced, but Gavroche turned his bold face to them,

and took advantage of the clap of thunder to burst into a laugh.

“Calm down, children. Don’t topple over the edifice. That’s fine,

first-class thunder; all right. That’s no slouch of a streak of

lightning. Bravo for the good God! Deuce take it! It’s almost as good

as it is at the Ambigu.”

That said, he restored order in the netting, pushed the two children

gently down on the bed, pressed their knees, in order to stretch them

out at full length, and exclaimed:—

“Since the good God is lighting his candle, I can blow out mine. Now,

babes, now, my young humans, you must shut your peepers. It’s very bad

not to sleep. It’ll make you swallow the strainer, or, as they say, in

fashionable society, stink in the gullet. Wrap yourself up well in the

hide! I’m going to put out the light. Are you ready?”

“Yes,” murmured the elder, “I’m all right. I seem to have feathers

under my head.”

“People don’t say ‘head,’” cried Gavroche, “they say ‘nut’.”

The two children nestled close to each other, Gavroche finished

arranging them on the mat, drew the blanket up to their very ears, then

repeated, for the third time, his injunction in the hieratical tongue:—

“Shut your peepers!”

And he snuffed out his tiny light.

Hardly had the light been extinguished, when a peculiar trembling began

to affect the netting under which the three children lay.

It consisted of a multitude of dull scratches which produced a metallic

sound, as if claws and teeth were gnawing at the copper wire. This was

accompanied by all sorts of little piercing cries.

The little five-year-old boy, on hearing this hubbub overhead, and

chilled with terror, jogged his brother’s elbow; but the elder brother

had already shut his peepers, as Gavroche had ordered. Then the little

one, who could no longer control his terror, questioned Gavroche, but

in a very low tone, and with bated breath:—

“Sir?”

“Hey?” said Gavroche, who had just closed his eyes.

“What is that?”

“It’s the rats,” replied Gavroche.

And he laid his head down on the mat again.

The rats, in fact, who swarmed by thousands in the carcass of the

elephant, and who were the living black spots which we have already

mentioned, had been held in awe by the flame of the candle, so long as

it had been lighted; but as soon as the cavern, which was the same as

their city, had returned to darkness, scenting what the good

story-teller Perrault calls “fresh meat,” they had hurled themselves in

throngs on Gavroche’s tent, had climbed to the top of it, and had begun

to bite the meshes as though seeking to pierce this new-fangled trap.

Still the little one could not sleep.

“Sir?” he began again.

“Hey?” said Gavroche.

“What are rats?”

“They are mice.”

This explanation reassured the child a little. He had seen white mice

in the course of his life, and he was not afraid of them. Nevertheless,

he lifted up his voice once more.

“Sir?”

“Hey?” said Gavroche again.

“Why don’t you have a cat?”

“I did have one,” replied Gavroche, “I brought one here, but they ate

her.”

This second explanation undid the work of the first, and the little

fellow began to tremble again.

The dialogue between him and Gavroche began again for the fourth time:—

“Monsieur?”

“Hey?”

“Who was it that was eaten?”

“The cat.”

“And who ate the cat?”

“The rats.”

“The mice?”

“Yes, the rats.”

The child, in consternation, dismayed at the thought of mice which ate

cats, pursued:—

“Sir, would those mice eat us?”

“Wouldn’t they just!” ejaculated Gavroche.

The child’s terror had reached its climax. But Gavroche added:—

“Don’t be afraid. They can’t get in. And besides, I’m here! Here, catch

hold of my hand. Hold your tongue and shut your peepers!”

At the same time Gavroche grasped the little fellow’s hand across his

brother. The child pressed the hand close to him, and felt reassured.

Courage and strength have these mysterious ways of communicating

themselves. Silence reigned round them once more, the sound of their

voices had frightened off the rats; at the expiration of a few minutes,

they came raging back, but in vain, the three little fellows were fast

asleep and heard nothing more.

The hours of the night fled away. Darkness covered the vast Place de la

Bastille. A wintry gale, which mingled with the rain, blew in gusts,

the patrol searched all the doorways, alleys, enclosures, and obscure

nooks, and in their search for nocturnal vagabonds they passed in

silence before the elephant; the monster, erect, motionless, staring

open-eyed into the shadows, had the appearance of dreaming happily over

his good deed; and sheltered from heaven and from men the three poor

sleeping children.

In order to understand what is about to follow, the reader must

remember, that, at that epoch, the Bastille guard-house was situated at

the other end of the square, and that what took place in the vicinity

of the elephant could neither be seen nor heard by the sentinel.

Towards the end of that hour which immediately precedes the dawn, a man

turned from the Rue Saint-Antoine at a run, made the circuit of the

enclosure of the column of July, and glided between the palings until

he was underneath the belly of the elephant. If any light had

illuminated that man, it might have been divined from the thorough

manner in which he was soaked that he had passed the night in the rain.

Arrived beneath the elephant, he uttered a peculiar cry, which did not

belong to any human tongue, and which a paroquet alone could have

imitated. Twice he repeated this cry, of whose orthography the

following barely conveys an idea:—

“Kirikikiou!”

At the second cry, a clear, young, merry voice responded from the belly

of the elephant:—

“Yes!”

Almost immediately, the plank which closed the hole was drawn aside,

and gave passage to a child who descended the elephant’s leg, and fell

briskly near the man. It was Gavroche. The man was Montparnasse.

As for his cry of \_Kirikikiou\_,—that was, doubtless, what the child had

meant, when he said:—

“You will ask for Monsieur Gavroche.”

On hearing it, he had waked with a start, had crawled out of his

“alcove,” pushing apart the netting a little, and carefully drawing it

together again, then he had opened the trap, and descended.

The man and the child recognized each other silently amid the gloom:

Montparnasse confined himself to the remark:—

“We need you. Come, lend us a hand.”

The lad asked for no further enlightenment.

“I’m with you,” said he.

And both took their way towards the Rue Saint-Antoine, whence

Montparnasse had emerged, winding rapidly through the long file of

market-gardeners’ carts which descend towards the markets at that hour.

The market-gardeners, crouching, half-asleep, in their wagons, amid the

salads and vegetables, enveloped to their very eyes in their mufflers

on account of the beating rain, did not even glance at these strange

pedestrians.

CHAPTER III—THE VICISSITUDES OF FLIGHT

This is what had taken place that same night at the La Force:—

An escape had been planned between Babet, Brujon, Guelemer, and

Thénardier, although Thénardier was in close confinement. Babet had

arranged the matter for his own benefit, on the same day, as the reader

has seen from Montparnasse’s account to Gavroche. Montparnasse was to

help them from outside.

Brujon, after having passed a month in the punishment cell, had had

time, in the first place, to weave a rope, in the second, to mature a

plan. In former times, those severe places where the discipline of the

prison delivers the convict into his own hands, were composed of four

stone walls, a stone ceiling, a flagged pavement, a camp bed, a grated

window, and a door lined with iron, and were called \_dungeons\_; but the

dungeon was judged to be too terrible; nowadays they are composed of an

iron door, a grated window, a camp bed, a flagged pavement, four stone

walls, and a stone ceiling, and are called \_chambers of punishment\_. A

little light penetrates towards midday. The inconvenient point about

these chambers which, as the reader sees, are not dungeons, is that

they allow the persons who should be at work to think.

So Brujon meditated, and he emerged from the chamber of punishment with

a rope. As he had the name of being very dangerous in the Charlemagne

courtyard, he was placed in the New Building. The first thing he found

in the New Building was Guelemer, the second was a nail; Guelemer, that

is to say, crime; a nail, that is to say, liberty. Brujon, of whom it

is high time that the reader should have a complete idea, was, with an

appearance of delicate health and a profoundly premeditated languor, a

polished, intelligent sprig, and a thief, who had a caressing glance,

and an atrocious smile. His glance resulted from his will, and his

smile from his nature. His first studies in his art had been directed

to roofs. He had made great progress in the industry of the men who

tear off lead, who plunder the roofs and despoil the gutters by the

process called \_double pickings\_.

The circumstance which put the finishing touch on the moment peculiarly

favorable for an attempt at escape, was that the roofers were re-laying

and re-jointing, at that very moment, a portion of the slates on the

prison. The Saint-Bernard courtyard was no longer absolutely isolated

from the Charlemagne and the Saint-Louis courts. Up above there were

scaffoldings and ladders; in other words, bridges and stairs in the

direction of liberty.

The New Building, which was the most cracked and decrepit thing to be

seen anywhere in the world, was the weak point in the prison. The walls

were eaten by saltpetre to such an extent that the authorities had been

obliged to line the vaults of the dormitories with a sheathing of wood,

because stones were in the habit of becoming detached and falling on

the prisoners in their beds. In spite of this antiquity, the

authorities committed the error of confining in the New Building the

most troublesome prisoners, of placing there “the hard cases,” as they

say in prison parlance.

The New Building contained four dormitories, one above the other, and a

top story which was called the Bel-Air (Fine-Air). A large

chimney-flue, probably from some ancient kitchen of the Dukes de la

Force, started from the ground floor, traversed all four stories, cut

the dormitories, where it figured as a flattened pillar, into two

portions, and finally pierced the roof.

Guelemer and Brujon were in the same dormitory. They had been placed,

by way of precaution, on the lower story. Chance ordained that the

heads of their beds should rest against the chimney.

Thénardier was directly over their heads in the top story known as

Fine-Air. The pedestrian who halts on the Rue Culture-Sainte-Catherine,

after passing the barracks of the firemen, in front of the

porte-cochère of the bathing establishment, beholds a yard full of

flowers and shrubs in wooden boxes, at the extremity of which spreads

out a little white rotunda with two wings, brightened up with green

shutters, the bucolic dream of Jean Jacques.

Not more than ten years ago, there rose above that rotunda an enormous

black, hideous, bare wall by which it was backed up.

This was the outer wall of La Force.

This wall, beside that rotunda, was Milton viewed through Berquin.

Lofty as it was, this wall was overtopped by a still blacker roof,

which could be seen beyond. This was the roof of the New Building.

There one could descry four dormer-windows, guarded with bars; they

were the windows of the Fine-Air.

A chimney pierced the roof; this was the chimney which traversed the

dormitories.

The Bel-Air, that top story of the New Building, was a sort of large

hall, with a Mansard roof, guarded with triple gratings and double

doors of sheet iron, which were studded with enormous bolts. When one

entered from the north end, one had on one’s left the four

dormer-windows, on one’s right, facing the windows, at regular

intervals, four square, tolerably vast cages, separated by narrow

passages, built of masonry to about the height of the elbow, and the

rest, up to the roof, of iron bars.

Thénardier had been in solitary confinement in one of these cages since

the night of the 3d of February. No one was ever able to discover how,

and by what connivance, he succeeded in procuring, and secreting a

bottle of wine, invented, so it is said, by Desrues, with which a

narcotic is mixed, and which the band of the \_Endormeurs\_, or

\_Sleep-compellers\_, rendered famous.

There are, in many prisons, treacherous employees, half-jailers,

half-thieves, who assist in escapes, who sell to the police an

unfaithful service, and who turn a penny whenever they can.

On that same night, then, when Little Gavroche picked up the two lost

children, Brujon and Guelemer, who knew that Babet, who had escaped

that morning, was waiting for them in the street as well as

Montparnasse, rose softly, and with the nail which Brujon had found,

began to pierce the chimney against which their beds stood. The rubbish

fell on Brujon’s bed, so that they were not heard. Showers mingled with

thunder shook the doors on their hinges, and created in the prison a

terrible and opportune uproar. Those of the prisoners who woke,

pretended to fall asleep again, and left Guelemer and Brujon to their

own devices. Brujon was adroit; Guelemer was vigorous. Before any sound

had reached the watcher, who was sleeping in the grated cell which

opened into the dormitory, the wall had been pierced, the chimney

scaled, the iron grating which barred the upper orifice of the flue

forced, and the two redoubtable ruffians were on the roof. The wind and

rain redoubled, the roof was slippery.

“What a good night to leg it!” said Brujon.

An abyss six feet broad and eighty feet deep separated them from the

surrounding wall. At the bottom of this abyss, they could see the

musket of a sentinel gleaming through the gloom. They fastened one end

of the rope which Brujon had spun in his dungeon to the stumps of the

iron bars which they had just wrenched off, flung the other over the

outer wall, crossed the abyss at one bound, clung to the coping of the

wall, got astride of it, let themselves slip, one after the other,

along the rope, upon a little roof which touches the bath-house, pulled

their rope after them, jumped down into the courtyard of the

bath-house, traversed it, pushed open the porter’s wicket, beside which

hung his rope, pulled this, opened the porte-cochère, and found

themselves in the street.

Three-quarters of an hour had not elapsed since they had risen in bed

in the dark, nail in hand, and their project in their heads.

A few moments later they had joined Babet and Montparnasse, who were

prowling about the neighborhood.

They had broken their rope in pulling it after them, and a bit of it

remained attached to the chimney on the roof. They had sustained no

other damage, however, than that of scratching nearly all the skin off

their hands.

That night, Thénardier was warned, without any one being able to

explain how, and was not asleep.

Towards one o’clock in the morning, the night being very dark, he saw

two shadows pass along the roof, in the rain and squalls, in front of

the dormer-window which was opposite his cage. One halted at the

window, long enough to dart in a glance. This was Brujon.

Thénardier recognized him, and understood. This was enough.

Thénardier, rated as a burglar, and detained as a measure of precaution

under the charge of organizing a nocturnal ambush, with armed force,

was kept in sight. The sentry, who was relieved every two hours,

marched up and down in front of his cage with loaded musket. The

Fine-Air was lighted by a skylight. The prisoner had on his feet

fetters weighing fifty pounds. Every day, at four o’clock in the

afternoon, a jailer, escorted by two dogs,—this was still in vogue at

that time,—entered his cage, deposited beside his bed a loaf of black

bread weighing two pounds, a jug of water, a bowl filled with rather

thin bouillon, in which swam a few Mayagan beans, inspected his irons

and tapped the bars. This man and his dogs made two visits during the

night.

Thénardier had obtained permission to keep a sort of iron bolt which he

used to spike his bread into a crack in the wall, “in order to preserve

it from the rats,” as he said. As Thénardier was kept in sight, no

objection had been made to this spike. Still, it was remembered

afterwards, that one of the jailers had said: “It would be better to

let him have only a wooden spike.”

At two o’clock in the morning, the sentinel, who was an old soldier,

was relieved, and replaced by a conscript. A few moments later, the man

with the dogs paid his visit, and went off without noticing anything,

except, possibly, the excessive youth and “the rustic air” of the “raw

recruit.” Two hours afterwards, at four o’clock, when they came to

relieve the conscript, he was found asleep on the floor, lying like a

log near Thénardier’s cage. As for Thénardier, he was no longer there.

There was a hole in the ceiling of his cage, and, above it, another

hole in the roof. One of the planks of his bed had been wrenched off,

and probably carried away with him, as it was not found. They also

seized in his cell a half-empty bottle which contained the remains of

the stupefying wine with which the soldier had been drugged. The

soldier’s bayonet had disappeared.

At the moment when this discovery was made, it was assumed that

Thénardier was out of reach. The truth is, that he was no longer in the

New Building, but that he was still in great danger.

Thénardier, on reaching the roof of the New Building, had found the

remains of Brujon’s rope hanging to the bars of the upper trap of the

chimney, but, as this broken fragment was much too short, he had not

been able to escape by the outer wall, as Brujon and Guelemer had done.

When one turns from the Rue des Ballets into the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile,

one almost immediately encounters a repulsive ruin. There stood on that

spot, in the last century, a house of which only the back wall now

remains, a regular wall of masonry, which rises to the height of the

third story between the adjoining buildings. This ruin can be

recognized by two large square windows which are still to be seen

there; the middle one, that nearest the right gable, is barred with a

worm-eaten beam adjusted like a prop. Through these windows there was

formerly visible a lofty and lugubrious wall, which was a fragment of

the outer wall of La Force.

The empty space on the street left by the demolished house is

half-filled by a fence of rotten boards, shored up by five stone posts.

In this recess lies concealed a little shanty which leans against the

portion of the ruin which has remained standing. The fence has a gate,

which, a few years ago, was fastened only by a latch.

It was the crest of this ruin that Thénardier had succeeded in

reaching, a little after one o’clock in the morning.

How had he got there? That is what no one has ever been able to explain

or understand. The lightning must, at the same time, have hindered and

helped him. Had he made use of the ladders and scaffoldings of the

slaters to get from roof to roof, from enclosure to enclosure, from

compartment to compartment, to the buildings of the Charlemagne court,

then to the buildings of the Saint-Louis court, to the outer wall, and

thence to the hut on the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile? But in that itinerary

there existed breaks which seemed to render it an impossibility. Had he

placed the plank from his bed like a bridge from the roof of the

Fine-Air to the outer wall, and crawled flat, on his belly on the

coping of the outer wall the whole distance round the prison as far as

the hut? But the outer wall of La Force formed a crenellated and

unequal line; it mounted and descended, it dropped at the firemen’s

barracks, it rose towards the bath-house, it was cut in twain by

buildings, it was not even of the same height on the Hotel Lamoignon as

on the Rue Pavée; everywhere occurred falls and right angles; and then,

the sentinels must have espied the dark form of the fugitive; hence,

the route taken by Thénardier still remains rather inexplicable. In two

manners, flight was impossible. Had Thénardier, spurred on by that

thirst for liberty which changes precipices into ditches, iron bars

into wattles of osier, a legless man into an athlete, a gouty man into

a bird, stupidity into instinct, instinct into intelligence, and

intelligence into genius, had Thénardier invented a third mode? No one

has ever found out.

The marvels of escape cannot always be accounted for. The man who makes

his escape, we repeat, is inspired; there is something of the star and

of the lightning in the mysterious gleam of flight; the effort towards

deliverance is no less surprising than the flight towards the sublime,

and one says of the escaped thief: “How did he contrive to scale that

wall?” in the same way that one says of Corneille: “Where did he find

\_the means of dying?\_”

At all events, dripping with perspiration, drenched with rain, with his

clothes hanging in ribbons, his hands flayed, his elbows bleeding, his

knees torn, Thénardier had reached what children, in their figurative

language, call \_the edge\_ of the wall of the ruin, there he had

stretched himself out at full length, and there his strength had failed

him. A steep escarpment three stories high separated him from the

pavement of the street.

The rope which he had was too short.

There he waited, pale, exhausted, desperate with all the despair which

he had undergone, still hidden by the night, but telling himself that

the day was on the point of dawning, alarmed at the idea of hearing the

neighboring clock of Saint-Paul strike four within a few minutes, an

hour when the sentinel was relieved and when the latter would be found

asleep under the pierced roof, staring in horror at a terrible depth,

at the light of the street lanterns, the wet, black pavement, that

pavement longed for yet frightful, which meant death, and which meant

liberty.

He asked himself whether his three accomplices in flight had succeeded,

if they had heard him, and if they would come to his assistance. He

listened. With the exception of the patrol, no one had passed through

the street since he had been there. Nearly the whole of the descent of

the market-gardeners from Montreuil, from Charonne, from Vincennes, and

from Bercy to the markets was accomplished through the Rue

Saint-Antoine.

Four o’clock struck. Thénardier shuddered. A few moments later, that

terrified and confused uproar which follows the discovery of an escape

broke forth in the prison. The sound of doors opening and shutting, the

creaking of gratings on their hinges, a tumult in the guard-house, the

hoarse shouts of the turnkeys, the shock of musket-butts on the

pavement of the courts, reached his ears. Lights ascended and descended

past the grated windows of the dormitories, a torch ran along the

ridge-pole of the top story of the New Building, the firemen belonging

in the barracks on the right had been summoned. Their helmets, which

the torch lighted up in the rain, went and came along the roofs. At the

same time, Thénardier perceived in the direction of the Bastille a wan

whiteness lighting up the edge of the sky in doleful wise.

He was on top of a wall ten inches wide, stretched out under the heavy

rains, with two gulfs to right and left, unable to stir, subject to the

giddiness of a possible fall, and to the horror of a certain arrest,

and his thoughts, like the pendulum of a clock, swung from one of these

ideas to the other: “Dead if I fall, caught if I stay.” In the midst of

this anguish, he suddenly saw, the street being still dark, a man who

was gliding along the walls and coming from the Rue Pavée, halt in the

recess above which Thénardier was, as it were, suspended. Here this man

was joined by a second, who walked with the same caution, then by a

third, then by a fourth. When these men were re-united, one of them

lifted the latch of the gate in the fence, and all four entered the

enclosure in which the shanty stood. They halted directly under

Thénardier. These men had evidently chosen this vacant space in order

that they might consult without being seen by the passers-by or by the

sentinel who guards the wicket of La Force a few paces distant. It must

be added, that the rain kept this sentinel blocked in his box.

Thénardier, not being able to distinguish their visages, lent an ear to

their words with the desperate attention of a wretch who feels himself

lost.

Thénardier saw something resembling a gleam of hope flash before his

eyes,—these men conversed in slang.

The first said in a low but distinct voice:—

“Let’s cut. What are we up to here?”

The second replied: “It’s raining hard enough to put out the very

devil’s fire. And the bobbies will be along instanter. There’s a

soldier on guard yonder. We shall get nabbed here.”

These two words, \_icigo\_ and \_icicaille\_, both of which mean \_ici\_, and

which belong, the first to the slang of the barriers, the second to the

slang of the Temple, were flashes of light for Thénardier. By the

\_icigo\_ he recognized Brujon, who was a prowler of the barriers, by the

\_icicaille\_ he knew Babet, who, among his other trades, had been an

old-clothes broker at the Temple.

The antique slang of the great century is no longer spoken except in

the Temple, and Babet was really the only person who spoke it in all

its purity. Had it not been for the \_icicaille\_, Thénardier would not

have recognized him, for he had entirely changed his voice.

In the meanwhile, the third man had intervened.

“There’s no hurry yet, let’s wait a bit. How do we know that he doesn’t

stand in need of us?”

By this, which was nothing but French, Thénardier recognized

Montparnasse, who made it a point in his elegance to understand all

slangs and to speak none of them.

As for the fourth, he held his peace, but his huge shoulders betrayed

him. Thénardier did not hesitate. It was Guelemer.

Brujon replied almost impetuously but still in a low tone:—

“What are you jabbering about? The tavern-keeper hasn’t managed to cut

his stick. He don’t tumble to the racket, that he don’t! You have to be

a pretty knowing cove to tear up your shirt, cut up your sheet to make

a rope, punch holes in doors, get up false papers, make false keys,

file your irons, hang out your cord, hide yourself, and disguise

yourself! The old fellow hasn’t managed to play it, he doesn’t

understand how to work the business.”

Babet added, still in that classical slang which was spoken by

Poulailler and Cartouche, and which is to the bold, new, highly colored

and risky argot used by Brujon what the language of Racine is to the

language of André Chenier:—

“Your tavern-keeper must have been nabbed in the act. You have to be

knowing. He’s only a greenhorn. He must have let himself be taken in by

a bobby, perhaps even by a sheep who played it on him as his pal.

Listen, Montparnasse, do you hear those shouts in the prison? You have

seen all those lights. He’s recaptured, there! He’ll get off with

twenty years. I ain’t afraid, I ain’t a coward, but there ain’t

anything more to do, or otherwise they’d lead us a dance. Don’t get

mad, come with us, let’s go drink a bottle of old wine together.”

“One doesn’t desert one’s friends in a scrape,” grumbled Montparnasse.

“I tell you he’s nabbed!” retorted Brujon. “At the present moment, the

inn-keeper ain’t worth a ha’penny. We can’t do nothing for him. Let’s

be off. Every minute I think a bobby has got me in his fist.”

Montparnasse no longer offered more than a feeble resistance; the fact

is, that these four men, with the fidelity of ruffians who never

abandon each other, had prowled all night long about La Force, great as

was their peril, in the hope of seeing Thénardier make his appearance

on the top of some wall. But the night, which was really growing too

fine,—for the downpour was such as to render all the streets

deserted,—the cold which was overpowering them, their soaked garments,

their hole-ridden shoes, the alarming noise which had just burst forth

in the prison, the hours which had elapsed, the patrol which they had

encountered, the hope which was vanishing, all urged them to beat a

retreat. Montparnasse himself, who was, perhaps, almost Thénardier’s

son-in-law, yielded. A moment more, and they would be gone. Thénardier

was panting on his wall like the shipwrecked sufferers of the \_Méduse\_

on their raft when they beheld the vessel which had appeared in sight

vanish on the horizon.

He dared not call to them; a cry might be heard and ruin everything. An

idea occurred to him, a last idea, a flash of inspiration; he drew from

his pocket the end of Brujon’s rope, which he had detached from the

chimney of the New Building, and flung it into the space enclosed by

the fence.

This rope fell at their feet.

“A widow,”37 said Babet.

“My tortouse!”38 said Brujon.

“The tavern-keeper is there,” said Montparnasse.

They raised their eyes. Thénardier thrust out his head a very little.

“Quick!” said Montparnasse, “have you the other end of the rope,

Brujon?”

“Yes.”

“Knot the two pieces together, we’ll fling him the rope, he can fasten

it to the wall, and he’ll have enough of it to get down with.”

Thénardier ran the risk, and spoke:—

“I am paralyzed with cold.”

“We’ll warm you up.”

“I can’t budge.”

“Let yourself slide, we’ll catch you.”

“My hands are benumbed.”

“Only fasten the rope to the wall.”

“I can’t.”

“Then one of us must climb up,” said Montparnasse.

“Three stories!” ejaculated Brujon.

An ancient plaster flue, which had served for a stove that had been

used in the shanty in former times, ran along the wall and mounted

almost to the very spot where they could see Thénardier. This flue,

then much damaged and full of cracks, has since fallen, but the marks

of it are still visible.

It was very narrow.

“One might get up by the help of that,” said Montparnasse.

“By that flue?” exclaimed Babet, “a grown-up cove, never! it would take

a brat.”

“A brat must be got,” resumed Brujon.

“Where are we to find a young ’un?” said Guelemer.

“Wait,” said Montparnasse. “I’ve got the very article.”

He opened the gate of the fence very softly, made sure that no one was

passing along the street, stepped out cautiously, shut the gate behind

him, and set off at a run in the direction of the Bastille.

Seven or eight minutes elapsed, eight thousand centuries to Thénardier;

Babet, Brujon, and Guelemer did not open their lips; at last the gate

opened once more, and Montparnasse appeared, breathless, and followed

by Gavroche. The rain still rendered the street completely deserted.

Little Gavroche entered the enclosure and gazed at the forms of these

ruffians with a tranquil air. The water was dripping from his hair.

Guelemer addressed him:—

“Are you a man, young ’un?”

Gavroche shrugged his shoulders, and replied:—

“A young ’un like me’s a man, and men like you are babes.”

“The brat’s tongue’s well hung!” exclaimed Babet.

“The Paris brat ain’t made of straw,” added Brujon.

“What do you want?” asked Gavroche.

Montparnasse answered:—

“Climb up that flue.”

“With this rope,” said Babet.

“And fasten it,” continued Brujon.

“To the top of the wall,” went on Babet.

“To the cross-bar of the window,” added Brujon.

“And then?” said Gavroche.

“There!” said Guelemer.

The gamin examined the rope, the flue, the wall, the windows, and made

that indescribable and disdainful noise with his lips which signifies:—

“Is that all!”

“There’s a man up there whom you are to save,” resumed Montparnasse.

“Will you?” began Brujon again.

“Greenhorn!” replied the lad, as though the question appeared a most

unprecedented one to him.

And he took off his shoes.

Guelemer seized Gavroche by one arm, set him on the roof of the shanty,

whose worm-eaten planks bent beneath the urchin’s weight, and handed

him the rope which Brujon had knotted together during Montparnasse’s

absence. The gamin directed his steps towards the flue, which it was

easy to enter, thanks to a large crack which touched the roof. At the

moment when he was on the point of ascending, Thénardier, who saw life

and safety approaching, bent over the edge of the wall; the first light

of dawn struck white upon his brow dripping with sweat, upon his livid

cheek-bones, his sharp and savage nose, his bristling gray beard, and

Gavroche recognized him.

“Hullo! it’s my father! Oh, that won’t hinder.”

And taking the rope in his teeth, he resolutely began the ascent.

He reached the summit of the hut, bestrode the old wall as though it

had been a horse, and knotted the rope firmly to the upper cross-bar of

the window.

A moment later, Thénardier was in the street.

As soon as he touched the pavement, as soon as he found himself out of

danger, he was no longer either weary, or chilled or trembling; the

terrible things from which he had escaped vanished like smoke, all that

strange and ferocious mind awoke once more, and stood erect and free,

ready to march onward.

These were this man’s first words:—

“Now, whom are we to eat?”

It is useless to explain the sense of this frightfully transparent

remark, which signifies both to kill, to assassinate, and to plunder.

\_To eat\_, true sense: \_to devour\_.

“Let’s get well into a corner,” said Brujon. “Let’s settle it in three

words, and part at once. There was an affair that promised well in the

Rue Plumet, a deserted street, an isolated house, an old rotten gate on

a garden, and lone women.”

“Well! why not?” demanded Thénardier.

“Your girl, Éponine, went to see about the matter,” replied Babet.

“And she brought a biscuit to Magnon,” added Guelemer. “Nothing to be

made there.”

“The girl’s no fool,” said Thénardier. “Still, it must be seen to.”

“Yes, yes,” said Brujon, “it must be looked up.”

In the meanwhile, none of the men seemed to see Gavroche, who, during

this colloquy, had seated himself on one of the fence-posts; he waited

a few moments, thinking that perhaps his father would turn towards him,

then he put on his shoes again, and said:—

“Is that all? You don’t want any more, my men? Now you’re out of your

scrape. I’m off. I must go and get my brats out of bed.”

And off he went.

The five men emerged, one after another, from the enclosure.

When Gavroche had disappeared at the corner of the Rue des Ballets,

Babet took Thénardier aside.

“Did you take a good look at that young ’un?” he asked.

“What young ’un?”

“The one who climbed the wall and carried you the rope.”

“Not particularly.”

“Well, I don’t know, but it strikes me that it was your son.”

“Bah!” said Thénardier, “do you think so?”

BOOK SEVENTH—SLANG

[Illustration: Slang]

CHAPTER I—ORIGIN

\_Pigritia\_ is a terrible word.

It engenders a whole world, \_la pègre\_, for which read \_theft\_, and a

hell, \_la pègrenne\_, for which read \_hunger\_.

Thus, idleness is the mother.

She has a son, theft, and a daughter, hunger.

Where are we at this moment? In the land of slang.

What is slang? It is at one and the same time, a nation and a dialect;

it is theft in its two kinds; people and language.

When, four and thirty years ago, the narrator of this grave and sombre

history introduced into a work written with the same aim as this39 a

thief who talked argot, there arose amazement and clamor.—“What! How!

Argot! Why, argot is horrible! It is the language of prisons, galleys,

convicts, of everything that is most abominable in society!” etc., etc.

We have never understood this sort of objections.

Since that time, two powerful romancers, one of whom is a profound

observer of the human heart, the other an intrepid friend of the

people, Balzac and Eugène Sue, having represented their ruffians as

talking their natural language, as the author of \_The Last Day of a

Condemned Man\_ did in 1828, the same objections have been raised.

People repeated: “What do authors mean by that revolting dialect? Slang

is odious! Slang makes one shudder!”

Who denies that? Of course it does.

When it is a question of probing a wound, a gulf, a society, since when

has it been considered wrong to go too far? to go to the bottom? We

have always thought that it was sometimes a courageous act, and, at

least, a simple and useful deed, worthy of the sympathetic attention

which duty accepted and fulfilled merits. Why should one not explore

everything, and study everything? Why should one halt on the way? The

halt is a matter depending on the sounding-line, and not on the

leadsman.

Certainly, too, it is neither an attractive nor an easy task to

undertake an investigation into the lowest depths of the social order,

where terra firma comes to an end and where mud begins, to rummage in

those vague, murky waves, to follow up, to seize and to fling, still

quivering, upon the pavement that abject dialect which is dripping with

filth when thus brought to the light, that pustulous vocabulary each

word of which seems an unclean ring from a monster of the mire and the

shadows. Nothing is more lugubrious than the contemplation thus in its

nudity, in the broad light of thought, of the horrible swarming of

slang. It seems, in fact, to be a sort of horrible beast made for the

night which has just been torn from its cesspool. One thinks one

beholds a frightful, living, and bristling thicket which quivers,

rustles, wavers, returns to shadow, threatens and glares. One word

resembles a claw, another an extinguished and bleeding eye, such and

such a phrase seems to move like the claw of a crab. All this is alive

with the hideous vitality of things which have been organized out of

disorganization.

Now, when has horror ever excluded study? Since when has malady

banished medicine? Can one imagine a naturalist refusing to study the

viper, the bat, the scorpion, the centipede, the tarantula, and one who

would cast them back into their darkness, saying: “Oh! how ugly that

is!” The thinker who should turn aside from slang would resemble a

surgeon who should avert his face from an ulcer or a wart. He would be

like a philologist refusing to examine a fact in language, a

philosopher hesitating to scrutinize a fact in humanity. For, it must

be stated to those who are ignorant of the case, that argot is both a

literary phenomenon and a social result. What is slang, properly

speaking? It is the language of wretchedness.

We may be stopped; the fact may be put to us in general terms, which is

one way of attenuating it; we may be told, that all trades,

professions, it may be added, all the accidents of the social hierarchy

and all forms of intelligence, have their own slang. The merchant who

says: “Montpellier not active, Marseilles fine quality,” the broker on

’change who says: “Assets at end of current month,” the gambler who

says: \_“Tiers et tout, refait de pique,”\_ the sheriff of the Norman

Isles who says: “The holder in fee reverting to his landed estate

cannot claim the fruits of that estate during the hereditary seizure of

the real estate by the mortgagor,” the playwright who says: “The piece

was hissed,” the comedian who says: “I’ve made a hit,” the philosopher

who says: “Phenomenal triplicity,” the huntsman who says: \_“Voileci

allais, Voileci fuyant,”\_ the phrenologist who says: “Amativeness,

combativeness, secretiveness,” the infantry soldier who says: “My

shooting-iron,” the cavalry-man who says: “My turkey-cock,” the

fencing-master who says: “Tierce, quarte, break,” the printer who says:

“My shooting-stick and galley,”—all, printer, fencing-master, cavalry

dragoon, infantry-man, phrenologist, huntsman, philosopher, comedian,

playwright, sheriff, gambler, stock-broker, and merchant, speak slang.

The painter who says: “My grinder,” the notary who says: “My

Skip-the-Gutter,” the hairdresser who says: “My mealyback,” the cobbler

who says: “My cub,” talks slang. Strictly speaking, if one absolutely

insists on the point, all the different fashions of saying the right

and the left, the sailor’s \_port\_ and \_starboard\_, the scene-shifter’s

\_court-side\_, and \_garden-side\_, the beadle’s \_Gospel-side\_ and

\_Epistle-side\_, are slang. There is the slang of the affected lady as

well as of the \_précieuses\_. The Hotel Rambouillet nearly adjoins the

Cour des Miracles. There is a slang of duchesses, witness this phrase

contained in a love-letter from a very great lady and a very pretty

woman of the Restoration: “You will find in this gossip a fultitude of

reasons why I should libertize.”40 Diplomatic ciphers are slang; the

pontifical chancellery by using 26 for Rome, \_grkztntgzyal\_ for

despatch, and \_abfxustgrnogrkzu tu XI\_. for the Duc de Modena, speaks

slang. The physicians of the Middle Ages who, for carrot, radish, and

turnip, said \_Opoponach, perfroschinum, reptitalmus, dracatholicum,

angelorum, postmegorum\_, talked slang. The sugar-manufacturer who says:

“Loaf, clarified, lumps, bastard, common, burnt,”—this honest

manufacturer talks slang. A certain school of criticism twenty years

ago, which used to say: “Half of the works of Shakespeare consists of

plays upon words and puns,”—talked slang. The poet, and the artist who,

with profound understanding, would designate M. de Montmorency as “a

bourgeois,” if he were not a judge of verses and statues, speak slang.

The classic Academician who calls flowers “Flora,” fruits, “Pomona,”

the sea, “Neptune,” love, “fires,” beauty, “charms,” a horse, “a

courser,” the white or tricolored cockade, “the rose of Bellona,” the

three-cornered hat, “Mars’ triangle,”—that classical Academician talks

slang. Algebra, medicine, botany, have each their slang. The tongue

which is employed on board ship, that wonderful language of the sea,

which is so complete and so picturesque, which was spoken by Jean Bart,

Duquesne, Suffren, and Duperré, which mingles with the whistling of the

rigging, the sound of the speaking-trumpets, the shock of the

boarding-irons, the roll of the sea, the wind, the gale, the cannon, is

wholly a heroic and dazzling slang, which is to the fierce slang of the

thieves what the lion is to the jackal.

No doubt. But say what we will, this manner of understanding the word

\_slang\_ is an extension which every one will not admit. For our part,

we reserve to the word its ancient and precise, circumscribed and

determined significance, and we restrict slang to slang. The veritable

slang and the slang that is pre-eminently slang, if the two words can

be coupled thus, the slang immemorial which was a kingdom, is nothing

else, we repeat, than the homely, uneasy, crafty, treacherous,

venomous, cruel, equivocal, vile, profound, fatal tongue of

wretchedness. There exists, at the extremity of all abasement and all

misfortunes, a last misery which revolts and makes up its mind to enter

into conflict with the whole mass of fortunate facts and reigning

rights; a fearful conflict, where, now cunning, now violent, unhealthy

and ferocious at one and the same time, it attacks the social order

with pin-pricks through vice, and with club-blows through crime. To

meet the needs of this conflict, wretchedness has invented a language

of combat, which is slang.

To keep afloat and to rescue from oblivion, to hold above the gulf,

were it but a fragment of some language which man has spoken and which

would, otherwise, be lost, that is to say, one of the elements, good or

bad, of which civilization is composed, or by which it is complicated,

to extend the records of social observation; is to serve civilization

itself. This service Plautus rendered, consciously or unconsciously, by

making two Carthaginian soldiers talk Phœnician; that service Molière

rendered, by making so many of his characters talk Levantine and all

sorts of dialects. Here objections spring up afresh. Phœnician, very

good! Levantine, quite right! Even dialect, let that pass! They are

tongues which have belonged to nations or provinces; but slang! What is

the use of preserving slang? What is the good of assisting slang “to

survive”?

To this we reply in one word, only. Assuredly, if the tongue which a

nation or a province has spoken is worthy of interest, the language

which has been spoken by a misery is still more worthy of attention and

study.

It is the language which has been spoken, in France, for example, for

more than four centuries, not only by a misery, but by every possible

human misery.

And then, we insist upon it, the study of social deformities and

infirmities, and the task of pointing them out with a view to remedy,

is not a business in which choice is permitted. The historian of

manners and ideas has no less austere a mission than the historian of

events. The latter has the surface of civilization, the conflicts of

crowns, the births of princes, the marriages of kings, battles,

assemblages, great public men, revolutions in the daylight, everything

on the exterior; the other historian has the interior, the depths, the

people who toil, suffer, wait, the oppressed woman, the agonizing

child, the secret war between man and man, obscure ferocities,

prejudices, plotted iniquities, the subterranean, the indistinct

tremors of multitudes, the die-of-hunger, the counter-blows of the law,

the secret evolution of souls, the go-bare-foot, the bare-armed, the

disinherited, the orphans, the unhappy, and the infamous, all the forms

which roam through the darkness. He must descend with his heart full of

charity, and severity at the same time, as a brother and as a judge, to

those impenetrable casemates where crawl, pell-mell, those who bleed

and those who deal the blow, those who weep and those who curse, those

who fast and those who devour, those who endure evil and those who

inflict it. Have these historians of hearts and souls duties at all

inferior to the historians of external facts? Does any one think that

Alighieri has any fewer things to say than Machiavelli? Is the under

side of civilization any less important than the upper side merely

because it is deeper and more sombre? Do we really know the mountain

well when we are not acquainted with the cavern?

Let us say, moreover, parenthetically, that from a few words of what

precedes a marked separation might be inferred between the two classes

of historians which does not exist in our mind. No one is a good

historian of the patent, visible, striking, and public life of peoples,

if he is not, at the same time, in a certain measure, the historian of

their deep and hidden life; and no one is a good historian of the

interior unless he understands how, at need, to be the historian of the

exterior also. The history of manners and ideas permeates the history

of events, and this is true reciprocally. They constitute two different

orders of facts which correspond to each other, which are always

interlaced, and which often bring forth results. All the lineaments

which providence traces on the surface of a nation have their

parallels, sombre but distinct, in their depths, and all convulsions of

the depths produce ebullitions on the surface. True history being a

mixture of all things, the true historian mingles in everything.

Man is not a circle with a single centre; he is an ellipse with a

double focus. Facts form one of these, and ideas the other.

Slang is nothing but a dressing-room where the tongue having some bad

action to perform, disguises itself. There it clothes itself in

word-masks, in metaphor-rags. In this guise it becomes horrible.

One finds it difficult to recognize. Is it really the French tongue,

the great human tongue? Behold it ready to step upon the stage and to

retort upon crime, and prepared for all the employments of the

repertory of evil. It no longer walks, it hobbles; it limps on the

crutch of the Court of Miracles, a crutch metamorphosable into a club;

it is called vagrancy; every sort of spectre, its dressers, have

painted its face, it crawls and rears, the double gait of the reptile.

Henceforth, it is apt at all rôles, it is made suspicious by the

counterfeiter, covered with verdigris by the forger, blacked by the

soot of the incendiary; and the murderer applies its rouge.

When one listens, by the side of honest men, at the portals of society,

one overhears the dialogues of those who are on the outside. One

distinguishes questions and replies. One perceives, without

understanding it, a hideous murmur, sounding almost like human accents,

but more nearly resembling a howl than an articulate word. It is slang.

The words are misshapen and stamped with an indescribable and fantastic

bestiality. One thinks one hears hydras talking.

It is unintelligible in the dark. It gnashes and whispers, completing

the gloom with mystery. It is black in misfortune, it is blacker still

in crime; these two blacknesses amalgamated, compose slang. Obscurity

in the atmosphere, obscurity in acts, obscurity in voices. Terrible,

toad-like tongue which goes and comes, leaps, crawls, slobbers, and

stirs about in monstrous wise in that immense gray fog composed of rain

and night, of hunger, of vice, of falsehood, of injustice, of nudity,

of suffocation, and of winter, the high noonday of the miserable.

Let us have compassion on the chastised. Alas! Who are we ourselves?

Who am I who now address you? Who are you who are listening to me? And

are you very sure that we have done nothing before we were born? The

earth is not devoid of resemblance to a jail. Who knows whether man is

not a recaptured offender against divine justice? Look closely at life.

It is so made, that everywhere we feel the sense of punishment.

Are you what is called a happy man? Well! you are sad every day. Each

day has its own great grief or its little care. Yesterday you were

trembling for a health that is dear to you, to-day you fear for your

own; to-morrow it will be anxiety about money, the day after to-morrow

the diatribe of a slanderer, the day after that, the misfortune of some

friend; then the prevailing weather, then something that has been

broken or lost, then a pleasure with which your conscience and your

vertebral column reproach you; again, the course of public affairs.

This without reckoning in the pains of the heart. And so it goes on.

One cloud is dispelled, another forms. There is hardly one day out of a

hundred which is wholly joyous and sunny. And you belong to that small

class who are happy! As for the rest of mankind, stagnating night rests

upon them.

Thoughtful minds make but little use of the phrase: the fortunate and

the unfortunate. In this world, evidently the vestibule of another,

there are no fortunate.

The real human division is this: the luminous and the shady. To

diminish the number of the shady, to augment the number of the

luminous,—that is the object. That is why we cry: Education! science!

To teach reading, means to light the fire; every syllable spelled out

sparkles.

However, he who says light does not, necessarily, say joy. People

suffer in the light; excess burns. The flame is the enemy of the wing.

To burn without ceasing to fly,—therein lies the marvel of genius.

When you shall have learned to know, and to love, you will still

suffer. The day is born in tears. The luminous weep, if only over those

in darkness.

CHAPTER II—ROOTS

Slang is the tongue of those who sit in darkness.

Thought is moved in its most sombre depths, social philosophy is bidden

to its most poignant meditations, in the presence of that enigmatic

dialect at once so blighted and rebellious. Therein lies chastisement

made visible. Every syllable has an air of being marked. The words of

the vulgar tongue appear therein wrinkled and shrivelled, as it were,

beneath the hot iron of the executioner. Some seem to be still smoking.

Such and such a phrase produces upon you the effect of the shoulder of

a thief branded with the fleur-de-lys, which has suddenly been laid

bare. Ideas almost refuse to be expressed in these substantives which

are fugitives from justice. Metaphor is sometimes so shameless, that

one feels that it has worn the iron neck-fetter.

Moreover, in spite of all this, and because of all this, this strange

dialect has by rights, its own compartment in that great impartial case

of pigeon-holes where there is room for the rusty farthing as well as

for the gold medal, and which is called literature. Slang, whether the

public admit the fact or not has its syntax and its poetry. It is a

language. Yes, by the deformity of certain terms, we recognize the fact

that it was chewed by Mandrin, and by the splendor of certain

metonymies, we feel that Villon spoke it.

That exquisite and celebrated verse—

Mais où sont les neiges d’antan?

But where are the snows of years gone by?

is a verse of slang. \_Antan—ante annum\_—is a word of Thunes slang,

which signified the past year, and by extension, \_formerly\_.

Thirty-five years ago, at the epoch of the departure of the great

chain-gang, there could be read in one of the cells at Bicêtre, this

maxim engraved with a nail on the wall by a king of Thunes condemned to

the galleys: \_Les dabs d’antan trimaient siempre pour la pierre du

Coësre\_. This means \_Kings in days gone by always went and had

themselves anointed\_. In the opinion of that king, anointment meant the

galleys.

The word \_décarade\_, which expresses the departure of heavy vehicles at

a gallop, is attributed to Villon, and it is worthy of him. This word,

which strikes fire with all four of its feet, sums up in a masterly

onomatopœia the whole of La Fontaine’s admirable verse:—

Six forts chevaux tiraient un coche.

Six stout horses drew a coach.

From a purely literary point of view, few studies would prove more

curious and fruitful than the study of slang. It is a whole language

within a language, a sort of sickly excrescence, an unhealthy graft

which has produced a vegetation, a parasite which has its roots in the

old Gallic trunk, and whose sinister foliage crawls all over one side

of the language. This is what may be called the first, the vulgar

aspect of slang. But, for those who study the tongue as it should be

studied, that is to say, as geologists study the earth, slang appears

like a veritable alluvial deposit. According as one digs a longer or

shorter distance into it, one finds in slang, below the old popular

French, Provençal, Spanish, Italian, Levantine, that language of the

Mediterranean ports, English and German, the Romance language in its

three varieties, French, Italian, and Romance Romance, Latin, and

finally Basque and Celtic. A profound and unique formation. A

subterranean edifice erected in common by all the miserable. Each

accursed race has deposited its layer, each suffering has dropped its

stone there, each heart has contributed its pebble. A throng of evil,

base, or irritated souls, who have traversed life and have vanished

into eternity, linger there almost entirely visible still beneath the

form of some monstrous word.

Do you want Spanish? The old Gothic slang abounded in it. Here is

\_boffete\_, a box on the ear, which is derived from \_bofeton; vantane\_,

window (later on \_vanterne\_), which comes from \_vantana; gat\_, cat,

which comes from \_gato; acite\_, oil, which comes from \_aceyte\_. Do you

want Italian? Here is \_spade\_, sword, which comes from \_spada; carvel\_,

boat, which comes from \_caravella\_. Do you want English? Here is

\_bichot\_, which comes from \_bishop; raille\_, spy, which comes from

\_rascal, rascalion; pilche\_, a case, which comes from \_pilcher\_, a

sheath. Do you want German? Here is the \_caleur\_, the waiter,

\_kellner\_; the \_hers\_, the master, \_herzog\_ (duke). Do you want Latin?

Here is \_frangir\_, to break, \_frangere; affurer\_, to steal, \_fur;

cadene\_, chain, \_catena\_. There is one word which crops up in every

language of the continent, with a sort of mysterious power and

authority. It is the word \_magnus\_; the Scotchman makes of it his

\_mac\_, which designates the chief of the clan; Mac-Farlane,

Mac-Callumore, the great Farlane, the great Callumore41; slang turns it

into \_meck\_ and later \_le meg\_, that is to say, God. Would you like

Basque? Here is \_gahisto\_, the devil, which comes from \_gaïztoa\_, evil;

\_sorgabon\_, good night, which comes from \_gabon\_, good evening. Do you

want Celtic? Here is \_blavin\_, a handkerchief, which comes from

\_blavet\_, gushing water; \_ménesse\_, a woman (in a bad sense), which

comes from \_meinec\_, full of stones; \_barant\_, brook, from \_baranton\_,

fountain; \_goffeur\_, locksmith, from \_goff\_, blacksmith; \_guedouze\_,

death, which comes from \_guenn-du\_, black-white. Finally, would you

like history? Slang calls crowns \_les maltèses\_, a souvenir of the coin

in circulation on the galleys of Malta.

In addition to the philological origins just indicated, slang possesses

other and still more natural roots, which spring, so to speak, from the

mind of man itself.

In the first place, the direct creation of words. Therein lies the

mystery of tongues. To paint with words, which contains figures one

knows not how or why, is the primitive foundation of all human

languages, what may be called their granite.

Slang abounds in words of this description, immediate words, words

created instantaneously no one knows either where or by whom, without

etymology, without analogies, without derivatives, solitary, barbarous,

sometimes hideous words, which at times possess a singular power of

expression and which live. The executioner, \_le taule\_; the forest, \_le

sabri\_; fear, flight, \_taf\_; the lackey, \_le larbin\_; the mineral, the

prefect, the minister, \_pharos\_; the devil, \_le rabouin\_. Nothing is

stranger than these words which both mask and reveal. Some, \_le

rabouin\_, for example, are at the same time grotesque and terrible, and

produce on you the effect of a cyclopean grimace.

In the second place, metaphor. The peculiarity of a language which is

desirous of saying all yet concealing all is that it is rich in

figures. Metaphor is an enigma, wherein the thief who is plotting a

stroke, the prisoner who is arranging an escape, take refuge. No idiom

is more metaphorical than slang: \_dévisser le coco\_ (to unscrew the

nut), to twist the neck; \_tortiller\_ (to wriggle), to eat; \_être

gerbé\_, to be tried; \_a rat\_, a bread thief; \_il lansquine\_, it rains,

a striking, ancient figure which partly bears its date about it, which

assimilates long oblique lines of rain, with the dense and slanting

pikes of the lancers, and which compresses into a single word the

popular expression: it rains halberds. Sometimes, in proportion as

slang progresses from the first epoch to the second, words pass from

the primitive and savage sense to the metaphorical sense. The devil

ceases to be \_le rabouin\_, and becomes \_le boulanger\_ (the baker), who

puts the bread into the oven. This is more witty, but less grand,

something like Racine after Corneille, like Euripides after Æschylus.

Certain slang phrases which participate in the two epochs and have at

once the barbaric character and the metaphorical character resemble

phantasmagories. \_Les sorgueuers vont solliciter des gails à la

lune\_—the prowlers are going to steal horses by night,—this passes

before the mind like a group of spectres. One knows not what one sees.

In the third place, the expedient. Slang lives on the language. It uses

it in accordance with its fancy, it dips into it hap-hazard, and it

often confines itself, when occasion arises, to alter it in a gross and

summary fashion. Occasionally, with the ordinary words thus deformed

and complicated with words of pure slang, picturesque phrases are

formed, in which there can be felt the mixture of the two preceding

elements, the direct creation and the metaphor: \_le cab jaspine, je

marronne que la roulotte de Pantin trime dans le sabri\_, the dog is

barking, I suspect that the diligence for Paris is passing through the

woods. \_Le dab est sinve, la dabuge est merloussière, la fée est

bative\_, the bourgeois is stupid, the bourgeoise is cunning, the

daughter is pretty. Generally, to throw listeners off the track, slang

confines itself to adding to all the words of the language without

distinction, an ignoble tail, a termination in \_aille\_, in \_orgue\_, in

\_iergue\_, or in \_uche\_. Thus: \_Vousiergue trouvaille bonorgue ce

gigotmuche?\_ Do you think that leg of mutton good? A phrase addressed

by Cartouche to a turnkey in order to find out whether the sum offered

for his escape suited him.

The termination in \_mar\_ has been added recently.

Slang, being the dialect of corruption, quickly becomes corrupted

itself. Besides this, as it is always seeking concealment, as soon as

it feels that it is understood, it changes its form. Contrary to what

happens with every other vegetation, every ray of light which falls

upon it kills whatever it touches. Thus slang is in constant process of

decomposition and recomposition; an obscure and rapid work which never

pauses. It passes over more ground in ten years than a language in ten

centuries. Thus \_le larton\_ (bread) becomes \_le lartif; le gail\_

(horse) becomes \_le gaye; la fertanche\_ (straw) becomes \_la fertille;

le momignard\_ (brat), \_le momacque; les fiques\_ (duds), \_frusques; la

chique\_ (the church), \_l’égrugeoir; le colabre\_ (neck), \_le colas\_. The

devil is at first, \_gahisto\_, then \_le rabouin\_, then \_the baker\_; the

priest is a \_ratichon\_, then the boar (\_le sanglier\_); the dagger is

\_le vingt-deux\_ (twenty-two), then \_le surin\_, then \_le lingre\_; the

police are \_railles\_, then \_roussins\_, then \_rousses\_, then \_marchands

de lacets\_ (dealers in stay-laces), then \_coquers\_, then \_cognes\_; the

executioner is \_le taule\_, then \_Charlot, l’atigeur\_, then \_le

becquillard\_. In the seventeenth century, to fight was “to give each

other snuff”; in the nineteenth it is “to chew each other’s throats.”

There have been twenty different phrases between these two extremes.

Cartouche’s talk would have been Hebrew to Lacenaire. All the words of

this language are perpetually engaged in flight like the men who utter

them.

Still, from time to time, and in consequence of this very movement, the

ancient slang crops up again and becomes new once more. It has its

headquarters where it maintains its sway. The Temple preserved the

slang of the seventeenth century; Bicêtre, when it was a prison,

preserved the slang of Thunes. There one could hear the termination in

\_anche\_ of the old Thuneurs. \_Boyanches-tu\_ (bois-tu), do you drink?

But perpetual movement remains its law, nevertheless.

If the philosopher succeeds in fixing, for a moment, for purposes of

observation, this language which is incessantly evaporating, he falls

into doleful and useful meditation. No study is more efficacious and

more fecund in instruction. There is not a metaphor, not an analogy, in

slang, which does not contain a lesson. Among these men, to beat means

to feign; one beats a malady; ruse is their strength.

For them, the idea of the man is not separated from the idea of

darkness. The night is called \_la sorgue\_; man, \_l’orgue\_. Man is a

derivative of the night.

They have taken up the practice of considering society in the light of

an atmosphere which kills them, of a fatal force, and they speak of

their liberty as one would speak of his health. A man under arrest is a

\_sick man\_; one who is condemned is a \_dead man\_.

The most terrible thing for the prisoner within the four walls in which

he is buried, is a sort of glacial chastity, and he calls the dungeon

the \_castus\_. In that funereal place, life outside always presents

itself under its most smiling aspect. The prisoner has irons on his

feet; you think, perhaps, that his thought is that it is with the feet

that one walks? No; he is thinking that it is with the feet that one

dances; so, when he has succeeded in severing his fetters, his first

idea is that now he can dance, and he calls the saw the \_bastringue\_

(public-house ball).—A name is a centre; profound assimilation.—The

ruffian has two heads, one of which reasons out his actions and leads

him all his life long, and the other which he has upon his shoulders on

the day of his death; he calls the head which counsels him in crime \_la

sorbonne\_, and the head which expiates it \_la tronche\_.—When a man has

no longer anything but rags upon his body and vices in his heart, when

he has arrived at that double moral and material degradation which the

word blackguard characterizes in its two acceptations, he is ripe for

crime; he is like a well-whetted knife; he has two cutting edges, his

distress and his malice; so slang does not say a blackguard, it says

\_un réguisé\_.—What are the galleys? A brazier of damnation, a hell. The

convict calls himself a \_fagot\_.—And finally, what name do malefactors

give to their prison? The \_college\_. A whole penitentiary system can be

evolved from that word.

Does the reader wish to know where the majority of the songs of the

galleys, those refrains called in the special vocabulary \_lirlonfa\_,

have had their birth?

Let him listen to what follows:—

There existed at the Châtelet in Paris a large and long cellar. This

cellar was eight feet below the level of the Seine. It had neither

windows nor air-holes, its only aperture was the door; men could enter

there, air could not. This vault had for ceiling a vault of stone, and

for floor ten inches of mud. It was flagged; but the pavement had

rotted and cracked under the oozing of the water. Eight feet above the

floor, a long and massive beam traversed this subterranean excavation

from side to side; from this beam hung, at short distances apart,

chains three feet long, and at the end of these chains there were rings

for the neck. In this vault, men who had been condemned to the galleys

were incarcerated until the day of their departure for Toulon. They

were thrust under this beam, where each one found his fetters swinging

in the darkness and waiting for him.

The chains, those pendant arms, and the necklets, those open hands,

caught the unhappy wretches by the throat. They were rivetted and left

there. As the chain was too short, they could not lie down. They

remained motionless in that cavern, in that night, beneath that beam,

almost hanging, forced to unheard-of efforts to reach their bread, jug,

or their vault overhead, mud even to mid-leg, filth flowing to their

very calves, broken asunder with fatigue, with thighs and knees giving

way, clinging fast to the chain with their hands in order to obtain

some rest, unable to sleep except when standing erect, and awakened

every moment by the strangling of the collar; some woke no more. In

order to eat, they pushed the bread, which was flung to them in the

mud, along their leg with their heel until it reached their hand.

How long did they remain thus? One month, two months, six months

sometimes; one stayed a year. It was the antechamber of the galleys.

Men were put there for stealing a hare from the king. In this

sepulchre-hell, what did they do? What man can do in a sepulchre, they

went through the agonies of death, and what can man do in hell, they

sang; for song lingers where there is no longer any hope. In the waters

of Malta, when a galley was approaching, the song could be heard before

the sound of the oars. Poor Survincent, the poacher, who had gone

through the prison-cellar of the Châtelet, said: “It was the rhymes

that kept me up.” Uselessness of poetry. What is the good of rhyme?

It is in this cellar that nearly all the slang songs had their birth.

It is from the dungeon of the Grand-Châtelet of Paris that comes the

melancholy refrain of the Montgomery galley: \_“Timaloumisaine,

timaloumison.”\_ The majority of these songs are melancholy; some are

gay; one is tender:—

Icicaille est la theatre

Du petit dardant.

Here is the theatre

Of the little archer (Cupid).

Do what you will, you cannot annihilate that eternal relic in the heart

of man, love.

In this world of dismal deeds, people keep their secrets. The secret is

the thing above all others. The secret, in the eyes of these wretches,

is unity which serves as a base of union. To betray a secret is to tear

from each member of this fierce community something of his own

personality. To inform against, in the energetic slang dialect, is

called: “to eat the bit.” As though the informer drew to himself a

little of the substance of all and nourished himself on a bit of each

one’s flesh.

What does it signify to receive a box on the ear? Commonplace metaphor

replies: “It is to see thirty-six candles.” Here slang intervenes and

takes it up: Candle, \_camoufle\_. Thereupon, the ordinary tongue gives

\_camouflet\_42 as the synonym for \_soufflet\_. Thus, by a sort of

infiltration from below upwards, with the aid of metaphor, that

incalculable, trajectory slang mounts from the cavern to the Academy;

and Poulailler saying: “I light my \_camoufle\_,” causes Voltaire to

write: “Langleviel La Beaumelle deserves a hundred \_camouflets\_.”

Researches in slang mean discoveries at every step. Study and

investigation of this strange idiom lead to the mysterious point of

intersection of regular society with society which is accursed.

The thief also has his food for cannon, stealable matter, you, I,

whoever passes by; \_le pantre\_. (\_Pan\_, everybody.)

Slang is language turned convict.

That the thinking principle of man be thrust down ever so low, that it

can be dragged and pinioned there by obscure tyrannies of fatality,

that it can be bound by no one knows what fetters in that abyss, is

sufficient to create consternation.

Oh, poor thought of miserable wretches!

Alas! will no one come to the succor of the human soul in that

darkness? Is it her destiny there to await forever the mind, the

liberator, the immense rider of Pegasi and hippogriffs, the combatant

of heroes of the dawn who shall descend from the azure between two

wings, the radiant knight of the future? Will she forever summon in

vain to her assistance the lance of light of the ideal? Is she

condemned to hear the fearful approach of Evil through the density of

the gulf, and to catch glimpses, nearer and nearer at hand, beneath the

hideous water of that dragon’s head, that maw streaked with foam, and

that writhing undulation of claws, swellings, and rings? Must it remain

there, without a gleam of light, without hope, given over to that

terrible approach, vaguely scented out by the monster, shuddering,

dishevelled, wringing its arms, forever chained to the rock of night, a

sombre Andromeda white and naked amid the shadows!

CHAPTER III—SLANG WHICH WEEPS AND SLANG WHICH LAUGHS

As the reader perceives, slang in its entirety, slang of four hundred

years ago, like the slang of to-day, is permeated with that sombre,

symbolical spirit which gives to all words a mien which is now

mournful, now menacing. One feels in it the wild and ancient sadness of

those vagrants of the Court of Miracles who played at cards with packs

of their own, some of which have come down to us. The eight of clubs,

for instance, represented a huge tree bearing eight enormous trefoil

leaves, a sort of fantastic personification of the forest. At the foot

of this tree a fire was burning, over which three hares were roasting a

huntsman on a spit, and behind him, on another fire, hung a steaming

pot, whence emerged the head of a dog. Nothing can be more melancholy

than these reprisals in painting, by a pack of cards, in the presence

of stakes for the roasting of smugglers and of the cauldron for the

boiling of counterfeiters. The diverse forms assumed by thought in the

realm of slang, even song, even raillery, even menace, all partook of

this powerless and dejected character. All the songs, the melodies of

some of which have been collected, were humble and lamentable to the

point of evoking tears. The \_pègre\_ is always the poor \_pègre\_, and he

is always the hare in hiding, the fugitive mouse, the flying bird. He

hardly complains, he contents himself with sighing; one of his moans

has come down to us: “I do not understand how God, the father of men,

can torture his children and his grandchildren and hear them cry,

without himself suffering torture.”43 The wretch, whenever he has time

to think, makes himself small before the low, and frail in the presence

of society; he lies down flat on his face, he entreats, he appeals to

the side of compassion; we feel that he is conscious of his guilt.

Towards the middle of the last century a change took place, prison

songs and thieves’ ritournelles assumed, so to speak, an insolent and

jovial mien. The plaintive \_maluré\_ was replaced by the \_larifla\_. We

find in the eighteenth century, in nearly all the songs of the galleys

and prisons, a diabolical and enigmatical gayety. We hear this strident

and lilting refrain which we should say had been lighted up by a

phosphorescent gleam, and which seems to have been flung into the

forest by a will-o’-the-wisp playing the fife:—

Miralabi suslababo

Mirliton ribonribette

Surlababi mirlababo

Mirliton ribonribo.

This was sung in a cellar or in a nook of the forest while cutting a

man’s throat.

A serious symptom. In the eighteenth century, the ancient melancholy of

the dejected classes vanishes. They began to laugh. They rally the

\_grand meg\_ and the \_grand dab\_. Given Louis XV. they call the King of

France “le Marquis de Pantin.” And behold, they are almost gay. A sort

of gleam proceeds from these miserable wretches, as though their

consciences were not heavy within them any more. These lamentable

tribes of darkness have no longer merely the desperate audacity of

actions, they possess the heedless audacity of mind. A sign that they

are losing the sense of their criminality, and that they feel, even

among thinkers and dreamers, some indefinable support which the latter

themselves know not of. A sign that theft and pillage are beginning to

filter into doctrines and sophisms, in such a way as to lose somewhat

of their ugliness, while communicating much of it to sophisms and

doctrines. A sign, in short, of some outbreak which is prodigious and

near unless some diversion shall arise.

Let us pause a moment. Whom are we accusing here? Is it the eighteenth

century? Is it philosophy? Certainly not. The work of the eighteenth

century is healthy and good and wholesome. The encyclopedists, Diderot

at their head; the physiocrates, Turgot at their head; the

philosophers, Voltaire at their head; the Utopians, Rousseau at their

head,—these are four sacred legions. Humanity’s immense advance towards

the light is due to them. They are the four vanguards of the human

race, marching towards the four cardinal points of progress. Diderot

towards the beautiful, Turgot towards the useful, Voltaire towards the

true, Rousseau towards the just. But by the side of and above the

philosophers, there were the sophists, a venomous vegetation mingled

with a healthy growth, hemlock in the virgin forest. While the

executioner was burning the great books of the liberators of the

century on the grand staircase of the court-house, writers now

forgotten were publishing, with the King’s sanction, no one knows what

strangely disorganizing writings, which were eagerly read by the

unfortunate. Some of these publications, odd to say, which were

patronized by a prince, are to be found in the Secret Library. These

facts, significant but unknown, were imperceptible on the surface.

Sometimes, in the very obscurity of a fact lurks its danger. It is

obscure because it is underhand. Of all these writers, the one who

probably then excavated in the masses the most unhealthy gallery was

Restif de La Bretonne.

This work, peculiar to the whole of Europe, effected more ravages in

Germany than anywhere else. In Germany, during a given period, summed

up by Schiller in his famous drama \_The Robbers\_, theft and pillage

rose up in protest against property and labor, assimilated certain

specious and false elementary ideas, which, though just in appearance,

were absurd in reality, enveloped themselves in these ideas,

disappeared within them, after a fashion, assumed an abstract name,

passed into the state of theory, and in that shape circulated among the

laborious, suffering, and honest masses, unknown even to the imprudent

chemists who had prepared the mixture, unknown even to the masses who

accepted it. Whenever a fact of this sort presents itself, the case is

grave. Suffering engenders wrath; and while the prosperous classes

blind themselves or fall asleep, which is the same thing as shutting

one’s eyes, the hatred of the unfortunate classes lights its torch at

some aggrieved or ill-made spirit which dreams in a corner, and sets

itself to the scrutiny of society. The scrutiny of hatred is a terrible

thing.

Hence, if the ill-fortune of the times so wills it, those fearful

commotions which were formerly called \_jacqueries\_, beside which purely

political agitations are the merest child’s play, which are no longer

the conflict of the oppressed and the oppressor, but the revolt of

discomfort against comfort. Then everything crumbles.

Jacqueries are earthquakes of the people.

It is this peril, possibly imminent towards the close of the eighteenth

century, which the French Revolution, that immense act of probity, cut

short.

The French Revolution, which is nothing else than the idea armed with

the sword, rose erect, and, with the same abrupt movement, closed the

door of ill and opened the door of good.

It put a stop to torture, promulgated the truth, expelled miasma,

rendered the century healthy, crowned the populace.

It may be said of it that it created man a second time, by giving him a

second soul, the right.

The nineteenth century has inherited and profited by its work, and

to-day, the social catastrophe to which we lately alluded is simply

impossible. Blind is he who announces it! Foolish is he who fears it!

Revolution is the vaccine of Jacquerie.

Thanks to the Revolution, social conditions have changed. Feudal and

monarchical maladies no longer run in our blood. There is no more of

the Middle Ages in our constitution. We no longer live in the days when

terrible swarms within made irruptions, when one heard beneath his feet

the obscure course of a dull rumble, when indescribable elevations from

mole-like tunnels appeared on the surface of civilization, where the

soil cracked open, where the roofs of caverns yawned, and where one

suddenly beheld monstrous heads emerging from the earth.

The revolutionary sense is a moral sense. The sentiment of right, once

developed, develops the sentiment of duty. The law of all is liberty,

which ends where the liberty of others begins, according to

Robespierre’s admirable definition. Since ’89, the whole people has

been dilating into a sublime individual; there is not a poor man, who,

possessing his right, has not his ray of sun; the die-of-hunger feels

within him the honesty of France; the dignity of the citizen is an

internal armor; he who is free is scrupulous; he who votes reigns.

Hence incorruptibility; hence the miscarriage of unhealthy lusts; hence

eyes heroically lowered before temptations. The revolutionary

wholesomeness is such, that on a day of deliverance, a 14th of July, a

10th of August, there is no longer any populace. The first cry of the

enlightened and increasing throngs is: death to thieves! Progress is an

honest man; the ideal and the absolute do not filch

pocket-handkerchiefs. By whom were the wagons containing the wealth of

the Tuileries escorted in 1848? By the rag-pickers of the Faubourg

Saint-Antoine. Rags mounted guard over the treasure. Virtue rendered

these tatterdemalions resplendent. In those wagons in chests, hardly

closed, and some, even, half-open, amid a hundred dazzling caskets, was

that ancient crown of France, studded with diamonds, surmounted by the

carbuncle of royalty, by the Regent diamond, which was worth thirty

millions. Barefooted, they guarded that crown.

Hence, no more Jacquerie. I regret it for the sake of the skilful. The

old fear has produced its last effects in that quarter; and henceforth

it can no longer be employed in politics. The principal spring of the

red spectre is broken. Every one knows it now. The scare-crow scares no

longer. The birds take liberties with the mannikin, foul creatures

alight upon it, the bourgeois laugh at it.

CHAPTER IV—THE TWO DUTIES: TO WATCH AND TO HOPE

This being the case, is all social danger dispelled? Certainly not.

There is no Jacquerie; society may rest assured on that point; blood

will no longer rush to its head. But let society take heed to the

manner in which it breathes. Apoplexy is no longer to be feared, but

phthisis is there. Social phthisis is called misery.

One can perish from being undermined as well as from being struck by

lightning.

Let us not weary of repeating, and sympathetic souls must not forget

that this is the first of fraternal obligations, and selfish hearts

must understand that the first of political necessities consists in

thinking first of all of the disinherited and sorrowing throngs, in

solacing, airing, enlightening, loving them, in enlarging their horizon

to a magnificent extent, in lavishing upon them education in every

form, in offering them the example of labor, never the example of

idleness, in diminishing the individual burden by enlarging the notion

of the universal aim, in setting a limit to poverty without setting a

limit to wealth, in creating vast fields of public and popular

activity, in having, like Briareus, a hundred hands to extend in all

directions to the oppressed and the feeble, in employing the collective

power for that grand duty of opening workshops for all arms, schools

for all aptitudes, and laboratories for all degrees of intelligence, in

augmenting salaries, diminishing trouble, balancing what should be and

what is, that is to say, in proportioning enjoyment to effort and a

glut to need; in a word, in evolving from the social apparatus more

light and more comfort for the benefit of those who suffer and those

who are ignorant.

And, let us say it, all this is but the beginning. The true question is

this: labor cannot be a law without being a right.

We will not insist upon this point; this is not the proper place for

that.

If nature calls itself Providence, society should call itself

foresight.

Intellectual and moral growth is no less indispensable than material

improvement. To know is a sacrament, to think is the prime necessity,

truth is nourishment as well as grain. A reason which fasts from

science and wisdom grows thin. Let us enter equal complaint against

stomachs and minds which do not eat. If there is anything more

heart-breaking than a body perishing for lack of bread, it is a soul

which is dying from hunger for the light.

The whole of progress tends in the direction of solution. Some day we

shall be amazed. As the human race mounts upward, the deep layers

emerge naturally from the zone of distress. The obliteration of misery

will be accomplished by a simple elevation of level.

We should do wrong were we to doubt this blessed consummation.

The past is very strong, it is true, at the present moment. It

censures. This rejuvenation of a corpse is surprising. Behold, it is

walking and advancing. It seems a victor; this dead body is a

conqueror. He arrives with his legions, superstitions, with his sword,

despotism, with his banner, ignorance; a while ago, he won ten battles.

He advances, he threatens, he laughs, he is at our doors. Let us not

despair, on our side. Let us sell the field on which Hannibal is

encamped.

What have we to fear, we who believe?

No such thing as a back-flow of ideas exists any more than there exists

a return of a river on its course.

But let those who do not desire a future reflect on this matter. When

they say “no” to progress, it is not the future but themselves that

they are condemning. They are giving themselves a sad malady; they are

inoculating themselves with the past. There is but one way of rejecting

To-morrow, and that is to die.

Now, no death, that of the body as late as possible, that of the soul

never,—this is what we desire.

Yes, the enigma will utter its word, the sphinx will speak, the problem

will be solved.

Yes, the people, sketched out by the eighteenth century, will be

finished by the nineteenth. He who doubts this is an idiot! The future

blossoming, the near blossoming forth of universal well-being, is a

divinely fatal phenomenon.

Immense combined propulsions direct human affairs and conduct them

within a given time to a logical state, that is to say, to a state of

equilibrium; that is to say, to equity. A force composed of earth and

heaven results from humanity and governs it; this force is a worker of

miracles; marvellous issues are no more difficult to it than

extraordinary vicissitudes. Aided by science, which comes from one man,

and by the event, which comes from another, it is not greatly alarmed

by these contradictions in the attitude of problems, which seem

impossibilities to the vulgar herd. It is no less skilful at causing a

solution to spring forth from the reconciliation of ideas, than a

lesson from the reconciliation of facts, and we may expect anything

from that mysterious power of progress, which brought the Orient and

the Occident face to face one fine day, in the depths of a sepulchre,

and made the imaums converse with Bonaparte in the interior of the

Great Pyramid.

In the meantime, let there be no halt, no hesitation, no pause in the

grandiose onward march of minds. Social philosophy consists essentially

in science and peace. Its object is, and its result must be, to

dissolve wrath by the study of antagonisms. It examines, it

scrutinizes, it analyzes; then it puts together once more, it proceeds

by means of reduction, discarding all hatred.

More than once, a society has been seen to give way before the wind

which is let loose upon mankind; history is full of the shipwrecks of

nations and empires; manners, customs, laws, religions,—and some fine

day that unknown force, the hurricane, passes by and bears them all

away. The civilizations of India, of Chaldea, of Persia, of Syria, of

Egypt, have disappeared one after the other. Why? We know not. What are

the causes of these disasters? We do not know. Could these societies

have been saved? Was it their fault? Did they persist in the fatal vice

which destroyed them? What is the amount of suicide in these terrible

deaths of a nation and a race? Questions to which there exists no

reply. Darkness enwraps condemned civilizations. They sprung a leak,

then they sank. We have nothing more to say; and it is with a sort of

terror that we look on, at the bottom of that sea which is called the

past, behind those colossal waves, at the shipwreck of those immense

vessels, Babylon, Nineveh, Tarsus, Thebes, Rome, beneath the fearful

gusts which emerge from all the mouths of the shadows. But shadows are

there, and light is here. We are not acquainted with the maladies of

these ancient civilizations, we do not know the infirmities of our own.

Everywhere upon it we have the right of light, we contemplate its

beauties, we lay bare its defects. Where it is ill, we probe; and the

sickness once diagnosed, the study of the cause leads to the discovery

of the remedy. Our civilization, the work of twenty centuries, is its

law and its prodigy; it is worth the trouble of saving. It will be

saved. It is already much to have solaced it; its enlightenment is yet

another point. All the labors of modern social philosophies must

converge towards this point. The thinker of to-day has a great duty—to

auscultate civilization.

We repeat, that this auscultation brings encouragement; it is by this

persistence in encouragement that we wish to conclude these pages, an

austere interlude in a mournful drama. Beneath the social mortality, we

feel human imperishableness. The globe does not perish, because it has

these wounds, craters, eruptions, sulphur pits, here and there, nor

because of a volcano which ejects its pus. The maladies of the people

do not kill man.

And yet, any one who follows the course of social clinics shakes his

head at times. The strongest, the tenderest, the most logical have

their hours of weakness.

Will the future arrive? It seems as though we might almost put this

question, when we behold so much terrible darkness. Melancholy

face-to-face encounter of selfish and wretched. On the part of the

selfish, the prejudices, shadows of costly education, appetite

increasing through intoxication, a giddiness of prosperity which dulls,

a fear of suffering which, in some, goes as far as an aversion for the

suffering, an implacable satisfaction, the \_I\_ so swollen that it bars

the soul; on the side of the wretched covetousness, envy, hatred of

seeing others enjoy, the profound impulses of the human beast towards

assuaging its desires, hearts full of mist, sadness, need, fatality,

impure and simple ignorance.

Shall we continue to raise our eyes to heaven? is the luminous point

which we distinguish there one of those which vanish? The ideal is

frightful to behold, thus lost in the depths, small, isolated,

imperceptible, brilliant, but surrounded by those great, black menaces,

monstrously heaped around it; yet no more in danger than a star in the

maw of the clouds.

BOOK EIGHTH—ENCHANTMENTS AND DESOLATIONS

CHAPTER I—FULL LIGHT

The reader has probably understood that Éponine, having recognized

through the gate, the inhabitant of that Rue Plumet whither Magnon had

sent her, had begun by keeping the ruffians away from the Rue Plumet,

and had then conducted Marius thither, and that, after many days spent

in ecstasy before that gate, Marius, drawn on by that force which draws

the iron to the magnet and a lover towards the stones of which is built

the house of her whom he loves, had finally entered Cosette’s garden as

Romeo entered the garden of Juliet. This had even proved easier for him

than for Romeo; Romeo was obliged to scale a wall, Marius had only to

use a little force on one of the bars of the decrepit gate which

vacillated in its rusty recess, after the fashion of old people’s

teeth. Marius was slender and readily passed through.

As there was never any one in the street, and as Marius never entered

the garden except at night, he ran no risk of being seen.

Beginning with that blessed and holy hour when a kiss betrothed these

two souls, Marius was there every evening. If, at that period of her

existence, Cosette had fallen in love with a man in the least

unscrupulous or debauched, she would have been lost; for there are

generous natures which yield themselves, and Cosette was one of them.

One of woman’s magnanimities is to yield. Love, at the height where it

is absolute, is complicated with some indescribably celestial blindness

of modesty. But what dangers you run, O noble souls! Often you give the

heart, and we take the body. Your heart remains with you, you gaze upon

it in the gloom with a shudder. Love has no middle course; it either

ruins or it saves. All human destiny lies in this dilemma. This

dilemma, ruin, or safety, is set forth no more inexorably by any

fatality than by love. Love is life, if it is not death. Cradle; also

coffin. The same sentiment says “yes” and “no” in the human heart. Of

all the things that God has made, the human heart is the one which

sheds the most light, alas! and the most darkness.

God willed that Cosette’s love should encounter one of the loves which

save.

Throughout the whole of the month of May of that year 1832, there were

there, in every night, in that poor, neglected garden, beneath that

thicket which grew thicker and more fragrant day by day, two beings

composed of all chastity, all innocence, overflowing with all the

felicity of heaven, nearer to the archangels than to mankind, pure,

honest, intoxicated, radiant, who shone for each other amid the

shadows. It seemed to Cosette that Marius had a crown, and to Marius

that Cosette had a nimbus. They touched each other, they gazed at each

other, they clasped each other’s hands, they pressed close to each

other; but there was a distance which they did not pass. Not that they

respected it; they did not know of its existence. Marius was conscious

of a barrier, Cosette’s innocence; and Cosette of a support, Marius’

loyalty. The first kiss had also been the last. Marius, since that

time, had not gone further than to touch Cosette’s hand, or her

kerchief, or a lock of her hair, with his lips. For him, Cosette was a

perfume and not a woman. He inhaled her. She refused nothing, and he

asked nothing. Cosette was happy, and Marius was satisfied. They lived

in this ecstatic state which can be described as the dazzling of one

soul by another soul. It was the ineffable first embrace of two maiden

souls in the ideal. Two swans meeting on the Jungfrau.

At that hour of love, an hour when voluptuousness is absolutely mute,

beneath the omnipotence of ecstasy, Marius, the pure and seraphic

Marius, would rather have gone to a woman of the town than have raised

Cosette’s robe to the height of her ankle. Once, in the moonlight,

Cosette stooped to pick up something on the ground, her bodice fell

apart and permitted a glimpse of the beginning of her throat. Marius

turned away his eyes.

What took place between these two beings? Nothing. They adored each

other.

At night, when they were there, that garden seemed a living and a

sacred spot. All flowers unfolded around them and sent them incense;

and they opened their souls and scattered them over the flowers. The

wanton and vigorous vegetation quivered, full of strength and

intoxication, around these two innocents, and they uttered words of

love which set the trees to trembling.

What words were these? Breaths. Nothing more. These breaths sufficed to

trouble and to touch all nature round about. Magic power which we

should find it difficult to understand were we to read in a book these

conversations which are made to be borne away and dispersed like smoke

wreaths by the breeze beneath the leaves. Take from those murmurs of

two lovers that melody which proceeds from the soul and which

accompanies them like a lyre, and what remains is nothing more than a

shade; you say: “What! is that all!” eh! yes, childish prattle,

repetitions, laughter at nothing, nonsense, everything that is deepest

and most sublime in the world! The only things which are worth the

trouble of saying and hearing!

The man who has never heard, the man who has never uttered these

absurdities, these paltry remarks, is an imbecile and a malicious

fellow. Cosette said to Marius:—

“Dost thou know?—”

[In all this and athwart this celestial maidenliness, and without

either of them being able to say how it had come about, they had begun

to call each other \_thou\_.]

“Dost thou know? My name is Euphrasie.”

“Euphrasie? Why, no, thy name is Cosette.”

“Oh! Cosette is a very ugly name that was given to me when I was a

little thing. But my real name is Euphrasie. Dost thou like that

name—Euphrasie?”

“Yes. But Cosette is not ugly.”

“Do you like it better than Euphrasie?”

“Why, yes.”

“Then I like it better too. Truly, it is pretty, Cosette. Call me

Cosette.”

And the smile that she added made of this dialogue an idyl worthy of a

grove situated in heaven. On another occasion she gazed intently at him

and exclaimed:—

“Monsieur, you are handsome, you are good-looking, you are witty, you

are not at all stupid, you are much more learned than I am, but I bid

you defiance with this word: I love you!”

And Marius, in the very heavens, thought he heard a strain sung by a

star.

Or she bestowed on him a gentle tap because he coughed, and she said to

him:—

“Don’t cough, sir; I will not have people cough on my domain without my

permission. It’s very naughty to cough and to disturb me. I want you to

be well, because, in the first place, if you were not well, I should be

very unhappy. What should I do then?”

And this was simply divine.

Once Marius said to Cosette:—

“Just imagine, I thought at one time that your name was Ursule.”

This made both of them laugh the whole evening.

In the middle of another conversation, he chanced to exclaim:—

“Oh! One day, at the Luxembourg, I had a good mind to finish breaking

up a veteran!” But he stopped short, and went no further. He would have

been obliged to speak to Cosette of her garter, and that was

impossible. This bordered on a strange theme, the flesh, before which

that immense and innocent love recoiled with a sort of sacred fright.

Marius pictured life with Cosette to himself like this, without

anything else; to come every evening to the Rue Plumet, to displace the

old and accommodating bar of the chief-justice’s gate, to sit elbow to

elbow on that bench, to gaze through the trees at the scintillation of

the on-coming night, to fit a fold of the knee of his trousers into the

ample fall of Cosette’s gown, to caress her thumb-nail, to call her

\_thou\_, to smell of the same flower, one after the other, forever,

indefinitely. During this time, clouds passed above their heads. Every

time that the wind blows it bears with it more of the dreams of men

than of the clouds of heaven.

This chaste, almost shy love was not devoid of gallantry, by any means.

To pay compliments to the woman whom a man loves is the first method of

bestowing caresses, and he is half audacious who tries it. A compliment

is something like a kiss through a veil. Voluptuousness mingles there

with its sweet tiny point, while it hides itself. The heart draws back

before voluptuousness only to love the more. Marius’ blandishments, all

saturated with fancy, were, so to speak, of azure hue. The birds when

they fly up yonder, in the direction of the angels, must hear such

words. There were mingled with them, nevertheless, life, humanity, all

the positiveness of which Marius was capable. It was what is said in

the bower, a prelude to what will be said in the chamber; a lyrical

effusion, strophe and sonnet intermingled, pleasing hyperboles of

cooing, all the refinements of adoration arranged in a bouquet and

exhaling a celestial perfume, an ineffable twitter of heart to heart.

“Oh!” murmured Marius, “how beautiful you are! I dare not look at you.

It is all over with me when I contemplate you. You are a grace. I know

not what is the matter with me. The hem of your gown, when the tip of

your shoe peeps from beneath, upsets me. And then, what an enchanted

gleam when you open your thought even but a little! You talk

astonishingly good sense. It seems to me at times that you are a dream.

Speak, I listen, I admire. Oh Cosette! how strange it is and how

charming! I am really beside myself. You are adorable, Mademoiselle. I

study your feet with the microscope and your soul with the telescope.”

And Cosette answered:—

“I have been loving a little more all the time that has passed since

this morning.”

Questions and replies took care of themselves in this dialogue, which

always turned with mutual consent upon love, as the little pith figures

always turn on their peg.

Cosette’s whole person was ingenuousness, ingenuity, transparency,

whiteness, candor, radiance. It might have been said of Cosette that

she was clear. She produced on those who saw her the sensation of April

and dawn. There was dew in her eyes. Cosette was a condensation of the

auroral light in the form of a woman.

It was quite simple that Marius should admire her, since he adored her.

But the truth is, that this little school-girl, fresh from the convent,

talked with exquisite penetration and uttered, at times, all sorts of

true and delicate sayings. Her prattle was conversation. She never made

a mistake about anything, and she saw things justly. The woman feels

and speaks with the tender instinct of the heart, which is infallible.

No one understands so well as a woman, how to say things that are, at

once, both sweet and deep. Sweetness and depth, they are the whole of

woman; in them lies the whole of heaven.

In this full felicity, tears welled up to their eyes every instant. A

crushed lady-bug, a feather fallen from a nest, a branch of hawthorn

broken, aroused their pity, and their ecstasy, sweetly mingled with

melancholy, seemed to ask nothing better than to weep. The most

sovereign symptom of love is a tenderness that is, at times, almost

unbearable.

And, in addition to this,—all these contradictions are the lightning

play of love,—they were fond of laughing, they laughed readily and with

a delicious freedom, and so familiarly that they sometimes presented

the air of two boys.

Still, though unknown to hearts intoxicated with purity, nature is

always present and will not be forgotten. She is there with her brutal

and sublime object; and however great may be the innocence of souls,

one feels in the most modest private interview, the adorable and

mysterious shade which separates a couple of lovers from a pair of

friends.

They idolized each other.

The permanent and the immutable are persistent. People live, they

smile, they laugh, they make little grimaces with the tips of their

lips, they interlace their fingers, they call each other \_thou\_, and

that does not prevent eternity.

Two lovers hide themselves in the evening, in the twilight, in the

invisible, with the birds, with the roses; they fascinate each other in

the darkness with their hearts which they throw into their eyes, they

murmur, they whisper, and in the meantime, immense librations of the

planets fill the infinite universe.

CHAPTER II—THE BEWILDERMENT OF PERFECT HAPPINESS

They existed vaguely, frightened at their happiness. They did not

notice the cholera which decimated Paris precisely during that very

month. They had confided in each other as far as possible, but this had

not extended much further than their names. Marius had told Cosette

that he was an orphan, that his name was Marius Pontmercy, that he was

a lawyer, that he lived by writing things for publishers, that his

father had been a colonel, that the latter had been a hero, and that

he, Marius, was on bad terms with his grandfather who was rich. He had

also hinted at being a baron, but this had produced no effect on

Cosette. She did not know the meaning of the word. Marius was Marius.

On her side, she had confided to him that she had been brought up at

the Petit-Picpus convent, that her mother, like his own, was dead, that

her father’s name was M. Fauchelevent, that he was very good, that he

gave a great deal to the poor, but that he was poor himself, and that

he denied himself everything though he denied her nothing.

Strange to say, in the sort of symphony which Marius had lived since he

had been in the habit of seeing Cosette, the past, even the most recent

past, had become so confused and distant to him, that what Cosette told

him satisfied him completely. It did not even occur to him to tell her

about the nocturnal adventure in the hovel, about Thénardier, about the

burn, and about the strange attitude and singular flight of her father.

Marius had momentarily forgotten all this; in the evening he did not

even know that there had been a morning, what he had done, where he had

breakfasted, nor who had spoken to him; he had songs in his ears which

rendered him deaf to every other thought; he only existed at the hours

when he saw Cosette. Then, as he was in heaven, it was quite natural

that he should forget earth. Both bore languidly the indefinable burden

of immaterial pleasures. Thus lived these somnambulists who are called

lovers.

Alas! Who is there who has not felt all these things? Why does there

come an hour when one emerges from this azure, and why does life go on

afterwards?

Loving almost takes the place of thinking. Love is an ardent

forgetfulness of all the rest. Then ask logic of passion if you will.

There is no more absolute logical sequence in the human heart than

there is a perfect geometrical figure in the celestial mechanism. For

Cosette and Marius nothing existed except Marius and Cosette. The

universe around them had fallen into a hole. They lived in a golden

minute. There was nothing before them, nothing behind. It hardly

occurred to Marius that Cosette had a father. His brain was dazzled and

obliterated. Of what did these lovers talk then? We have seen, of the

flowers, and the swallows, the setting sun and the rising moon, and all

sorts of important things. They had told each other everything except

everything. The everything of lovers is nothing. But the father, the

realities, that lair, the ruffians, that adventure, to what purpose?

And was he very sure that this nightmare had actually existed? They

were two, and they adored each other, and beyond that there was

nothing. Nothing else existed. It is probable that this vanishing of

hell in our rear is inherent to the arrival of paradise. Have we beheld

demons? Are there any? Have we trembled? Have we suffered? We no longer

know. A rosy cloud hangs over it.

So these two beings lived in this manner, high aloft, with all that

improbability which is in nature; neither at the nadir nor at the

zenith, between man and seraphim, above the mire, below the ether, in

the clouds; hardly flesh and blood, soul and ecstasy from head to foot;

already too sublime to walk the earth, still too heavily charged with

humanity to disappear in the blue, suspended like atoms which are

waiting to be precipitated; apparently beyond the bounds of destiny;

ignorant of that rut; yesterday, to-day, to-morrow; amazed, rapturous,

floating, soaring; at times so light that they could take their flight

out into the infinite; almost prepared to soar away to all eternity.

They slept wide-awake, thus sweetly lulled. Oh! splendid lethargy of

the real overwhelmed by the ideal.

Sometimes, beautiful as Cosette was, Marius shut his eyes in her

presence. The best way to look at the soul is through closed eyes.

Marius and Cosette never asked themselves whither this was to lead

them. They considered that they had already arrived. It is a strange

claim on man’s part to wish that love should lead to something.

CHAPTER III—THE BEGINNING OF SHADOW

Jean Valjean suspected nothing.

Cosette, who was rather less dreamy than Marius, was gay, and that

sufficed for Jean Valjean’s happiness. The thoughts which Cosette

cherished, her tender preoccupations, Marius’ image which filled her

heart, took away nothing from the incomparable purity of her beautiful,

chaste, and smiling brow. She was at the age when the virgin bears her

love as the angel his lily. So Jean Valjean was at ease. And then, when

two lovers have come to an understanding, things always go well; the

third party who might disturb their love is kept in a state of perfect

blindness by a restricted number of precautions which are always the

same in the case of all lovers. Thus, Cosette never objected to any of

Jean Valjean’s proposals. Did she want to take a walk? “Yes, dear

little father.” Did she want to stay at home? Very good. Did he wish to

pass the evening with Cosette? She was delighted. As he always went to

bed at ten o’clock, Marius did not come to the garden on such occasions

until after that hour, when, from the street, he heard Cosette open the

long glass door on the veranda. Of course, no one ever met Marius in

the daytime. Jean Valjean never even dreamed any longer that Marius was

in existence. Only once, one morning, he chanced to say to Cosette:

“Why, you have whitewash on your back!” On the previous evening,

Marius, in a transport, had pushed Cosette against the wall.

Old Toussaint, who retired early, thought of nothing but her sleep, and

was as ignorant of the whole matter as Jean Valjean.

Marius never set foot in the house. When he was with Cosette, they hid

themselves in a recess near the steps, in order that they might neither

be seen nor heard from the street, and there they sat, frequently

contenting themselves, by way of conversation, with pressing each

other’s hands twenty times a minute as they gazed at the branches of

the trees. At such times, a thunderbolt might have fallen thirty paces

from them, and they would not have noticed it, so deeply was the

reverie of the one absorbed and sunk in the reverie of the other.

Limpid purity. Hours wholly white; almost all alike. This sort of love

is a recollection of lily petals and the plumage of the dove.

The whole extent of the garden lay between them and the street. Every

time that Marius entered and left, he carefully adjusted the bar of the

gate in such a manner that no displacement was visible.

He usually went away about midnight, and returned to Courfeyrac’s

lodgings. Courfeyrac said to Bahorel:—

“Would you believe it? Marius comes home nowadays at one o’clock in the

morning.”

Bahorel replied:—

“What do you expect? There’s always a petard in a seminary fellow.”

At times, Courfeyrac folded his arms, assumed a serious air, and said

to Marius:—

“You are getting irregular in your habits, young man.”

Courfeyrac, being a practical man, did not take in good part this

reflection of an invisible paradise upon Marius; he was not much in the

habit of concealed passions; it made him impatient, and now and then he

called upon Marius to come back to reality.

One morning, he threw him this admonition:—

“My dear fellow, you produce upon me the effect of being located in the

moon, the realm of dreams, the province of illusions, capital,

soap-bubble. Come, be a good boy, what’s her name?”

But nothing could induce Marius “to talk.” They might have torn out his

nails before one of the two sacred syllables of which that ineffable

name, Cosette, was composed. True love is as luminous as the dawn and

as silent as the tomb. Only, Courfeyrac saw this change in Marius, that

his taciturnity was of the beaming order.

During this sweet month of May, Marius and Cosette learned to know

these immense delights. To dispute and to say \_you\_ for \_thou\_, simply

that they might say \_thou\_ the better afterwards. To talk at great

length with very minute details, of persons in whom they took not the

slightest interest in the world; another proof that in that ravishing

opera called love, the libretto counts for almost nothing;

For Marius, to listen to Cosette discussing finery;

For Cosette, to listen to Marius talk in politics;

To listen, knee pressed to knee, to the carriages rolling along the Rue

de Babylone;

To gaze upon the same planet in space, or at the same glowworm gleaming

in the grass;

To hold their peace together; a still greater delight than

conversation;

Etc., etc.

In the meantime, divers complications were approaching.

One evening, Marius was on his way to the rendezvous, by way of the

Boulevard des Invalides. He habitually walked with drooping head. As he

was on the point of turning the corner of the Rue Plumet, he heard some

one quite close to him say:—

“Good evening, Monsieur Marius.”

He raised his head and recognized Éponine.

This produced a singular effect upon him. He had not thought of that

girl a single time since the day when she had conducted him to the Rue

Plumet, he had not seen her again, and she had gone completely out of

his mind. He had no reasons for anything but gratitude towards her, he

owed her his happiness, and yet, it was embarrassing to him to meet

her.

It is an error to think that passion, when it is pure and happy, leads

man to a state of perfection; it simply leads him, as we have noted, to

a state of oblivion. In this situation, man forgets to be bad, but he

also forgets to be good. Gratitude, duty, matters essential and

important to be remembered, vanish. At any other time, Marius would

have behaved quite differently to Éponine. Absorbed in Cosette, he had

not even clearly put it to himself that this Éponine was named Éponine

Thénardier, and that she bore the name inscribed in his father’s will,

that name, for which, but a few months before, he would have so

ardently sacrificed himself. We show Marius as he was. His father

himself was fading out of his soul to some extent, under the splendor

of his love.

He replied with some embarrassment:—

“Ah! so it’s you, Éponine?”

“Why do you call me \_you?\_ Have I done anything to you?”

“No,” he answered.

Certainly, he had nothing against her. Far from it. Only, he felt that

he could not do otherwise, now that he used \_thou\_ to Cosette, than say

\_you\_ to Éponine.

As he remained silent, she exclaimed:—

“Say—”

Then she paused. It seemed as though words failed that creature

formerly so heedless and so bold. She tried to smile and could not.

Then she resumed:—

“Well?”

Then she paused again, and remained with downcast eyes.

“Good evening, Mr. Marius,” said she suddenly and abruptly; and away

she went.

CHAPTER IV—A CAB RUNS IN ENGLISH AND BARKS IN SLANG

The following day was the 3d of June, 1832, a date which it is

necessary to indicate on account of the grave events which at that

epoch hung on the horizon of Paris in the state of lightning-charged

clouds. Marius, at nightfall, was pursuing the same road as on the

preceding evening, with the same thoughts of delight in his heart, when

he caught sight of Éponine approaching, through the trees of the

boulevard. Two days in succession—this was too much. He turned hastily

aside, quitted the boulevard, changed his course and went to the Rue

Plumet through the Rue Monsieur.

This caused Éponine to follow him to the Rue Plumet, a thing which she

had not yet done. Up to that time, she had contented herself with

watching him on his passage along the boulevard without ever seeking to

encounter him. It was only on the evening before that she had attempted

to address him.

So Éponine followed him, without his suspecting the fact. She saw him

displace the bar and slip into the garden.

She approached the railing, felt of the bars one after the other, and

readily recognized the one which Marius had moved.

She murmured in a low voice and in gloomy accents:—

“None of that, Lisette!”

She seated herself on the underpinning of the railing, close beside the

bar, as though she were guarding it. It was precisely at the point

where the railing touched the neighboring wall. There was a dim nook

there, in which Éponine was entirely concealed.

She remained thus for more than an hour, without stirring and without

breathing, a prey to her thoughts.

Towards ten o’clock in the evening, one of the two or three persons who

passed through the Rue Plumet, an old, belated bourgeois who was making

haste to escape from this deserted spot of evil repute, as he skirted

the garden railings and reached the angle which it made with the wall,

heard a dull and threatening voice saying:—

“I’m no longer surprised that he comes here every evening.”

The passer-by cast a glance around him, saw no one, dared not peer into

the black niche, and was greatly alarmed. He redoubled his pace.

This passer-by had reason to make haste, for a very few instants later,

six men, who were marching separately and at some distance from each

other, along the wall, and who might have been taken for a gray patrol,

entered the Rue Plumet.

The first to arrive at the garden railing halted, and waited for the

others; a second later, all six were reunited.

These men began to talk in a low voice.

“This is the place,” said one of them.

“Is there a \_cab\_ [dog] in the garden?” asked another.

“I don’t know. In any case, I have fetched a ball that we’ll make him

eat.”

“Have you some putty to break the pane with?”

“Yes.”

“The railing is old,” interpolated a fifth, who had the voice of a

ventriloquist.

“So much the better,” said the second who had spoken. “It won’t screech

under the saw, and it won’t be hard to cut.”

The sixth, who had not yet opened his lips, now began to inspect the

gate, as Éponine had done an hour earlier, grasping each bar in

succession, and shaking them cautiously.

Thus he came to the bar which Marius had loosened. As he was on the

point of grasping this bar, a hand emerged abruptly from the darkness,

fell upon his arm; he felt himself vigorously thrust aside by a push in

the middle of his breast, and a hoarse voice said to him, but not

loudly:—

“There’s a dog.”

At the same moment, he perceived a pale girl standing before him.

The man underwent that shock which the unexpected always brings. He

bristled up in hideous wise; nothing is so formidable to behold as

ferocious beasts who are uneasy; their terrified air evokes terror.

He recoiled and stammered:—

“What jade is this?”

“Your daughter.”

It was, in fact, Éponine, who had addressed Thénardier.

At the apparition of Éponine, the other five, that is to say,

Claquesous, Guelemer, Babet, Brujon, and Montparnasse had noiselessly

drawn near, without precipitation, without uttering a word, with the

sinister slowness peculiar to these men of the night.

Some indescribable but hideous tools were visible in their hands.

Guelemer held one of those pairs of curved pincers which prowlers call

\_fanchons\_.

“Ah, see here, what are you about there? What do you want with us? Are

you crazy?” exclaimed Thénardier, as loudly as one can exclaim and

still speak low; “what have you come here to hinder our work for?”

Éponine burst out laughing, and threw herself on his neck.

“I am here, little father, because I am here. Isn’t a person allowed to

sit on the stones nowadays? It’s you who ought not to be here. What

have you come here for, since it’s a biscuit? I told Magnon so. There’s

nothing to be done here. But embrace me, my good little father! It’s a

long time since I’ve seen you! So you’re out?”

Thénardier tried to disentangle himself from Éponine’s arms, and

grumbled:—

“That’s good. You’ve embraced me. Yes, I’m out. I’m not in. Now, get

away with you.”

But Éponine did not release her hold, and redoubled her caresses.

“But how did you manage it, little pa? You must have been very clever

to get out of that. Tell me about it! And my mother? Where is mother?

Tell me about mamma.”

Thénardier replied:—

“She’s well. I don’t know, let me alone, and be off, I tell you.”

“I won’t go, so there now,” pouted Éponine like a spoiled child; “you

send me off, and it’s four months since I saw you, and I’ve hardly had

time to kiss you.”

And she caught her father round the neck again.

“Come, now, this is stupid!” said Babet.

“Make haste!” said Guelemer, “the cops may pass.”

The ventriloquist’s voice repeated his distich:—

“Nous n’ sommes pas le jour de l’an,

A bécoter papa, maman.”

“This isn’t New Year’s day

To peck at pa and ma.”

Éponine turned to the five ruffians.

“Why, it’s Monsieur Brujon. Good day, Monsieur Babet. Good day,

Monsieur Claquesous. Don’t you know me, Monsieur Guelemer? How goes it,

Montparnasse?”

“Yes, they know you!” ejaculated Thénardier. “But good day, good

evening, sheer off! leave us alone!”

“It’s the hour for foxes, not for chickens,” said Montparnasse.

“You see the job we have on hand here,” added Babet.

Éponine caught Montparnasse’s hand.

“Take care,” said he, “you’ll cut yourself, I’ve a knife open.”

“My little Montparnasse,” responded Éponine very gently, “you must have

confidence in people. I am the daughter of my father, perhaps. Monsieur

Babet, Monsieur Guelemer, I’m the person who was charged to investigate

this matter.”

It is remarkable that Éponine did not talk slang. That frightful tongue

had become impossible to her since she had known Marius.

She pressed in her hand, small, bony, and feeble as that of a skeleton,

Guelemer’s huge, coarse fingers, and continued:—

“You know well that I’m no fool. Ordinarily, I am believed. I have

rendered you service on various occasions. Well, I have made inquiries;

you will expose yourselves to no purpose, you see. I swear to you that

there is nothing in this house.”

“There are lone women,” said Guelemer.

“No, the persons have moved away.”

“The candles haven’t, anyway!” ejaculated Babet.

And he pointed out to Éponine, across the tops of the trees, a light

which was wandering about in the mansard roof of the pavilion. It was

Toussaint, who had stayed up to spread out some linen to dry.

Éponine made a final effort.

“Well,” said she, “they’re very poor folks, and it’s a hovel where

there isn’t a sou.”

“Go to the devil!” cried Thénardier. “When we’ve turned the house

upside down and put the cellar at the top and the attic below, we’ll

tell you what there is inside, and whether it’s francs or sous or

half-farthings.”

And he pushed her aside with the intention of entering.

“My good friend, Mr. Montparnasse,” said Éponine, “I entreat you, you

are a good fellow, don’t enter.”

“Take care, you’ll cut yourself,” replied Montparnasse.

Thénardier resumed in his decided tone:—

“Decamp, my girl, and leave men to their own affairs!”

Éponine released Montparnasse’s hand, which she had grasped again, and

said:—

“So you mean to enter this house?”

“Rather!” grinned the ventriloquist.

Then she set her back against the gate, faced the six ruffians who were

armed to the teeth, and to whom the night lent the visages of demons,

and said in a firm, low voice:—

“Well, I don’t mean that you shall.”

They halted in amazement. The ventriloquist, however, finished his

grin. She went on:—

“Friends! Listen well. This is not what you want. Now I’m talking. In

the first place, if you enter this garden, if you lay a hand on this

gate, I’ll scream, I’ll beat on the door, I’ll rouse everybody, I’ll

have the whole six of you seized, I’ll call the police.”

“She’d do it, too,” said Thénardier in a low tone to Brujon and the

ventriloquist.

She shook her head and added:—

“Beginning with my father!”

Thénardier stepped nearer.

“Not so close, my good man!” said she.

He retreated, growling between his teeth:—

“Why, what’s the matter with her?”

And he added:—

“Bitch!”

She began to laugh in a terrible way:—

“As you like, but you shall not enter here. I’m not the daughter of a

dog, since I’m the daughter of a wolf. There are six of you, what

matters that to me? You are men. Well, I’m a woman. You don’t frighten

me. I tell you that you shan’t enter this house, because it doesn’t

suit me. If you approach, I’ll bark. I told you, I’m the dog, and I

don’t care a straw for you. Go your way, you bore me! Go where you

please, but don’t come here, I forbid it! You can use your knives. I’ll

use kicks; it’s all the same to me, come on!”

She advanced a pace nearer the ruffians, she was terrible, she burst

out laughing:—

“Pardine! I’m not afraid. I shall be hungry this summer, and I shall be

cold this winter. Aren’t they ridiculous, these ninnies of men, to

think they can scare a girl! What! Scare? Oh, yes, much! Because you

have finical poppets of mistresses who hide under the bed when you put

on a big voice, forsooth! I ain’t afraid of anything, that I ain’t!”

She fastened her intent gaze upon Thénardier and said:—

“Not even of you, father!”

Then she continued, as she cast her blood-shot, spectre-like eyes upon

the ruffians in turn:—

“What do I care if I’m picked up to-morrow morning on the pavement of

the Rue Plumet, killed by the blows of my father’s club, or whether I’m

found a year from now in the nets at Saint-Cloud or the Isle of Swans

in the midst of rotten old corks and drowned dogs?”

She was forced to pause; she was seized by a dry cough, her breath came

from her weak and narrow chest like the death-rattle.

She resumed:—

“I have only to cry out, and people will come, and then slap, bang!

There are six of you; I represent the whole world.”

Thénardier made a movement towards her.

“Don’t approach!” she cried.

He halted, and said gently:—

“Well, no; I won’t approach, but don’t speak so loud. So you intend to

hinder us in our work, my daughter? But we must earn our living all the

same. Have you no longer any kind feeling for your father?”

“You bother me,” said Éponine.

“But we must live, we must eat—”

“Burst!”

So saying, she seated herself on the underpinning of the fence and

hummed:—

“Mon bras si dodu,

Ma jambe bien faite

Et le temps perdu.”

“My arm so plump,

My leg well formed,

And time wasted.”

She had set her elbow on her knee and her chin in her hand, and she

swung her foot with an air of indifference. Her tattered gown permitted

a view of her thin shoulder-blades. The neighboring street lantern

illuminated her profile and her attitude. Nothing more resolute and

more surprising could be seen.

The six rascals, speechless and gloomy at being held in check by a

girl, retreated beneath the shadow cast by the lantern, and held

counsel with furious and humiliated shrugs.

In the meantime she stared at them with a stern but peaceful air.

“There’s something the matter with her,” said Babet. “A reason. Is she

in love with the dog? It’s a shame to miss this, anyway. Two women, an

old fellow who lodges in the back-yard, and curtains that ain’t so bad

at the windows. The old cove must be a Jew. I think the job’s a good

one.”

“Well, go in, then, the rest of you,” exclaimed Montparnasse. “Do the

job. I’ll stay here with the girl, and if she fails us—”

He flashed the knife, which he held open in his hand, in the light of

the lantern.

Thénardier said not a word, and seemed ready for whatever the rest

pleased.

Brujon, who was somewhat of an oracle, and who had, as the reader

knows, “put up the job,” had not as yet spoken. He seemed thoughtful.

He had the reputation of not sticking at anything, and it was known

that he had plundered a police post simply out of bravado. Besides this

he made verses and songs, which gave him great authority.

Babet interrogated him:—

“You say nothing, Brujon?”

Brujon remained silent an instant longer, then he shook his head in

various ways, and finally concluded to speak:—

“See here; this morning I came across two sparrows fighting, this

evening I jostled a woman who was quarrelling. All that’s bad. Let’s

quit.”

They went away.

As they went, Montparnasse muttered:—

“Never mind! if they had wanted, I’d have cut her throat.”

Babet responded

“I wouldn’t. I don’t hit a lady.”

At the corner of the street they halted and exchanged the following

enigmatical dialogue in a low tone:—

“Where shall we go to sleep to-night?”

“Under Pantin [Paris].”

“Have you the key to the gate, Thénardier?”

“Pardi.”

Éponine, who never took her eyes off of them, saw them retreat by the

road by which they had come. She rose and began to creep after them

along the walls and the houses. She followed them thus as far as the

boulevard.

There they parted, and she saw these six men plunge into the gloom,

where they appeared to melt away.

CHAPTER V—THINGS OF THE NIGHT

After the departure of the ruffians, the Rue Plumet resumed its

tranquil, nocturnal aspect. That which had just taken place in this

street would not have astonished a forest. The lofty trees, the copses,

the heaths, the branches rudely interlaced, the tall grass, exist in a

sombre manner; the savage swarming there catches glimpses of sudden

apparitions of the invisible; that which is below man distinguishes,

through the mists, that which is beyond man; and the things of which we

living beings are ignorant there meet face to face in the night.

Nature, bristling and wild, takes alarm at certain approaches in which

she fancies that she feels the supernatural. The forces of the gloom

know each other, and are strangely balanced by each other. Teeth and

claws fear what they cannot grasp. Blood-drinking bestiality, voracious

appetites, hunger in search of prey, the armed instincts of nails and

jaws which have for source and aim the belly, glare and smell out

uneasily the impassive spectral forms straying beneath a shroud, erect

in its vague and shuddering robe, and which seem to them to live with a

dead and terrible life. These brutalities, which are only matter,

entertain a confused fear of having to deal with the immense obscurity

condensed into an unknown being. A black figure barring the way stops

the wild beast short. That which emerges from the cemetery intimidates

and disconcerts that which emerges from the cave; the ferocious fear

the sinister; wolves recoil when they encounter a ghoul.

CHAPTER VI—MARIUS BECOMES PRACTICAL ONCE MORE TO THE EXTENT OF GIVING

COSETTE HIS ADDRESS

While this sort of a dog with a human face was mounting guard over the

gate, and while the six ruffians were yielding to a girl, Marius was by

Cosette’s side.

Never had the sky been more studded with stars and more charming, the

trees more trembling, the odor of the grass more penetrating; never had

the birds fallen asleep among the leaves with a sweeter noise; never

had all the harmonies of universal serenity responded more thoroughly

to the inward music of love; never had Marius been more captivated,

more happy, more ecstatic.

But he had found Cosette sad; Cosette had been weeping. Her eyes were

red.

This was the first cloud in that wonderful dream.

Marius’ first word had been: “What is the matter?”

And she had replied: “This.”

Then she had seated herself on the bench near the steps, and while he

tremblingly took his place beside her, she had continued:—

“My father told me this morning to hold myself in readiness, because he

has business, and we may go away from here.”

Marius shivered from head to foot.

When one is at the end of one’s life, to die means to go away; when one

is at the beginning of it, to go away means to die.

For the last six weeks, Marius had little by little, slowly, by

degrees, taken possession of Cosette each day. As we have already

explained, in the case of first love, the soul is taken long before the

body; later on, one takes the body long before the soul; sometimes one

does not take the soul at all; the Faublas and the Prudhommes add:

“Because there is none”; but the sarcasm is, fortunately, a blasphemy.

So Marius possessed Cosette, as spirits possess, but he enveloped her

with all his soul, and seized her jealously with incredible conviction.

He possessed her smile, her breath, her perfume, the profound radiance

of her blue eyes, the sweetness of her skin when he touched her hand,

the charming mark which she had on her neck, all her thoughts.

Therefore, he possessed all Cosette’s dreams.

He incessantly gazed at, and he sometimes touched lightly with his

breath, the short locks on the nape of her neck, and he declared to

himself that there was not one of those short hairs which did not

belong to him, Marius. He gazed upon and adored the things that she

wore, her knot of ribbon, her gloves, her sleeves, her shoes, her

cuffs, as sacred objects of which he was the master. He dreamed that he

was the lord of those pretty shell combs which she wore in her hair,

and he even said to himself, in confused and suppressed stammerings of

voluptuousness which did not make their way to the light, that there

was not a ribbon of her gown, not a mesh in her stockings, not a fold

in her bodice, which was not his. Beside Cosette he felt himself beside

his own property, his own thing, his own despot and his slave. It

seemed as though they had so intermingled their souls, that it would

have been impossible to tell them apart had they wished to take them

back again.—“This is mine.” “No, it is mine.” “I assure you that you

are mistaken. This is my property.” “What you are taking as your own is

myself.”—Marius was something that made a part of Cosette, and Cosette

was something which made a part of Marius. Marius felt Cosette within

him. To have Cosette, to possess Cosette, this, to him, was not to be

distinguished from breathing. It was in the midst of this faith, of

this intoxication, of this virgin possession, unprecedented and

absolute, of this sovereignty, that these words: “We are going away,”

fell suddenly, at a blow, and that the harsh voice of reality cried to

him: “Cosette is not yours!”

Marius awoke. For six weeks Marius had been living, as we have said,

outside of life; those words, \_going away!\_ caused him to re-enter it

harshly.

He found not a word to say. Cosette merely felt that his hand was very

cold. She said to him in her turn: “What is the matter?”

He replied in so low a tone that Cosette hardly heard him:—

“I did not understand what you said.”

She began again:—

“This morning my father told me to settle all my little affairs and to

hold myself in readiness, that he would give me his linen to put in a

trunk, that he was obliged to go on a journey, that we were to go away,

that it is necessary to have a large trunk for me and a small one for

him, and that all is to be ready in a week from now, and that we might

go to England.”

“But this is outrageous!” exclaimed Marius.

It is certain, that, at that moment, no abuse of power, no violence,

not one of the abominations of the worst tyrants, no action of Busiris,

of Tiberius, or of Henry VIII., could have equalled this in atrocity,

in the opinion of Marius; M. Fauchelevent taking his daughter off to

England because he had business there.

He demanded in a weak voice:—

“And when do you start?”

“He did not say when.”

“And when shall you return?”

“He did not say when.”

Marius rose and said coldly:—

“Cosette, shall you go?”

Cosette turned toward him her beautiful eyes, all filled with anguish,

and replied in a sort of bewilderment:—

“Where?”

“To England. Shall you go?”

“Why do you say \_you\_ to me?”

“I ask you whether you will go?”

“What do you expect me to do?” she said, clasping her hands.

“So, you will go?”

“If my father goes.”

“So, you will go?”

Cosette took Marius’ hand, and pressed it without replying.

“Very well,” said Marius, “then I will go elsewhere.”

Cosette felt rather than understood the meaning of these words. She

turned so pale that her face shone white through the gloom. She

stammered:—

“What do you mean?”

Marius looked at her, then raised his eyes to heaven, and answered:

“Nothing.”

When his eyes fell again, he saw Cosette smiling at him. The smile of a

woman whom one loves possesses a visible radiance, even at night.

“How silly we are! Marius, I have an idea.”

“What is it?”

“If we go away, do you go too! I will tell you where! Come and join me

wherever I am.”

Marius was now a thoroughly roused man. He had fallen back into

reality. He cried to Cosette:—

“Go away with you! Are you mad? Why, I should have to have money, and I

have none! Go to England? But I am in debt now, I owe, I don’t know how

much, more than ten louis to Courfeyrac, one of my friends with whom

you are not acquainted! I have an old hat which is not worth three

francs, I have a coat which lacks buttons in front, my shirt is all

ragged, my elbows are torn, my boots let in the water; for the last six

weeks I have not thought about it, and I have not told you about it.

You only see me at night, and you give me your love; if you were to see

me in the daytime, you would give me a sou! Go to England! Eh! I

haven’t enough to pay for a passport!”

He threw himself against a tree which was close at hand, erect, his

brow pressed close to the bark, feeling neither the wood which flayed

his skin, nor the fever which was throbbing in his temples, and there

he stood motionless, on the point of falling, like the statue of

despair.

He remained a long time thus. One could remain for eternity in such

abysses. At last he turned round. He heard behind him a faint stifled

noise, which was sweet yet sad.

It was Cosette sobbing.

She had been weeping for more than two hours beside Marius as he

meditated.

He came to her, fell at her knees, and slowly prostrating himself, he

took the tip of her foot which peeped out from beneath her robe, and

kissed it.

She let him have his way in silence. There are moments when a woman

accepts, like a sombre and resigned goddess, the religion of love.

“Do not weep,” he said.

She murmured:—

“Not when I may be going away, and you cannot come!”

He went on:—

“Do you love me?”

She replied, sobbing, by that word from paradise which is never more

charming than amid tears:—

“I adore you!”

He continued in a tone which was an indescribable caress:—

“Do not weep. Tell me, will you do this for me, and cease to weep?”

“Do you love me?” said she.

He took her hand.

“Cosette, I have never given my word of honor to any one, because my

word of honor terrifies me. I feel that my father is by my side. Well,

I give you my most sacred word of honor, that if you go away I shall

die.”

In the tone with which he uttered these words there lay a melancholy so

solemn and so tranquil, that Cosette trembled. She felt that chill

which is produced by a true and gloomy thing as it passes by. The shock

made her cease weeping.

“Now, listen,” said he, “do not expect me to-morrow.”

“Why?”

“Do not expect me until the day after to-morrow.”

“Oh! Why?”

“You will see.”

“A day without seeing you! But that is impossible!”

“Let us sacrifice one day in order to gain our whole lives, perhaps.”

And Marius added in a low tone and in an aside:—

“He is a man who never changes his habits, and he has never received

any one except in the evening.”

“Of what man are you speaking?” asked Cosette.

“I? I said nothing.”

“What do you hope, then?”

“Wait until the day after to-morrow.”

“You wish it?”

“Yes, Cosette.”

She took his head in both her hands, raising herself on tiptoe in order

to be on a level with him, and tried to read his hope in his eyes.

Marius resumed:—

“Now that I think of it, you ought to know my address: something might

happen, one never knows; I live with that friend named Courfeyrac, Rue

de la Verrerie, No. 16.”

He searched in his pocket, pulled out his penknife, and with the blade

he wrote on the plaster of the wall:—

\_“16 Rue de la Verrerie.”\_

In the meantime, Cosette had begun to gaze into his eyes once more.

“Tell me your thought, Marius; you have some idea. Tell it to me. Oh!

tell me, so that I may pass a pleasant night.”

“This is my idea: that it is impossible that God should mean to part

us. Wait; expect me the day after to-morrow.”

“What shall I do until then?” said Cosette. “You are outside, you go,

and come! How happy men are! I shall remain entirely alone! Oh! How sad

I shall be! What is it that you are going to do to-morrow evening? tell

me.”

“I am going to try something.”

“Then I will pray to God and I will think of you here, so that you may

be successful. I will question you no further, since you do not wish

it. You are my master. I shall pass the evening to-morrow in singing

that music from \_Euryanthe\_ that you love, and that you came one

evening to listen to, outside my shutters. But day after to-morrow you

will come early. I shall expect you at dusk, at nine o’clock precisely,

I warn you. Mon Dieu! how sad it is that the days are so long! On the

stroke of nine, do you understand, I shall be in the garden.”

“And I also.”

And without having uttered it, moved by the same thought, impelled by

those electric currents which place lovers in continual communication,

both being intoxicated with delight even in their sorrow, they fell

into each other’s arms, without perceiving that their lips met while

their uplifted eyes, overflowing with rapture and full of tears, gazed

upon the stars.

When Marius went forth, the street was deserted. This was the moment

when Éponine was following the ruffians to the boulevard.

While Marius had been dreaming with his head pressed to the tree, an

idea had crossed his mind; an idea, alas! that he himself judged to be

senseless and impossible. He had come to a desperate decision.

CHAPTER VII—THE OLD HEART AND THE YOUNG HEART IN THE PRESENCE OF EACH

OTHER

At that epoch, Father Gillenormand was well past his ninety-first

birthday. He still lived with Mademoiselle Gillenormand in the Rue des

Filles-du-Calvaire, No. 6, in the old house which he owned. He was, as

the reader will remember, one of those antique old men who await death

perfectly erect, whom age bears down without bending, and whom even

sorrow cannot curve.

Still, his daughter had been saying for some time: “My father is

sinking.” He no longer boxed the maids’ ears; he no longer thumped the

landing-place so vigorously with his cane when Basque was slow in

opening the door. The Revolution of July had exasperated him for the

space of barely six months. He had viewed, almost tranquilly, that

coupling of words, in the \_Moniteur:\_ M. Humblot-Conté, peer of France.

The fact is, that the old man was deeply dejected. He did not bend, he

did not yield; this was no more a characteristic of his physical than

of his moral nature, but he felt himself giving way internally. For

four years he had been waiting for Marius, with his foot firmly

planted, that is the exact word, in the conviction that that

good-for-nothing young scamp would ring at his door some day or other;

now he had reached the point, where, at certain gloomy hours, he said

to himself, that if Marius made him wait much longer—It was not death

that was insupportable to him; it was the idea that perhaps he should

never see Marius again. The idea of never seeing Marius again had never

entered his brain until that day; now the thought began to recur to

him, and it chilled him. Absence, as is always the case in genuine and

natural sentiments, had only served to augment the grandfather’s love

for the ungrateful child, who had gone off like a flash. It is during

December nights, when the cold stands at ten degrees, that one thinks

oftenest of the son.

M. Gillenormand was, or thought himself, above all things, incapable of

taking a single step, he—the grandfather, towards his grandson; “I

would die rather,” he said to himself. He did not consider himself as

the least to blame; but he thought of Marius only with profound

tenderness, and the mute despair of an elderly, kindly old man who is

about to vanish in the dark.

He began to lose his teeth, which added to his sadness.

M. Gillenormand, without however acknowledging it to himself, for it

would have rendered him furious and ashamed, had never loved a mistress

as he loved Marius.

He had had placed in his chamber, opposite the head of his bed, so that

it should be the first thing on which his eyes fell on waking, an old

portrait of his other daughter, who was dead, Madame Pontmercy, a

portrait which had been taken when she was eighteen. He gazed

incessantly at that portrait. One day, he happened to say, as he gazed

upon it:—

“I think the likeness is strong.”

“To my sister?” inquired Mademoiselle Gillenormand. “Yes, certainly.”

The old man added:—

“And to him also.”

Once as he sat with his knees pressed together, and his eyes almost

closed, in a despondent attitude, his daughter ventured to say to him:—

“Father, are you as angry with him as ever?”

She paused, not daring to proceed further.

“With whom?” he demanded.

“With that poor Marius.”

He raised his aged head, laid his withered and emaciated fist on the

table, and exclaimed in his most irritated and vibrating tone:—

“Poor Marius, do you say! That gentleman is a knave, a wretched

scoundrel, a vain little ingrate, a heartless, soulless, haughty, and

wicked man!”

And he turned away so that his daughter might not see the tear that

stood in his eye.

Three days later he broke a silence which had lasted four hours, to say

to his daughter point-blank:—

“I had the honor to ask Mademoiselle Gillenormand never to mention him

to me.”

Aunt Gillenormand renounced every effort, and pronounced this acute

diagnosis: “My father never cared very much for my sister after her

folly. It is clear that he detests Marius.”

“After her folly” meant: “after she had married the colonel.”

However, as the reader has been able to conjecture, Mademoiselle

Gillenormand had failed in her attempt to substitute her favorite, the

officer of lancers, for Marius. The substitute, Théodule, had not been

a success. M. Gillenormand had not accepted the \_quid pro quo\_. A

vacancy in the heart does not accommodate itself to a stop-gap.

Théodule, on his side, though he scented the inheritance, was disgusted

at the task of pleasing. The goodman bored the lancer; and the lancer

shocked the goodman. Lieutenant Théodule was gay, no doubt, but a

chatter-box, frivolous, but vulgar; a high liver, but a frequenter of

bad company; he had mistresses, it is true, and he had a great deal to

say about them, it is true also; but he talked badly. All his good

qualities had a defect. M. Gillenormand was worn out with hearing him

tell about the love affairs that he had in the vicinity of the barracks

in the Rue de Babylone. And then, Lieutenant Gillenormand sometimes

came in his uniform, with the tricolored cockade. This rendered him

downright intolerable. Finally, Father Gillenormand had said to his

daughter: “I’ve had enough of that Théodule. I haven’t much taste for

warriors in time of peace. Receive him if you choose. I don’t know but

I prefer slashers to fellows that drag their swords. The clash of

blades in battle is less dismal, after all, than the clank of the

scabbard on the pavement. And then, throwing out your chest like a

bully and lacing yourself like a girl, with stays under your cuirass,

is doubly ridiculous. When one is a veritable man, one holds equally

aloof from swagger and from affected airs. He is neither a blusterer

nor a finnicky-hearted man. Keep your Théodule for yourself.”

It was in vain that his daughter said to him: “But he is your

grandnephew, nevertheless,”—it turned out that M. Gillenormand, who was

a grandfather to the very finger-tips, was not in the least a

grand-uncle.

In fact, as he had good sense, and as he had compared the two, Théodule

had only served to make him regret Marius all the more.

One evening,—it was the 24th of June, which did not prevent Father

Gillenormand having a rousing fire on the hearth,—he had dismissed his

daughter, who was sewing in a neighboring apartment. He was alone in

his chamber, amid its pastoral scenes, with his feet propped on the

andirons, half enveloped in his huge screen of coromandel lacquer, with

its nine leaves, with his elbow resting on a table where burned two

candles under a green shade, engulfed in his tapestry armchair, and in

his hand a book which he was not reading. He was dressed, according to

his wont, like an \_incroyable\_, and resembled an antique portrait by

Garat. This would have made people run after him in the street, had not

his daughter covered him up, whenever he went out, in a vast bishop’s

wadded cloak, which concealed his attire. At home, he never wore a

dressing gown, except when he rose and retired. “It gives one a look of

age,” said he.

Father Gillenormand was thinking of Marius lovingly and bitterly; and,

as usual, bitterness predominated. His tenderness once soured always

ended by boiling and turning to indignation. He had reached the point

where a man tries to make up his mind and to accept that which rends

his heart. He was explaining to himself that there was no longer any

reason why Marius should return, that if he intended to return, he

should have done it long ago, that he must renounce the idea. He was

trying to accustom himself to the thought that all was over, and that

he should die without having beheld “that gentleman” again. But his

whole nature revolted; his aged paternity would not consent to this.

“Well!” said he,—this was his doleful refrain,—“he will not return!”

His bald head had fallen upon his breast, and he fixed a melancholy and

irritated gaze upon the ashes on his hearth.

In the very midst of his reverie, his old servant Basque entered, and

inquired:—

“Can Monsieur receive M. Marius?”

The old man sat up erect, pallid, and like a corpse which rises under

the influence of a galvanic shock. All his blood had retreated to his

heart. He stammered:—

“M. Marius what?”

“I don’t know,” replied Basque, intimidated and put out of countenance

by his master’s air; “I have not seen him. Nicolette came in and said

to me: ‘There’s a young man here; say that it is M. Marius.’”

Father Gillenormand stammered in a low voice:—

“Show him in.”

And he remained in the same attitude, with shaking head, and his eyes

fixed on the door. It opened once more. A young man entered. It was

Marius.

Marius halted at the door, as though waiting to be bidden to enter.

His almost squalid attire was not perceptible in the obscurity caused

by the shade. Nothing could be seen but his calm, grave, but strangely

sad face.

It was several minutes before Father Gillenormand, dulled with

amazement and joy, could see anything except a brightness as when one

is in the presence of an apparition. He was on the point of swooning;

he saw Marius through a dazzling light. It certainly was he, it

certainly was Marius.

At last! After the lapse of four years! He grasped him entire, so to

speak, in a single glance. He found him noble, handsome, distinguished,

well-grown, a complete man, with a suitable mien and a charming air. He

felt a desire to open his arms, to call him, to fling himself forward;

his heart melted with rapture, affectionate words swelled and

overflowed his breast; at length all his tenderness came to the light

and reached his lips, and, by a contrast which constituted the very

foundation of his nature, what came forth was harshness. He said

abruptly:—

“What have you come here for?”

Marius replied with embarrassment:—

“Monsieur—”

M. Gillenormand would have liked to have Marius throw himself into his

arms. He was displeased with Marius and with himself. He was conscious

that he was brusque, and that Marius was cold. It caused the goodman

unendurable and irritating anxiety to feel so tender and forlorn

within, and only to be able to be hard outside. Bitterness returned. He

interrupted Marius in a peevish tone:—

“Then why did you come?”

That “then” signified: \_If you do not come to embrace me\_. Marius

looked at his grandfather, whose pallor gave him a face of marble.

“Monsieur—”

“Have you come to beg my pardon? Do you acknowledge your faults?”

He thought he was putting Marius on the right road, and that “the

child” would yield. Marius shivered; it was the denial of his father

that was required of him; he dropped his eyes and replied:—

“No, sir.”

“Then,” exclaimed the old man impetuously, with a grief that was

poignant and full of wrath, “what do you want of me?”

Marius clasped his hands, advanced a step, and said in a feeble and

trembling voice:—

“Sir, have pity on me.”

These words touched M. Gillenormand; uttered a little sooner, they

would have rendered him tender, but they came too late. The grandfather

rose; he supported himself with both hands on his cane; his lips were

white, his brow wavered, but his lofty form towered above Marius as he

bowed.

“Pity on you, sir! It is youth demanding pity of the old man of

ninety-one! You are entering into life, I am leaving it; you go to the

play, to balls, to the café, to the billiard-hall; you have wit, you

please the women, you are a handsome fellow; as for me, I spit on my

brands in the heart of summer; you are rich with the only riches that

are really such, I possess all the poverty of age; infirmity,

isolation! You have your thirty-two teeth, a good digestion, bright

eyes, strength, appetite, health, gayety, a forest of black hair; I

have no longer even white hair, I have lost my teeth, I am losing my

legs, I am losing my memory; there are three names of streets that I

confound incessantly, the Rue Charlot, the Rue du Chaume, and the Rue

Saint-Claude, that is what I have come to; you have before you the

whole future, full of sunshine, and I am beginning to lose my sight, so

far am I advancing into the night; you are in love, that is a matter of

course, I am beloved by no one in all the world; and you ask pity of

me! Parbleu! Molière forgot that. If that is the way you jest at the

courthouse, Messieurs the lawyers, I sincerely compliment you. You are

droll.”

And the octogenarian went on in a grave and angry voice:—

“Come, now, what do you want of me?”

“Sir,” said Marius, “I know that my presence is displeasing to you, but

I have come merely to ask one thing of you, and then I shall go away

immediately.”

“You are a fool!” said the old man. “Who said that you were to go

away?”

This was the translation of the tender words which lay at the bottom of

his heart:—

“Ask my pardon! Throw yourself on my neck!”

M. Gillenormand felt that Marius would leave him in a few moments, that

his harsh reception had repelled the lad, that his hardness was driving

him away; he said all this to himself, and it augmented his grief; and

as his grief was straightway converted into wrath, it increased his

harshness. He would have liked to have Marius understand, and Marius

did not understand, which made the goodman furious.

He began again:—

“What! you deserted me, your grandfather, you left my house to go no

one knows whither, you drove your aunt to despair, you went off, it is

easily guessed, to lead a bachelor life; it’s more convenient, to play

the dandy, to come in at all hours, to amuse yourself; you have given

me no signs of life, you have contracted debts without even telling me

to pay them, you have become a smasher of windows and a blusterer, and,

at the end of four years, you come to me, and that is all you have to

say to me!”

This violent fashion of driving a grandson to tenderness was productive

only of silence on the part of Marius. M. Gillenormand folded his arms;

a gesture which with him was peculiarly imperious, and apostrophized

Marius bitterly:—

“Let us make an end of this. You have come to ask something of me, you

say? Well, what? What is it? Speak!”

“Sir,” said Marius, with the look of a man who feels that he is falling

over a precipice, “I have come to ask your permission to marry.”

M. Gillenormand rang the bell. Basque opened the door half-way.

“Call my daughter.”

A second later, the door was opened once more, Mademoiselle

Gillenormand did not enter, but showed herself; Marius was standing,

mute, with pendant arms and the face of a criminal; M. Gillenormand was

pacing back and forth in the room. He turned to his daughter and said

to her:—

“Nothing. It is Monsieur Marius. Say good day to him. Monsieur wishes

to marry. That’s all. Go away.”

The curt, hoarse sound of the old man’s voice announced a strange

degree of excitement. The aunt gazed at Marius with a frightened air,

hardly appeared to recognize him, did not allow a gesture or a syllable

to escape her, and disappeared at her father’s breath more swiftly than

a straw before the hurricane.

In the meantime, Father Gillenormand had returned and placed his back

against the chimney-piece once more.

“You marry! At one and twenty! You have arranged that! You have only a

permission to ask! a formality. Sit down, sir. Well, you have had a

revolution since I had the honor to see you last. The Jacobins got the

upper hand. You must have been delighted. Are you not a Republican

since you are a Baron? You can make that agree. The Republic makes a

good sauce for the barony. Are you one of those decorated by July? Have

you taken the Louvre at all, sir? Quite near here, in the Rue

Saint-Antoine, opposite the Rue des Nonamdières, there is a cannon-ball

incrusted in the wall of the third story of a house with this

inscription: ‘July 28th, 1830.’ Go take a look at that. It produces a

good effect. Ah! those friends of yours do pretty things. By the way,

aren’t they erecting a fountain in the place of the monument of M. le

Duc de Berry? So you want to marry? Whom? Can one inquire without

indiscretion?”

He paused, and, before Marius had time to answer, he added violently:—

“Come now, you have a profession? A fortune made? How much do you earn

at your trade of lawyer?”

“Nothing,” said Marius, with a sort of firmness and resolution that was

almost fierce.

“Nothing? Then all that you have to live upon is the twelve hundred

livres that I allow you?”

Marius did not reply. M. Gillenormand continued:—

“Then I understand the girl is rich?”

“As rich as I am.”

“What! No dowry?”

“No.”

“Expectations?”

“I think not.”

“Utterly naked! What’s the father?”

“I don’t know.”

“And what’s her name?”

“Mademoiselle Fauchelevent.”

“Fauchewhat?”

“Fauchelevent.”

“Pttt!” ejaculated the old gentleman.

“Sir!” exclaimed Marius.

M. Gillenormand interrupted him with the tone of a man who is speaking

to himself:—

“That’s right, one and twenty years of age, no profession, twelve

hundred livres a year, Madame la Baronne de Pontmercy will go and

purchase a couple of sous’ worth of parsley from the fruiterer.”

“Sir,” repeated Marius, in the despair at the last hope, which was

vanishing, “I entreat you! I conjure you in the name of Heaven, with

clasped hands, sir, I throw myself at your feet, permit me to marry

her!”

The old man burst into a shout of strident and mournful laughter,

coughing and laughing at the same time.

“Ah! ah! ah! You said to yourself: ‘Pardine! I’ll go hunt up that old

blockhead, that absurd numskull! What a shame that I’m not twenty-five!

How I’d treat him to a nice respectful summons! How nicely I’d get

along without him! It’s nothing to me, I’d say to him: “You’re only too

happy to see me, you old idiot, I want to marry, I desire to wed

Mamselle No-matter-whom, daughter of Monsieur No-matter-what, I have no

shoes, she has no chemise, that just suits; I want to throw my career,

my future, my youth, my life to the dogs; I wish to take a plunge into

wretchedness with a woman around my neck, that’s an idea, and you must

consent to it!” and the old fossil will consent.’ Go, my lad, do as you

like, attach your paving-stone, marry your Pousselevent, your

Coupelevent—Never, sir, never!”

“Father—”

“Never!”

At the tone in which that “never” was uttered, Marius lost all hope. He

traversed the chamber with slow steps, with bowed head, tottering and

more like a dying man than like one merely taking his departure. M.

Gillenormand followed him with his eyes, and at the moment when the

door opened, and Marius was on the point of going out, he advanced four

paces, with the senile vivacity of impetuous and spoiled old gentlemen,

seized Marius by the collar, brought him back energetically into the

room, flung him into an armchair and said to him:—

“Tell me all about it!”

“It was that single word “father” which had effected this revolution.

Marius stared at him in bewilderment. M. Gillenormand’s mobile face was

no longer expressive of anything but rough and ineffable good-nature.

The grandsire had given way before the grandfather.

“Come, see here, speak, tell me about your love affairs, jabber, tell

me everything! Sapristi! how stupid young folks are!”

“Father—” repeated Marius.

The old man’s entire countenance lighted up with indescribable

radiance.

“Yes, that’s right, call me father, and you’ll see!”

There was now something so kind, so gentle, so openhearted, and so

paternal in this brusqueness, that Marius, in the sudden transition

from discouragement to hope, was stunned and intoxicated by it, as it

were. He was seated near the table, the light from the candles brought

out the dilapidation of his costume, which Father Gillenormand regarded

with amazement.

“Well, father—” said Marius.

“Ah, by the way,” interrupted M. Gillenormand, “you really have not a

penny then? You are dressed like a pickpocket.”

He rummaged in a drawer, drew forth a purse, which he laid on the

table: “Here are a hundred louis, buy yourself a hat.”

“Father,” pursued Marius, “my good father, if you only knew! I love

her. You cannot imagine it; the first time I saw her was at the

Luxembourg, she came there; in the beginning, I did not pay much heed

to her, and then, I don’t know how it came about, I fell in love with

her. Oh! how unhappy that made me! Now, at last, I see her every day,

at her own home, her father does not know it, just fancy, they are

going away, it is in the garden that we meet, in the evening, her

father means to take her to England, then I said to myself: ‘I’ll go

and see my grandfather and tell him all about the affair. I should go

mad first, I should die, I should fall ill, I should throw myself into

the water. I absolutely must marry her, since I should go mad

otherwise.’ This is the whole truth, and I do not think that I have

omitted anything. She lives in a garden with an iron fence, in the Rue

Plumet. It is in the neighborhood of the Invalides.”

Father Gillenormand had seated himself, with a beaming countenance,

beside Marius. As he listened to him and drank in the sound of his

voice, he enjoyed at the same time a protracted pinch of snuff. At the

words “Rue Plumet” he interrupted his inhalation and allowed the

remainder of his snuff to fall upon his knees.

“The Rue Plumet, the Rue Plumet, did you say?—Let us see!—Are there not

barracks in that vicinity?—Why, yes, that’s it. Your cousin Théodule

has spoken to me about it. The lancer, the officer. A gay girl, my good

friend, a gay girl!—Pardieu, yes, the Rue Plumet. It is what used to be

called the Rue Blomet.—It all comes back to me now. I have heard of

that little girl of the iron railing in the Rue Plumet. In a garden, a

Pamela. Your taste is not bad. She is said to be a very tidy creature.

Between ourselves, I think that simpleton of a lancer has been courting

her a bit. I don’t know where he did it. However, that’s not to the

purpose. Besides, he is not to be believed. He brags, Marius! I think

it quite proper that a young man like you should be in love. It’s the

right thing at your age. I like you better as a lover than as a

Jacobin. I like you better in love with a petticoat, sapristi! with

twenty petticoats, than with M. de Robespierre. For my part, I will do

myself the justice to say, that in the line of \_sans-culottes\_, I have

never loved any one but women. Pretty girls are pretty girls, the

deuce! There’s no objection to that. As for the little one, she

receives you without her father’s knowledge. That’s in the established

order of things. I have had adventures of that same sort myself. More

than one. Do you know what is done then? One does not take the matter

ferociously; one does not precipitate himself into the tragic; one does

not make one’s mind to marriage and M. le Maire with his scarf. One

simply behaves like a fellow of spirit. One shows good sense. Slip

along, mortals; don’t marry. You come and look up your grandfather, who

is a good-natured fellow at bottom, and who always has a few rolls of

louis in an old drawer; you say to him: ‘See here, grandfather.’ And

the grandfather says: ‘That’s a simple matter. Youth must amuse itself,

and old age must wear out. I have been young, you will be old. Come, my

boy, you shall pass it on to your grandson. Here are two hundred

pistoles. Amuse yourself, deuce take it!’ Nothing better! That’s the

way the affair should be treated. You don’t marry, but that does no

harm. You understand me?”

Marius, petrified and incapable of uttering a syllable, made a sign

with his head that he did not.

The old man burst out laughing, winked his aged eye, gave him a slap on

the knee, stared him full in the face with a mysterious and beaming

air, and said to him, with the tenderest of shrugs of the shoulder:—

“Booby! make her your mistress.”

Marius turned pale. He had understood nothing of what his grandfather

had just said. This twaddle about the Rue Blomet, Pamela, the barracks,

the lancer, had passed before Marius like a dissolving view. Nothing of

all that could bear any reference to Cosette, who was a lily. The good

man was wandering in his mind. But this wandering terminated in words

which Marius did understand, and which were a mortal insult to Cosette.

Those words, “make her your mistress,” entered the heart of the strict

young man like a sword.

He rose, picked up his hat which lay on the floor, and walked to the

door with a firm, assured step. There he turned round, bowed deeply to

his grandfather, raised his head erect again, and said:—

“Five years ago you insulted my father; to-day you have insulted my

wife. I ask nothing more of you, sir. Farewell.”

Father Gillenormand, utterly confounded, opened his mouth, extended his

arms, tried to rise, and before he could utter a word, the door closed

once more, and Marius had disappeared.

The old man remained for several minutes motionless and as though

struck by lightning, without the power to speak or breathe, as though a

clenched fist grasped his throat. At last he tore himself from his

armchair, ran, so far as a man can run at ninety-one, to the door,

opened it, and cried:—

“Help! Help!”

His daughter made her appearance, then the domestics. He began again,

with a pitiful rattle: “Run after him! Bring him back! What have I done

to him? He is mad! He is going away! Ah! my God! Ah! my God! This time

he will not come back!”

He went to the window which looked out on the street, threw it open

with his aged and palsied hands, leaned out more than half-way, while

Basque and Nicolette held him behind, and shouted:—

“Marius! Marius! Marius! Marius!”

But Marius could no longer hear him, for at that moment he was turning

the corner of the Rue Saint-Louis.

The octogenarian raised his hands to his temples two or three times

with an expression of anguish, recoiled tottering, and fell back into

an armchair, pulseless, voiceless, tearless, with quivering head and

lips which moved with a stupid air, with nothing in his eyes and

nothing any longer in his heart except a gloomy and profound something

which resembled night.

BOOK NINTH—WHITHER ARE THEY GOING?

CHAPTER I—JEAN VALJEAN

That same day, towards four o’clock in the afternoon, Jean Valjean was

sitting alone on the back side of one of the most solitary slopes in

the Champ-de-Mars. Either from prudence, or from a desire to meditate,

or simply in consequence of one of those insensible changes of habit

which gradually introduce themselves into the existence of every one,

he now rarely went out with Cosette. He had on his workman’s waistcoat,

and trousers of gray linen; and his long-visored cap concealed his

countenance.

He was calm and happy now beside Cosette; that which had, for a time,

alarmed and troubled him had been dissipated; but for the last week or

two, anxieties of another nature had come up. One day, while walking on

the boulevard, he had caught sight of Thénardier; thanks to his

disguise, Thénardier had not recognized him; but since that day, Jean

Valjean had seen him repeatedly, and he was now certain that Thénardier

was prowling about in their neighborhood.

This had been sufficient to make him come to a decision.

Moreover, Paris was not tranquil: political troubles presented this

inconvenient feature, for any one who had anything to conceal in his

life, that the police had grown very uneasy and very suspicious, and

that while seeking to ferret out a man like Pépin or Morey, they might

very readily discover a man like Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean had made up his mind to quit Paris, and even France, and

go over to England.

He had warned Cosette. He wished to set out before the end of the week.

He had seated himself on the slope in the Champ-de-Mars, turning over

all sorts of thoughts in his mind,—Thénardier, the police, the journey,

and the difficulty of procuring a passport.

He was troubled from all these points of view.

Last of all, an inexplicable circumstance which had just attracted his

attention, and from which he had not yet recovered, had added to his

state of alarm.

On the morning of that very day, when he alone of the household was

stirring, while strolling in the garden before Cosette’s shutters were

open, he had suddenly perceived on the wall, the following line,

engraved, probably with a nail:—

\_16 Rue de la Verrerie\_.

This was perfectly fresh, the grooves in the ancient black mortar were

white, a tuft of nettles at the foot of the wall was powdered with the

fine, fresh plaster.

This had probably been written on the preceding night.

What was this? A signal for others? A warning for himself?

In any case, it was evident that the garden had been violated, and that

strangers had made their way into it.

He recalled the odd incidents which had already alarmed the household.

His mind was now filling in this canvas.

He took good care not to speak to Cosette of the line written on the

wall, for fear of alarming her.

In the midst of his preoccupations, he perceived, from a shadow cast by

the sun, that some one had halted on the crest of the slope immediately

behind him.

He was on the point of turning round, when a paper folded in four fell

upon his knees as though a hand had dropped it over his head.

He took the paper, unfolded it, and read these words written in large

characters, with a pencil:—

“MOVE AWAY FROM YOUR HOUSE.”

Jean Valjean sprang hastily to his feet; there was no one on the slope;

he gazed all around him and perceived a creature larger than a child,

not so large as a man, clad in a gray blouse and trousers of

dust-colored cotton velvet, who was jumping over the parapet and who

slipped into the moat of the Champ-de-Mars.

Jean Valjean returned home at once, in a very thoughtful mood.

CHAPTER II—MARIUS

Marius had left M. Gillenormand in despair. He had entered the house

with very little hope, and quitted it with immense despair.

However, and those who have observed the depths of the human heart will

understand this, the officer, the lancer, the ninny, Cousin Théodule,

had left no trace in his mind. Not the slightest. The dramatic poet

might, apparently, expect some complications from this revelation made

point-blank by the grandfather to the grandson. But what the drama

would gain thereby, truth would lose. Marius was at an age when one

believes nothing in the line of evil; later on comes the age when one

believes everything. Suspicions are nothing else than wrinkles. Early

youth has none of them. That which overwhelmed Othello glides innocuous

over Candide. Suspect Cosette! There are hosts of crimes which Marius

could sooner have committed.

He began to wander about the streets, the resource of those who suffer.

He thought of nothing, so far as he could afterwards remember. At two

o’clock in the morning he returned to Courfeyrac’s quarters and flung

himself, without undressing, on his mattress. The sun was shining

brightly when he sank into that frightful leaden slumber which permits

ideas to go and come in the brain. When he awoke, he saw Courfeyrac,

Enjolras, Feuilly, and Combeferre standing in the room with their hats

on and all ready to go out.

Courfeyrac said to him:—

“Are you coming to General Lamarque’s funeral?”

It seemed to him that Courfeyrac was speaking Chinese.

He went out some time after them. He put in his pocket the pistols

which Javert had given him at the time of the adventure on the 3d of

February, and which had remained in his hands. These pistols were still

loaded. It would be difficult to say what vague thought he had in his

mind when he took them with him.

All day long he prowled about, without knowing where he was going; it

rained at times, he did not perceive it; for his dinner, he purchased a

penny roll at a baker’s, put it in his pocket and forgot it. It appears

that he took a bath in the Seine without being aware of it. There are

moments when a man has a furnace within his skull. Marius was passing

through one of those moments. He no longer hoped for anything; this

step he had taken since the preceding evening. He waited for night with

feverish impatience, he had but one idea clearly before his mind;—this

was, that at nine o’clock he should see Cosette. This last happiness

now constituted his whole future; after that, gloom. At intervals, as

he roamed through the most deserted boulevards, it seemed to him that

he heard strange noises in Paris. He thrust his head out of his reverie

and said: “Is there fighting on hand?”

At nightfall, at nine o’clock precisely, as he had promised Cosette, he

was in the Rue Plumet. When he approached the grating he forgot

everything. It was forty-eight hours since he had seen Cosette; he was

about to behold her once more; every other thought was effaced, and he

felt only a profound and unheard-of joy. Those minutes in which one

lives centuries always have this sovereign and wonderful property, that

at the moment when they are passing they fill the heart completely.

Marius displaced the bar, and rushed headlong into the garden. Cosette

was not at the spot where she ordinarily waited for him. He traversed

the thicket, and approached the recess near the flight of steps: “She

is waiting for me there,” said he. Cosette was not there. He raised his

eyes, and saw that the shutters of the house were closed. He made the

tour of the garden, the garden was deserted. Then he returned to the

house, and, rendered senseless by love, intoxicated, terrified,

exasperated with grief and uneasiness, like a master who returns home

at an evil hour, he tapped on the shutters. He knocked and knocked

again, at the risk of seeing the window open, and her father’s gloomy

face make its appearance, and demand: “What do you want?” This was

nothing in comparison with what he dimly caught a glimpse of. When he

had rapped, he lifted up his voice and called Cosette.—“Cosette!” he

cried; “Cosette!” he repeated imperiously. There was no reply. All was

over. No one in the garden; no one in the house.

Marius fixed his despairing eyes on that dismal house, which was as

black and as silent as a tomb and far more empty. He gazed at the stone

seat on which he had passed so many adorable hours with Cosette. Then

he seated himself on the flight of steps, his heart filled with

sweetness and resolution, he blessed his love in the depths of his

thought, and he said to himself that, since Cosette was gone, all that

there was left for him was to die.

All at once he heard a voice which seemed to proceed from the street,

and which was calling to him through the trees:—

“Mr. Marius!”

He started to his feet.

“Hey?” said he.

“Mr. Marius, are you there?”

“Yes.”

“Mr. Marius,” went on the voice, “your friends are waiting for you at

the barricade of the Rue de la Chanvrerie.”

This voice was not wholly unfamiliar to him. It resembled the hoarse,

rough voice of Éponine. Marius hastened to the gate, thrust aside the

movable bar, passed his head through the aperture, and saw some one who

appeared to him to be a young man, disappearing at a run into the

gloom.

CHAPTER III—M. MABEUF

Jean Valjean’s purse was of no use to M. Mabeuf. M. Mabeuf, in his

venerable, infantile austerity, had not accepted the gift of the stars;

he had not admitted that a star could coin itself into louis d’or. He

had not divined that what had fallen from heaven had come from

Gavroche. He had taken the purse to the police commissioner of the

quarter, as a lost article placed by the finder at the disposal of

claimants. The purse was actually lost. It is unnecessary to say that

no one claimed it, and that it did not succor M. Mabeuf.

Moreover, M. Mabeuf had continued his downward course.

His experiments on indigo had been no more successful in the Jardin des

Plantes than in his garden at Austerlitz. The year before he had owed

his housekeeper’s wages; now, as we have seen, he owed three quarters

of his rent. The pawnshop had sold the plates of his \_Flora\_ after the

expiration of thirteen months. Some coppersmith had made stewpans of

them. His copper plates gone, and being unable to complete even the

incomplete copies of his \_Flora\_ which were in his possession, he had

disposed of the text, at a miserable price, as waste paper, to a

second-hand bookseller. Nothing now remained to him of his life’s work.

He set to work to eat up the money for these copies. When he saw that

this wretched resource was becoming exhausted, he gave up his garden

and allowed it to run to waste. Before this, a long time before, he had

given up his two eggs and the morsel of beef which he ate from time to

time. He dined on bread and potatoes. He had sold the last of his

furniture, then all duplicates of his bedding, his clothing and his

blankets, then his herbariums and prints; but he still retained his

most precious books, many of which were of the greatest rarity, among

others, \_Les Quadrins Historiques de la Bible\_, edition of 1560; \_La

Concordance des Bibles\_, by Pierre de Besse; \_Les Marguerites de la

Marguerite\_, of Jean de La Haye, with a dedication to the Queen of

Navarre; the book \_de la Charge et Dignité de l’Ambassadeur\_, by the

Sieur de Villiers Hotman; a \_Florilegium Rabbinicum\_ of 1644; a

\_Tibullus\_ of 1567, with this magnificent inscription: \_Venetiis, in

ædibus Manutianis\_; and lastly, a Diogenes Laertius, printed at Lyons

in 1644, which contained the famous variant of the manuscript 411,

thirteenth century, of the Vatican, and those of the two manuscripts of

Venice, 393 and 394, consulted with such fruitful results by Henri

Estienne, and all the passages in Doric dialect which are only found in

the celebrated manuscript of the twelfth century belonging to the

Naples Library. M. Mabeuf never had any fire in his chamber, and went

to bed at sundown, in order not to consume any candles. It seemed as

though he had no longer any neighbors: people avoided him when he went

out; he perceived the fact. The wretchedness of a child interests a

mother, the wretchedness of a young man interests a young girl, the

wretchedness of an old man interests no one. It is, of all distresses,

the coldest. Still, Father Mabeuf had not entirely lost his childlike

serenity. His eyes acquired some vivacity when they rested on his

books, and he smiled when he gazed at the Diogenes Laertius, which was

a unique copy. His bookcase with glass doors was the only piece of

furniture which he had kept beyond what was strictly indispensable.

One day, Mother Plutarque said to him:—

“I have no money to buy any dinner.”

What she called dinner was a loaf of bread and four or five potatoes.

“On credit?” suggested M. Mabeuf.

“You know well that people refuse me.”

M. Mabeuf opened his bookcase, took a long look at all his books, one

after another, as a father obliged to decimate his children would gaze

upon them before making a choice, then seized one hastily, put it in

under his arm and went out. He returned two hours later, without

anything under his arm, laid thirty sous on the table, and said:—

“You will get something for dinner.”

From that moment forth, Mother Plutarque saw a sombre veil, which was

never more lifted, descend over the old man’s candid face.

On the following day, on the day after, and on the day after that, it

had to be done again.

M. Mabeuf went out with a book and returned with a coin. As the

second-hand dealers perceived that he was forced to sell, they

purchased of him for twenty sous that for which he had paid twenty

francs, sometimes at those very shops. Volume by volume, the whole

library went the same road. He said at times: “But I am eighty;” as

though he cherished some secret hope that he should arrive at the end

of his days before reaching the end of his books. His melancholy

increased. Once, however, he had a pleasure. He had gone out with a

Robert Estienne, which he had sold for thirty-five sous under the Quai

Malaquais, and he returned with an Aldus which he had bought for forty

sous in the Rue des Grès.—“I owe five sous,” he said, beaming on Mother

Plutarque. That day he had no dinner.

He belonged to the Horticultural Society. His destitution became known

there. The president of the society came to see him, promised to speak

to the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce about him, and did

so.—“Why, what!” exclaimed the Minister, “I should think so! An old

savant! a botanist! an inoffensive man! Something must be done for

him!” On the following day, M. Mabeuf received an invitation to dine

with the Minister. Trembling with joy, he showed the letter to Mother

Plutarque. “We are saved!” said he. On the day appointed, he went to

the Minister’s house. He perceived that his ragged cravat, his long,

square coat, and his waxed shoes astonished the ushers. No one spoke to

him, not even the Minister. About ten o’clock in the evening, while he

was still waiting for a word, he heard the Minister’s wife, a beautiful

woman in a low-necked gown whom he had not ventured to approach,

inquire: “Who is that old gentleman?” He returned home on foot at

midnight, in a driving rain-storm. He had sold an Elzevir to pay for a

carriage in which to go thither.

He had acquired the habit of reading a few pages in his Diogenes

Laertius every night, before he went to bed. He knew enough Greek to

enjoy the peculiarities of the text which he owned. He had now no other

enjoyment. Several weeks passed. All at once, Mother Plutarque fell

ill. There is one thing sadder than having no money with which to buy

bread at the baker’s and that is having no money to purchase drugs at

the apothecary’s. One evening, the doctor had ordered a very expensive

potion. And the malady was growing worse; a nurse was required. M.

Mabeuf opened his bookcase; there was nothing there. The last volume

had taken its departure. All that was left to him was Diogenes

Laertius. He put this unique copy under his arm, and went out. It was

the 4th of June, 1832; he went to the Porte Saint-Jacques, to Royal’s

successor, and returned with one hundred francs. He laid the pile of

five-franc pieces on the old serving-woman’s nightstand, and returned

to his chamber without saying a word.

On the following morning, at dawn, he seated himself on the overturned

post in his garden, and he could be seen over the top of the hedge,

sitting the whole morning motionless, with drooping head, his eyes

vaguely fixed on the withered flower-beds. It rained at intervals; the

old man did not seem to perceive the fact.

In the afternoon, extraordinary noises broke out in Paris. They

resembled shots and the clamors of a multitude.

Father Mabeuf raised his head. He saw a gardener passing, and

inquired:—

“What is it?”

The gardener, spade on back, replied in the most unconcerned tone:—

“It is the riots.”

“What riots?”

“Yes, they are fighting.”

“Why are they fighting?”

“Ah, good Heavens!” ejaculated the gardener.

“In what direction?” went on M. Mabeuf.

“In the neighborhood of the Arsenal.”

Father Mabeuf went to his room, took his hat, mechanically sought for a

book to place under his arm, found none, said: “Ah! truly!” and went

off with a bewildered air.

BOOK TENTH—THE 5TH OF JUNE, 1832

CHAPTER I—THE SURFACE OF THE QUESTION

Of what is revolt composed? Of nothing and of everything. Of an

electricity disengaged, little by little, of a flame suddenly darting

forth, of a wandering force, of a passing breath. This breath

encounters heads which speak, brains which dream, souls which suffer,

passions which burn, wretchedness which howls, and bears them away.

Whither?

At random. Athwart the state, the laws, athwart prosperity and the

insolence of others.

Irritated convictions, embittered enthusiasms, agitated indignations,

instincts of war which have been repressed, youthful courage which has

been exalted, generous blindness; curiosity, the taste for change, the

thirst for the unexpected, the sentiment which causes one to take

pleasure in reading the posters for the new play, and love, the

prompter’s whistle, at the theatre; the vague hatreds, rancors,

disappointments, every vanity which thinks that destiny has bankrupted

it; discomfort, empty dreams, ambitions that are hedged about, whoever

hopes for a downfall, some outcome, in short, at the very bottom, the

rabble, that mud which catches fire,—such are the elements of revolt.

That which is grandest and that which is basest; the beings who prowl

outside of all bounds, awaiting an occasion, bohemians, vagrants,

vagabonds of the crossroads, those who sleep at night in a desert of

houses with no other roof than the cold clouds of heaven, those who,

each day, demand their bread from chance and not from toil, the unknown

of poverty and nothingness, the bare-armed, the bare-footed, belong to

revolt. Whoever cherishes in his soul a secret revolt against any deed

whatever on the part of the state, of life or of fate, is ripe for

riot, and, as soon as it makes its appearance, he begins to quiver, and

to feel himself borne away with the whirlwind.

Revolt is a sort of waterspout in the social atmosphere which forms

suddenly in certain conditions of temperature, and which, as it eddies

about, mounts, descends, thunders, tears, razes, crushes, demolishes,

uproots, bearing with it great natures and small, the strong man and

the feeble mind, the tree trunk and the stalk of straw. Woe to him whom

it bears away as well as to him whom it strikes! It breaks the one

against the other.

It communicates to those whom it seizes an indescribable and

extraordinary power. It fills the firstcomer with the force of events;

it converts everything into projectiles. It makes a cannon-ball of a

rough stone, and a general of a porter.

If we are to believe certain oracles of crafty political views, a

little revolt is desirable from the point of view of power. System:

revolt strengthens those governments which it does not overthrow. It

puts the army to the test; it consecrates the bourgeoisie, it draws out

the muscles of the police; it demonstrates the force of the social

framework. It is an exercise in gymnastics; it is almost hygiene. Power

is in better health after a revolt, as a man is after a good rubbing

down.

Revolt, thirty years ago, was regarded from still other points of view.

There is for everything a theory, which proclaims itself “good sense”;

Philintus against Alcestis; mediation offered between the false and the

true; explanation, admonition, rather haughty extenuation which,

because it is mingled with blame and excuse, thinks itself wisdom, and

is often only pedantry. A whole political school called “the golden

mean” has been the outcome of this. As between cold water and hot

water, it is the lukewarm water party. This school with its false

depth, all on the surface, which dissects effects without going back to

first causes, chides from its height of a demi-science, the agitation

of the public square.

If we listen to this school, “The riots which complicated the affair of

1830 deprived that great event of a portion of its purity. The

Revolution of July had been a fine popular gale, abruptly followed by

blue sky. They made the cloudy sky reappear. They caused that

revolution, at first so remarkable for its unanimity, to degenerate

into a quarrel. In the Revolution of July, as in all progress

accomplished by fits and starts, there had been secret fractures; these

riots rendered them perceptible. It might have been said: ‘Ah! this is

broken.’ After the Revolution of July, one was sensible only of

deliverance; after the riots, one was conscious of a catastrophe.

“All revolt closes the shops, depresses the funds, throws the Exchange

into consternation, suspends commerce, clogs business, precipitates

failures; no more money, private fortunes rendered uneasy, public

credit shaken, industry disconcerted, capital withdrawing, work at a

discount, fear everywhere; counter-shocks in every town. Hence gulfs.

It has been calculated that the first day of a riot costs France twenty

millions, the second day forty, the third sixty, a three days’ uprising

costs one hundred and twenty millions, that is to say, if only the

financial result be taken into consideration, it is equivalent to a

disaster, a shipwreck or a lost battle, which should annihilate a fleet

of sixty ships of the line.

“No doubt, historically, uprisings have their beauty; the war of the

pavements is no less grandiose, and no less pathetic, than the war of

thickets: in the one there is the soul of forests, in the other the

heart of cities; the one has Jean Chouan, the other has a Jeanne.

Revolts have illuminated with a red glare all the most original points

of the Parisian character, generosity, devotion, stormy gayety,

students proving that bravery forms part of intelligence, the National

Guard invincible, bivouacs of shopkeepers, fortresses of street

urchins, contempt of death on the part of passers-by. Schools and

legions clashed together. After all, between the combatants, there was

only a difference of age; the race is the same; it is the same stoical

men who died at the age of twenty for their ideas, at forty for their

families. The army, always a sad thing in civil wars, opposed prudence

to audacity. Uprisings, while proving popular intrepidity, also

educated the courage of the bourgeois.

“This is well. But is all this worth the bloodshed? And to the

bloodshed add the future darkness, progress compromised, uneasiness

among the best men, honest liberals in despair, foreign absolutism

happy in these wounds dealt to revolution by its own hand, the

vanquished of 1830 triumphing and saying: ‘We told you so!’ Add Paris

enlarged, possibly, but France most assuredly diminished. Add, for all

must needs be told, the massacres which have too often dishonored the

victory of order grown ferocious over liberty gone mad. To sum up all,

uprisings have been disastrous.”

Thus speaks that approximation to wisdom with which the bourgeoisie,

that approximation to the people, so willingly contents itself.

For our parts, we reject this word \_uprisings\_ as too large, and

consequently as too convenient. We make a distinction between one

popular movement and another popular movement. We do not inquire

whether an uprising costs as much as a battle. Why a battle, in the

first place? Here the question of war comes up. Is war less of a

scourge than an uprising is of a calamity? And then, are all uprisings

calamities? And what if the revolt of July did cost a hundred and

twenty millions? The establishment of Philip V. in Spain cost France

two milliards. Even at the same price, we should prefer the 14th of

July. However, we reject these figures, which appear to be reasons and

which are only words. An uprising being given, we examine it by itself.

In all that is said by the doctrinarian objection above presented,

there is no question of anything but effect, we seek the cause.

We will be explicit.

CHAPTER II—THE ROOT OF THE MATTER

There is such a thing as an uprising, and there is such a thing as

insurrection; these are two separate phases of wrath; one is in the

wrong, the other is in the right. In democratic states, the only ones

which are founded on justice, it sometimes happens that the fraction

usurps; then the whole rises and the necessary claim of its rights may

proceed as far as resort to arms. In all questions which result from

collective sovereignty, the war of the whole against the fraction is

insurrection; the attack of the fraction against the whole is revolt;

according as the Tuileries contain a king or the Convention, they are

justly or unjustly attacked. The same cannon, pointed against the

populace, is wrong on the 10th of August, and right on the 14th of

Vendémiaire. Alike in appearance, fundamentally different in reality;

the Swiss defend the false, Bonaparte defends the true. That which

universal suffrage has effected in its liberty and in its sovereignty

cannot be undone by the street. It is the same in things pertaining

purely to civilization; the instinct of the masses, clear-sighted

to-day, may be troubled to-morrow. The same fury legitimate when

directed against Terray and absurd when directed against Turgot. The

destruction of machines, the pillage of warehouses, the breaking of

rails, the demolition of docks, the false routes of multitudes, the

refusal by the people of justice to progress, Ramus assassinated by

students, Rousseau driven out of Switzerland and stoned,—that is

revolt. Israel against Moses, Athens against Phocian, Rome against

Cicero,—that is an uprising; Paris against the Bastille,—that is

insurrection. The soldiers against Alexander, the sailors against

Christopher Columbus,—this is the same revolt; impious revolt; why?

Because Alexander is doing for Asia with the sword that which

Christopher Columbus is doing for America with the compass; Alexander

like Columbus, is finding a world. These gifts of a world to

civilization are such augmentations of light, that all resistance in

that case is culpable. Sometimes the populace counterfeits fidelity to

itself. The masses are traitors to the people. Is there, for example,

anything stranger than that long and bloody protest of dealers in

contraband salt, a legitimate chronic revolt, which, at the decisive

moment, on the day of salvation, at the very hour of popular victory,

espouses the throne, turns into \_chouannerie\_, and, from having been an

insurrection against, becomes an uprising for, sombre masterpieces of

ignorance! The contraband salt dealer escapes the royal gibbets, and

with a rope’s end round his neck, mounts the white cockade. “Death to

the salt duties,” brings forth, “Long live the King!” The assassins of

Saint-Barthélemy, the cut-throats of September, the manslaughterers of

Avignon, the assassins of Coligny, the assassins of Madam Lamballe, the

assassins of Brune, Miquelets, Verdets, Cadenettes, the companions of

Jéhu, the chevaliers of Brassard,—behold an uprising. La Vendée is a

grand, catholic uprising. The sound of right in movement is

recognizable, it does not always proceed from the trembling of excited

masses; there are mad rages, there are cracked bells, all tocsins do

not give out the sound of bronze. The brawl of passions and ignorances

is quite another thing from the shock of progress. Show me in what

direction you are going. Rise, if you will, but let it be that you may

grow great. There is no insurrection except in a forward direction. Any

other sort of rising is bad; every violent step towards the rear is a

revolt; to retreat is to commit a deed of violence against the human

race. Insurrection is a fit of rage on the part of truth; the pavements

which the uprising disturbs give forth the spark of right. These

pavements bequeath to the uprising only their mud. Danton against Louis

XIV. is insurrection; Hébert against Danton is revolt.

Hence it results that if insurrection in given cases may be, as

Lafayette says, the most holy of duties, an uprising may be the most

fatal of crimes.

There is also a difference in the intensity of heat; insurrection is

often a volcano, revolt is often only a fire of straw.

Revolt, as we have said, is sometimes found among those in power.

Polignac is a rioter; Camille Desmoulins is one of the governing

powers.

Insurrection is sometimes resurrection.

The solution of everything by universal suffrage being an absolutely

modern fact, and all history anterior to this fact being, for the space

of four thousand years, filled with violated right, and the suffering

of peoples, each epoch of history brings with it that protest of which

it is capable. Under the Cæsars, there was no insurrection, but there

was Juvenal.

The \_facit indignatio\_ replaces the Gracchi.

Under the Cæsars, there is the exile to Syene; there is also the man of

the \_Annales\_. We do not speak of the immense exile of Patmos who, on

his part also, overwhelms the real world with a protest in the name of

the ideal world, who makes of his vision an enormous satire and casts

on Rome-Nineveh, on Rome-Babylon, on Rome-Sodom, the flaming reflection

of the Apocalypse. John on his rock is the sphinx on its pedestal; we

may understand him, he is a Jew, and it is Hebrew; but the man who

writes the \_Annales\_ is of the Latin race, let us rather say he is a

Roman.

As the Neros reign in a black way, they should be painted to match. The

work of the graving-tool alone would be too pale; there must be poured

into the channel a concentrated prose which bites.

Despots count for something in the question of philosophers. A word

that is chained is a terrible word. The writer doubles and trebles his

style when silence is imposed on a nation by its master. From this

silence there arises a certain mysterious plenitude which filters into

thought and there congeals into bronze. The compression of history

produces conciseness in the historian. The granite solidity of such and

such a celebrated prose is nothing but the accumulation effected by the

tyrant.

Tyranny constrains the writer to conditions of diameter which are

augmentations of force. The Ciceronian period, which hardly sufficed

for Verres, would be blunted on Caligula. The less spread of sail in

the phrase, the more intensity in the blow. Tacitus thinks with all his

might.

The honesty of a great heart, condensed in justice and truth,

overwhelms as with lightning.

Be it remarked, in passing, that Tacitus is not historically superposed

upon Cæsar. The Tiberii were reserved for him. Cæsar and Tacitus are

two successive phenomena, a meeting between whom seems to be

mysteriously avoided, by the One who, when He sets the centuries on the

stage, regulates the entrances and the exits. Cæsar is great, Tacitus

is great; God spares these two greatnesses by not allowing them to

clash with one another. The guardian of justice, in striking Cæsar,

might strike too hard and be unjust. God does not will it. The great

wars of Africa and Spain, the pirates of Sicily destroyed, civilization

introduced into Gaul, into Britanny, into Germany,—all this glory

covers the Rubicon. There is here a sort of delicacy of the divine

justice, hesitating to let loose upon the illustrious usurper the

formidable historian, sparing Cæsar Tacitus, and according extenuating

circumstances to genius.

Certainly, despotism remains despotism, even under the despot of

genius. There is corruption under all illustrious tyrants, but the

moral pest is still more hideous under infamous tyrants. In such

reigns, nothing veils the shame; and those who make examples, Tacitus

as well as Juvenal, slap this ignominy which cannot reply, in the face,

more usefully in the presence of all humanity.

Rome smells worse under Vitellius than under Sylla. Under Claudius and

under Domitian, there is a deformity of baseness corresponding to the

repulsiveness of the tyrant. The villainy of slaves is a direct product

of the despot; a miasma exhales from these cowering consciences wherein

the master is reflected; public powers are unclean; hearts are small;

consciences are dull, souls are like vermin; thus it is under

Caracalla, thus it is under Commodus, thus it is under Heliogabalus,

while, from the Roman Senate, under Cæsar, there comes nothing but the

odor of the dung which is peculiar to the eyries of the eagles.

Hence the advent, apparently tardy, of the Tacituses and the Juvenals;

it is in the hour for evidence, that the demonstrator makes his

appearance.

But Juvenal and Tacitus, like Isaiah in Biblical times, like Dante in

the Middle Ages, is man; riot and insurrection are the multitude, which

is sometimes right and sometimes wrong.

In the majority of cases, riot proceeds from a material fact;

insurrection is always a moral phenomenon. Riot is Masaniello;

insurrection, Spartacus. Insurrection borders on mind, riot on the

stomach; Gaster grows irritated; but Gaster, assuredly, is not always

in the wrong. In questions of famine, riot, Buzançais, for example,

holds a true, pathetic, and just point of departure. Nevertheless, it

remains a riot. Why? It is because, right at bottom, it was wrong in

form. Shy although in the right, violent although strong, it struck at

random; it walked like a blind elephant; it left behind it the corpses

of old men, of women, and of children; it wished the blood of

inoffensive and innocent persons without knowing why. The nourishment

of the people is a good object; to massacre them is a bad means.

All armed protests, even the most legitimate, even that of the 10th of

August, even that of July 14th, begin with the same troubles. Before

the right gets set free, there is foam and tumult. In the beginning,

the insurrection is a riot, just as a river is a torrent. Ordinarily it

ends in that ocean: revolution. Sometimes, however, coming from those

lofty mountains which dominate the moral horizon, justice, wisdom,

reason, right, formed of the pure snow of the ideal, after a long fall

from rock to rock, after having reflected the sky in its transparency

and increased by a hundred affluents in the majestic mien of triumph,

insurrection is suddenly lost in some quagmire, as the Rhine is in a

swamp.

All this is of the past, the future is another thing. Universal

suffrage has this admirable property, that it dissolves riot in its

inception, and, by giving the vote to insurrection, it deprives it of

its arms. The disappearance of wars, of street wars as well as of wars

on the frontiers, such is the inevitable progression. Whatever To-day

may be, To-morrow will be peace.

However, insurrection, riot, and points of difference between the

former and the latter,—the bourgeois, properly speaking, knows nothing

of such shades. In his mind, all is sedition, rebellion pure and

simple, the revolt of the dog against his master, an attempt to bite

whom must be punished by the chain and the kennel, barking, snapping,

until such day as the head of the dog, suddenly enlarged, is outlined

vaguely in the gloom face to face with the lion.

Then the bourgeois shouts: “Long live the people!”

This explanation given, what does the movement of June, 1832, signify,

so far as history is concerned? Is it a revolt? Is it an insurrection?

It may happen to us, in placing this formidable event on the stage, to

say revolt now and then, but merely to distinguish superficial facts,

and always preserving the distinction between revolt, the form, and

insurrection, the foundation.

This movement of 1832 had, in its rapid outbreak and in its melancholy

extinction, so much grandeur, that even those who see in it only an

uprising, never refer to it otherwise than with respect. For them, it

is like a relic of 1830. Excited imaginations, say they, are not to be

calmed in a day. A revolution cannot be cut off short. It must needs

undergo some undulations before it returns to a state of rest, like a

mountain sinking into the plain. There are no Alps without their Jura,

nor Pyrenees without the Asturias.

This pathetic crisis of contemporary history which the memory of

Parisians calls “the epoch of the riots,” is certainly a characteristic

hour amid the stormy hours of this century. A last word, before we

enter on the recital.

The facts which we are about to relate belong to that dramatic and

living reality, which the historian sometimes neglects for lack of time

and space. There, nevertheless, we insist upon it, is life,

palpitation, human tremor. Petty details, as we think we have already

said, are, so to speak, the foliage of great events, and are lost in

the distance of history. The epoch, surnamed “of the riots,” abounds in

details of this nature. Judicial inquiries have not revealed, and

perhaps have not sounded the depths, for another reason than history.

We shall therefore bring to light, among the known and published

peculiarities, things which have not heretofore been known, about facts

over which have passed the forgetfulness of some, and the death of

others. The majority of the actors in these gigantic scenes have

disappeared; beginning with the very next day they held their peace;

but of what we shall relate, we shall be able to say: “We have seen

this.” We alter a few names, for history relates and does not inform

against, but the deed which we shall paint will be genuine. In

accordance with the conditions of the book which we are now writing, we

shall show only one side and one episode, and certainly, the least

known at that, of the two days, the 5th and the 6th of June, 1832, but

we shall do it in such wise that the reader may catch a glimpse,

beneath the gloomy veil which we are about to lift, of the real form of

this frightful public adventure.

CHAPTER III—A BURIAL; AN OCCASION TO BE BORN AGAIN

In the spring of 1832, although the cholera had been chilling all minds

for the last three months and had cast over their agitation an

indescribable and gloomy pacification, Paris had already long been ripe

for commotion. As we have said, the great city resembles a piece of

artillery; when it is loaded, it suffices for a spark to fall, and the

shot is discharged. In June, 1832, the spark was the death of General

Lamarque.

Lamarque was a man of renown and of action. He had had in succession,

under the Empire and under the Restoration, the sorts of bravery

requisite for the two epochs, the bravery of the battle-field and the

bravery of the tribune. He was as eloquent as he had been valiant; a

sword was discernible in his speech. Like Foy, his predecessor, after

upholding the command, he upheld liberty; he sat between the left and

the extreme left, beloved of the people because he accepted the chances

of the future, beloved of the populace because he had served the

Emperor well; he was, in company with Comtes Gérard and Drouet, one of

Napoleon’s marshals \_in petto\_. The treaties of 1815 removed him as a

personal offence. He hated Wellington with a downright hatred which

pleased the multitude; and, for seventeen years, he majestically

preserved the sadness of Waterloo, paying hardly any attention to

intervening events. In his death agony, at his last hour, he clasped to

his breast a sword which had been presented to him by the officers of

the Hundred Days. Napoleon had died uttering the word \_army\_, Lamarque

uttering the word \_country\_.

His death, which was expected, was dreaded by the people as a loss, and

by the government as an occasion. This death was an affliction. Like

everything that is bitter, affliction may turn to revolt. This is what

took place.

On the preceding evening, and on the morning of the 5th of June, the

day appointed for Lamarque’s burial, the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, which

the procession was to touch at, assumed a formidable aspect. This

tumultuous network of streets was filled with rumors. They armed

themselves as best they might. Joiners carried off door-weights of

their establishment “to break down doors.” One of them had made himself

a dagger of a stocking-weaver’s hook by breaking off the hook and

sharpening the stump. Another, who was in a fever “to attack,” slept

wholly dressed for three days. A carpenter named Lombier met a comrade,

who asked him: “Whither are you going?” “Eh! well, I have no weapons.”

“What then?” “I’m going to my timber-yard to get my compasses.” “What

for?” “I don’t know,” said Lombier. A certain Jacqueline, an

expeditious man, accosted some passing artisans: “Come here, you!” He

treated them to ten sous’ worth of wine and said: “Have you work?”

“No.” “Go to Filspierre, between the Barrière Charonne and the Barrière

Montreuil, and you will find work.” At Filspierre’s they found

cartridges and arms. Certain well-known leaders were going the rounds,

that is to say, running from one house to another, to collect their

men. At Barthélemy’s, near the Barrière du Trône, at Capel’s, near the

Petit-Chapeau, the drinkers accosted each other with a grave air. They

were heard to say: “Have you your pistol?” “Under my blouse.” “And

you?” “Under my shirt.” In the Rue Traversière, in front of the Bland

workshop, and in the yard of the Maison-Brulée, in front of tool-maker

Bernier’s, groups whispered together. Among them was observed a certain

Mavot, who never remained more than a week in one shop, as the masters

always discharged him “because they were obliged to dispute with him

every day.” Mavot was killed on the following day at the barricade of

the Rue Ménilmontant. Pretot, who was destined to perish also in the

struggle, seconded Mavot, and to the question: “What is your object?”

he replied: \_“Insurrection.”\_ Workmen assembled at the corner of the

Rue de Bercy, waited for a certain Lemarin, the revolutionary agent for

the Faubourg Saint-Marceau. Watchwords were exchanged almost publicly.

On the 5th of June, accordingly, a day of mingled rain and sun, General

Lamarque’s funeral procession traversed Paris with official military

pomp, somewhat augmented through precaution. Two battalions, with

draped drums and reversed arms, ten thousand National Guards, with

their swords at their sides, escorted the coffin. The hearse was drawn

by young men. The officers of the Invalides came immediately behind it,

bearing laurel branches. Then came an innumerable, strange, agitated

multitude, the sectionaries of the Friends of the People, the Law

School, the Medical School, refugees of all nationalities, and Spanish,

Italian, German, and Polish flags, tricolored horizontal banners, every

possible sort of banner, children waving green boughs, stone-cutters

and carpenters who were on strike at the moment, printers who were

recognizable by their paper caps, marching two by two, three by three,

uttering cries, nearly all of them brandishing sticks, some brandishing

sabres, without order and yet with a single soul, now a tumultuous

rout, again a column. Squads chose themselves leaders; a man armed with

a pair of pistols in full view, seemed to pass the host in review, and

the files separated before him. On the side alleys of the boulevards,

in the branches of the trees, on balconies, in windows, on the roofs,

swarmed the heads of men, women, and children; all eyes were filled

with anxiety. An armed throng was passing, and a terrified throng

looked on.

The Government, on its side, was taking observations. It observed with

its hand on its sword. Four squadrons of carabineers could be seen in

the Place Louis XV. in their saddles, with their trumpets at their

head, cartridge-boxes filled and muskets loaded, all in readiness to

march; in the Latin country and at the Jardin des Plantes, the

Municipal Guard echelonned from street to street; at the

Halle-aux-Vins, a squadron of dragoons; at the Grève half of the 12th

Light Infantry, the other half being at the Bastille; the 6th Dragoons

at the Célestins; and the courtyard of the Louvre full of artillery.

The remainder of the troops were confined to their barracks, without

reckoning the regiments of the environs of Paris. Power being uneasy,

held suspended over the menacing multitude twenty-four thousand

soldiers in the city and thirty thousand in the banlieue.

Divers reports were in circulation in the cortège. Legitimist tricks

were hinted at; they spoke of the Duc de Reichstadt, whom God had

marked out for death at that very moment when the populace were

designating him for the Empire. One personage, whose name has remained

unknown, announced that at a given hour two overseers who had been won

over, would throw open the doors of a factory of arms to the people.

That which predominated on the uncovered brows of the majority of those

present was enthusiasm mingled with dejection. Here and there, also, in

that multitude given over to such violent but noble emotions, there

were visible genuine visages of criminals and ignoble mouths which

said: “Let us plunder!” There are certain agitations which stir up the

bottoms of marshes and make clouds of mud rise through the water. A

phenomenon to which “well drilled” policemen are no strangers.

The procession proceeded, with feverish slowness, from the house of the

deceased, by way of the boulevards as far as the Bastille. It rained

from time to time; the rain mattered nothing to that throng. Many

incidents, the coffin borne round the Vendome column, stones thrown at

the Duc de Fitz-James, who was seen on a balcony with his hat on his

head, the Gallic cock torn from a popular flag and dragged in the mire,

a policeman wounded with a blow from a sword at the Porte Saint-Martin,

an officer of the 12th Light Infantry saying aloud: “I am a

Republican,” the Polytechnic School coming up unexpectedly against

orders to remain at home, the shouts of: “Long live the Polytechnique!

Long live the Republic!” marked the passage of the funeral train. At

the Bastille, long files of curious and formidable people who descended

from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, effected a junction with the

procession, and a certain terrible seething began to agitate the

throng.

One man was heard to say to another: “Do you see that fellow with a red

beard, he’s the one who will give the word when we are to fire.” It

appears that this red beard was present, at another riot, the Quénisset

affair, entrusted with this same function.

The hearse passed the Bastille, traversed the small bridge, and reached

the esplanade of the bridge of Austerlitz. There it halted. The crowd,

surveyed at that moment with a bird’s-eye view, would have presented

the aspect of a comet whose head was on the esplanade and whose tail

spread out over the Quai Bourdon, covered the Bastille, and was

prolonged on the boulevard as far as the Porte Saint-Martin. A circle

was traced around the hearse. The vast rout held their peace. Lafayette

spoke and bade Lamarque farewell. This was a touching and august

instant, all heads uncovered, all hearts beat high.

All at once, a man on horseback, clad in black, made his appearance in

the middle of the group with a red flag, others say, with a pike

surmounted with a red liberty-cap. Lafayette turned aside his head.

Exelmans quitted the procession.

This red flag raised a storm, and disappeared in the midst of it. From

the Boulevard Bourdon to the bridge of Austerlitz one of those clamors

which resemble billows stirred the multitude. Two prodigious shouts

went up: “Lamarque to the Pantheon!—Lafayette to the Town-hall!” Some

young men, amid the declamations of the throng, harnessed themselves

and began to drag Lamarque in the hearse across the bridge of

Austerlitz and Lafayette in a hackney-coach along the Quai Morland.

In the crowd which surrounded and cheered Lafayette, it was noticed

that a German showed himself named Ludwig Snyder, who died a

centenarian afterwards, who had also been in the war of 1776, and who

had fought at Trenton under Washington, and at Brandywine under

Lafayette.

In the meantime, the municipal cavalry on the left bank had been set in

motion, and came to bar the bridge, on the right bank the dragoons

emerged from the Célestins and deployed along the Quai Morland. The men

who were dragging Lafayette suddenly caught sight of them at the corner

of the quay and shouted: “The dragoons!” The dragoons advanced at a

walk, in silence, with their pistols in their holsters, their swords in

their scabbards, their guns slung in their leather sockets, with an air

of gloomy expectation.

They halted two hundred paces from the little bridge. The carriage in

which sat Lafayette advanced to them, their ranks opened and allowed it

to pass, and then closed behind it. At that moment the dragoons and the

crowd touched. The women fled in terror. What took place during that

fatal minute? No one can say. It is the dark moment when two clouds

come together. Some declare that a blast of trumpets sounding the

charge was heard in the direction of the Arsenal, others that a blow

from a dagger was given by a child to a dragoon. The fact is, that

three shots were suddenly discharged: the first killed Cholet, chief of

the squadron, the second killed an old deaf woman who was in the act of

closing her window, the third singed the shoulder of an officer; a

woman screamed: “They are beginning too soon!” and all at once, a

squadron of dragoons which had remained in the barracks up to this

time, was seen to debouch at a gallop with bared swords, through the

Rue Bassompierre and the Boulevard Bourdon, sweeping all before them.

Then all is said, the tempest is loosed, stones rain down, a fusillade

breaks forth, many precipitate themselves to the bottom of the bank,

and pass the small arm of the Seine, now filled in, the timber-yards of

the Isle Louviers, that vast citadel ready to hand, bristle with

combatants, stakes are torn up, pistol-shots fired, a barricade begun,

the young men who are thrust back pass the Austerlitz bridge with the

hearse at a run, and the municipal guard, the carabineers rush up, the

dragoons ply their swords, the crowd disperses in all directions, a

rumor of war flies to all four quarters of Paris, men shout: “To arms!”

they run, tumble down, flee, resist. Wrath spreads abroad the riot as

wind spreads a fire.

CHAPTER IV—THE EBULLITIONS OF FORMER DAYS

Nothing is more extraordinary than the first breaking out of a riot.

Everything bursts forth everywhere at once. Was it foreseen? Yes. Was

it prepared? No. Whence comes it? From the pavements. Whence falls it?

From the clouds. Here insurrection assumes the character of a plot;

there of an improvisation. The first comer seizes a current of the

throng and leads it whither he wills. A beginning full of terror, in

which is mingled a sort of formidable gayety. First come clamors, the

shops are closed, the displays of the merchants disappear; then come

isolated shots; people flee; blows from gun-stocks beat against

portes-cochères, servants can be heard laughing in the courtyards of

houses and saying: “There’s going to be a row!”

A quarter of an hour had not elapsed when this is what was taking place

at twenty different spots in Paris at once.

In the Rue Sainte-Croix-de-la-Bretonnerie, twenty young men, bearded

and with long hair, entered a dram-shop and emerged a moment later,

carrying a horizontal tricolored flag covered with crape, and having at

their head three men armed, one with a sword, one with a gun, and the

third with a pike.

In the Rue des Nonaindières, a very well-dressed bourgeois, who had a

prominent belly, a sonorous voice, a bald head, a lofty brow, a black

beard, and one of these stiff moustaches which will not lie flat,

offered cartridges publicly to passers-by.

In the Rue Saint-Pierre-Montmartre, men with bare arms carried about a

black flag, on which could be read in white letters this inscription:

“Republic or Death!” In the Rue des Jeûneurs, Rue du Cadran, Rue

Montorgueil, Rue Mandar, groups appeared waving flags on which could be

distinguished in gold letters, the word \_section\_ with a number. One of

these flags was red and blue with an almost imperceptible stripe of

white between.

They pillaged a factory of small-arms on the Boulevard Saint-Martin,

and three armorers’ shops, the first in the Rue Beaubourg, the second

in the Rue Michel-le-Comte, the other in the Rue du Temple. In a few

minutes, the thousand hands of the crowd had seized and carried off two

hundred and thirty guns, nearly all double-barrelled, sixty-four

swords, and eighty-three pistols. In order to provide more arms, one

man took the gun, the other the bayonet.

Opposite the Quai de la Grève, young men armed with muskets installed

themselves in the houses of some women for the purpose of firing. One

of them had a flint-lock. They rang, entered, and set about making

cartridges. One of these women relates: “I did not know what cartridges

were; it was my husband who told me.”

One cluster broke into a curiosity shop in the Rue des

Vieilles-Haudriettes, and seized yataghans and Turkish arms.

The body of a mason who had been killed by a gun-shot lay in the Rue de

la Perle.

And then on the right bank, the left bank, on the quays, on the

boulevards, in the Latin country, in the quarter of the Halles, panting

men, artisans, students, members of sections read proclamations and

shouted: “To arms!” broke street lanterns, unharnessed carriages,

unpaved the streets, broke in the doors of houses, uprooted trees,

rummaged cellars, rolled out hogsheads, heaped up paving-stones, rough

slabs, furniture and planks, and made barricades.

They forced the bourgeois to assist them in this. They entered the

dwellings of women, they forced them to hand over the swords and guns

of their absent husbands, and they wrote on the door, with whiting:

“The arms have been delivered”; some signed “their names” to receipts

for the guns and swords and said: “Send for them to-morrow at the

Mayor’s office.” They disarmed isolated sentinels and National

Guardsmen in the streets on their way to the Townhall. They tore the

epaulets from officers. In the Rue du Cimitière-Saint-Nicholas, an

officer of the National Guard, on being pursued by a crowd armed with

clubs and foils, took refuge with difficulty in a house, whence he was

only able to emerge at nightfall and in disguise.

In the Quartier Saint-Jacques, the students swarmed out of their hotels

and ascended the Rue Saint-Hyacinthe to the Café du Progrèss, or

descended to the Café des Sept-Billards, in the Rue des Mathurins.

There, in front of the door, young men mounted on the stone

corner-posts, distributed arms. They plundered the timber-yard in the

Rue Transnonain in order to obtain material for barricades. On a single

point the inhabitants resisted, at the corner of the Rue Sainte-Avoye

and the Rue Simon-Le-Franc, where they destroyed the barricade with

their own hands. At a single point the insurgents yielded; they

abandoned a barricade begun in the Rue de Temple after having fired on

a detachment of the National Guard, and fled through the Rue de la

Corderie. The detachment picked up in the barricade a red flag, a

package of cartridges, and three hundred pistol-balls. The National

Guardsmen tore up the flag, and carried off its tattered remains on the

points of their bayonets.

All that we are here relating slowly and successively took place

simultaneously at all points of the city in the midst of a vast tumult,

like a mass of tongues of lightning in one clap of thunder. In less

than an hour, twenty-seven barricades sprang out of the earth in the

quarter of the Halles alone. In the centre was that famous house No.

50, which was the fortress of Jeanne and her six hundred companions,

and which, flanked on the one hand by a barricade at Saint-Merry, and

on the other by a barricade of the Rue Maubuée, commanded three

streets, the Rue des Arcis, the Rue Saint-Martin, and the Rue

Aubry-le-Boucher, which it faced. The barricades at right angles fell

back, the one of the Rue Montorgueil on the Grande-Truanderie, the

other of the Rue Geoffroy-Langevin on the Rue Sainte-Avoye. Without

reckoning innumerable barricades in twenty other quarters of Paris, in

the Marais, at Mont-Sainte-Geneviève; one in the Rue Ménilmontant,

where was visible a porte-cochère torn from its hinges; another near

the little bridge of the Hôtel-Dieu made with an “écossais,” which had

been unharnessed and overthrown, three hundred paces from the

Prefecture of Police.

At the barricade of the Rue des Ménétriers, a well-dressed man

distributed money to the workmen. At the barricade of the Rue Grenetat,

a horseman made his appearance and handed to the one who seemed to be

the commander of the barricade what had the appearance of a roll of

silver. “Here,” said he, “this is to pay expenses, wine, et cætera.” A

light-haired young man, without a cravat, went from barricade to

barricade, carrying pass-words. Another, with a naked sword, a blue

police cap on his head, placed sentinels. In the interior, beyond the

barricades, the wine-shops and porters’ lodges were converted into

guard-houses. Otherwise the riot was conducted after the most

scientific military tactics. The narrow, uneven, sinuous streets, full

of angles and turns, were admirably chosen; the neighborhood of the

Halles, in particular, a network of streets more intricate than a

forest. The Society of the Friends of the People had, it was said,

undertaken to direct the insurrection in the Quartier Sainte-Avoye. A

man killed in the Rue du Ponceau who was searched had on his person a

plan of Paris.

That which had really undertaken the direction of the uprising was a

sort of strange impetuosity which was in the air. The insurrection had

abruptly built barricades with one hand, and with the other seized

nearly all the posts of the garrison. In less than three hours, like a

train of powder catching fire, the insurgents had invaded and occupied,

on the right bank, the Arsenal, the Mayoralty of the Place Royale, the

whole of the Marais, the Popincourt arms manufactory, la Galiote, the

Château-d’Eau, and all the streets near the Halles; on the left bank,

the barracks of the Veterans, Sainte-Pélagie, the Place Maubert, the

powder magazine of the Deux-Moulins, and all the barriers. At five

o’clock in the evening, they were masters of the Bastille, of the

Lingerie, of the Blancs-Manteaux; their scouts had reached the Place

des Victoires, and menaced the Bank, the Petits-Pères barracks, and the

Post-Office. A third of Paris was in the hands of the rioters.

The conflict had been begun on a gigantic scale at all points; and, as

a result of the disarming domiciliary visits, and armorers’ shops

hastily invaded, was, that the combat which had begun with the throwing

of stones was continued with gun-shots.

About six o’clock in the evening, the Passage du Saumon became the

field of battle. The uprising was at one end, the troops were at the

other. They fired from one gate to the other. An observer, a dreamer,

the author of this book, who had gone to get a near view of this

volcano, found himself in the passage between the two fires. All that

he had to protect him from the bullets was the swell of the two

half-columns which separate the shops; he remained in this delicate

situation for nearly half an hour.

Meanwhile the call to arms was beaten, the National Guard armed in

haste, the legions emerged from the Mayoralities, the regiments from

their barracks. Opposite the passage de l’Ancre a drummer received a

blow from a dagger. Another, in the Rue du Cygne, was assailed by

thirty young men who broke his instrument, and took away his sword.

Another was killed in the Rue Grenier-Saint-Lazare. In the Rue

Michel-le-Comte, three officers fell dead one after the other. Many of

the Municipal Guards, on being wounded, in the Rue des Lombards,

retreated.

In front of the Cour-Batave, a detachment of National Guards found a

red flag bearing the following inscription: \_Republican revolution, No.

127\_. Was this a revolution, in fact?

The insurrection had made of the centre of Paris a sort of

inextricable, tortuous, colossal citadel.

There was the hearth; there, evidently, was the question. All the rest

was nothing but skirmishes. The proof that all would be decided there

lay in the fact that there was no fighting going on there as yet.

In some regiments, the soldiers were uncertain, which added to the

fearful uncertainty of the crisis. They recalled the popular ovation

which had greeted the neutrality of the 53d of the Line in July, 1830.

Two intrepid men, tried in great wars, the Marshal Lobau and General

Bugeaud, were in command, Bugeaud under Lobau. Enormous patrols,

composed of battalions of the Line, enclosed in entire companies of the

National Guard, and preceded by a commissary of police wearing his

scarf of office, went to reconnoitre the streets in rebellion. The

insurgents, on their side, placed videttes at the corners of all open

spaces, and audaciously sent their patrols outside the barricades. Each

side was watching the other. The Government, with an army in its hand,

hesitated; the night was almost upon them, and the Saint-Merry tocsin

began to make itself heard. The Minister of War at that time, Marshal

Soult, who had seen Austerlitz, regarded this with a gloomy air.

These old sailors, accustomed to correct manœuvres and having as

resource and guide only tactics, that compass of battles, are utterly

disconcerted in the presence of that immense foam which is called

public wrath.

The National Guards of the suburbs rushed up in haste and disorder. A

battalion of the 12th Light came at a run from Saint-Denis, the 14th of

the Line arrived from Courbevoie, the batteries of the Military School

had taken up their position on the Carrousel; cannons were descending

from Vincennes.

Solitude was formed around the Tuileries. Louis Philippe was perfectly

serene.

CHAPTER V—ORIGINALITY OF PARIS

During the last two years, as we have said, Paris had witnessed more

than one insurrection. Nothing is, generally, more singularly calm than

the physiognomy of Paris during an uprising beyond the bounds of the

rebellious quarters. Paris very speedily accustoms herself to

anything,—it is only a riot,—and Paris has so many affairs on hand,

that she does not put herself out for so small a matter. These colossal

cities alone can offer such spectacles. These immense enclosures alone

can contain at the same time civil war and an odd and indescribable

tranquillity. Ordinarily, when an insurrection commences, when the

shop-keeper hears the drum, the call to arms, the general alarm, he

contents himself with the remark:—

“There appears to be a squabble in the Rue Saint-Martin.”

Or:—

“In the Faubourg Saint-Antoine.”

Often he adds carelessly:—

“Or somewhere in that direction.”

Later on, when the heart-rending and mournful hubbub of musketry and

firing by platoons becomes audible, the shopkeeper says:—

“It’s getting hot! Hullo, it’s getting hot!”

A moment later, the riot approaches and gains in force, he shuts up his

shop precipitately, hastily dons his uniform, that is to say, he places

his merchandise in safety and risks his own person.

Men fire in a square, in a passage, in a blind alley; they take and

re-take the barricade; blood flows, the grape-shot riddles the fronts

of the houses, the balls kill people in their beds, corpses encumber

the streets. A few streets away, the shock of billiard-balls can be

heard in the cafés.

The theatres open their doors and present vaudevilles; the curious

laugh and chat a couple of paces distant from these streets filled with

war. Hackney-carriages go their way; passers-by are going to a dinner

somewhere in town. Sometimes in the very quarter where the fighting is

going on.

In 1831, a fusillade was stopped to allow a wedding party to pass.

At the time of the insurrection of 1839, in the Rue Saint-Martin a

little, infirm old man, pushing a hand-cart surmounted by a tricolored

rag, in which he had carafes filled with some sort of liquid, went and

came from barricade to troops and from troops to the barricade,

offering his glasses of cocoa impartially,—now to the Government, now

to anarchy.

Nothing can be stranger; and this is the peculiar character of

uprisings in Paris, which cannot be found in any other capital. To this

end, two things are requisite, the size of Paris and its gayety. The

city of Voltaire and Napoleon is necessary.

On this occasion, however, in the resort to arms of June 5th, 1832, the

great city felt something which was, perhaps, stronger than itself. It

was afraid.

Closed doors, windows, and shutters were to be seen everywhere, in the

most distant and most “disinterested” quarters. The courageous took to

arms, the poltroons hid. The busy and heedless passer-by disappeared.

Many streets were empty at four o’clock in the morning.

Alarming details were hawked about, fatal news was disseminated,—that

\_they\_ were masters of the Bank;—that there were six hundred of them in

the Cloister of Saint-Merry alone, entrenched and embattled in the

church; that the line was not to be depended on; that Armand Carrel had

been to see Marshal Clausel and that the Marshal had said: “Get a

regiment first”; that Lafayette was ill, but that he had said to them,

nevertheless: “I am with you. I will follow you wherever there is room

for a chair”; that one must be on one’s guard; that at night there

would be people pillaging isolated dwellings in the deserted corners of

Paris (there the imagination of the police, that Anne Radcliffe mixed

up with the Government was recognizable); that a battery had been

established in the Rue Aubry le Boucher; that Lobau and Bugeaud were

putting their heads together, and that, at midnight, or at daybreak at

latest, four columns would march simultaneously on the centre of the

uprising, the first coming from the Bastille, the second from the Porte

Saint-Martin, the third from the Grève, the fourth from the Halles;

that perhaps, also, the troops would evacuate Paris and withdraw to the

Champ-de-Mars; that no one knew what would happen, but that this time,

it certainly was serious.

People busied themselves over Marshal Soult’s hesitations. Why did not

he attack at once? It is certain that he was profoundly absorbed. The

old lion seemed to scent an unknown monster in that gloom.

Evening came, the theatres did not open; the patrols circulated with an

air of irritation; passers-by were searched; suspicious persons were

arrested. By nine o’clock, more than eight hundred persons had been

arrested, the Prefecture of Police was encumbered with them, so was the

Conciergerie, so was La Force.

At the Conciergerie in particular, the long vault which is called the

Rue de Paris was littered with trusses of straw upon which lay a heap

of prisoners, whom the man of Lyons, Lagrange, harangued valiantly. All

that straw rustled by all these men, produced the sound of a heavy

shower. Elsewhere prisoners slept in the open air in the meadows, piled

on top of each other.

Anxiety reigned everywhere, and a certain tremor which was not habitual

with Paris.

People barricaded themselves in their houses; wives and mothers were

uneasy; nothing was to be heard but this: “Ah! my God! He has not come

home!” There was hardly even the distant rumble of a vehicle to be

heard.

People listened on their thresholds, to the rumors, the shouts, the

tumult, the dull and indistinct sounds, to the things that were said:

“It is cavalry,” or: “Those are the caissons galloping,” to the

trumpets, the drums, the firing, and, above all, to that lamentable

alarm peal from Saint-Merry.

They waited for the first cannon-shot. Men sprang up at the corners of

the streets and disappeared, shouting: “Go home!” And people made haste

to bolt their doors. They said: “How will all this end?” From moment to

moment, in proportion as the darkness descended, Paris seemed to take

on a more mournful hue from the formidable flaming of the revolt.

BOOK ELEVENTH—THE ATOM FRATERNIZES WITH THE HURRICANE

CHAPTER I—SOME EXPLANATIONS WITH REGARD TO THE ORIGIN OF GAVROCHE’S

POETRY. THE INFLUENCE OF AN ACADEMICIAN ON THIS POETRY

At the instant when the insurrection, arising from the shock of the

populace and the military in front of the Arsenal, started a movement

in advance and towards the rear in the multitude which was following

the hearse and which, through the whole length of the boulevards,

weighed, so to speak, on the head of the procession, there arose a

frightful ebb. The rout was shaken, their ranks were broken, all ran,

fled, made their escape, some with shouts of attack, others with the

pallor of flight. The great river which covered the boulevards divided

in a twinkling, overflowed to right and left, and spread in torrents

over two hundred streets at once with the roar of a sewer that has

broken loose.

At that moment, a ragged child who was coming down through the Rue

Ménilmontant, holding in his hand a branch of blossoming laburnum which

he had just plucked on the heights of Belleville, caught sight of an

old holster-pistol in the show-window of a bric-à-brac merchant’s shop.

“Mother What’s-your-name, I’m going to borrow your machine.”

And off he ran with the pistol.

Two minutes later, a flood of frightened bourgeois who were fleeing

through the Rue Amelot and the Rue Basse, encountered the lad

brandishing his pistol and singing:—

La nuit on ne voit rien,

Le jour on voit très bien,

D’un écrit apocryphe

Le bourgeois s’ébouriffe,

Pratiquez la vertu,

Tutu, chapeau pointu!44

It was little Gavroche on his way to the wars.

On the boulevard he noticed that the pistol had no trigger.

Who was the author of that couplet which served to punctuate his march,

and of all the other songs which he was fond of singing on occasion? We

know not. Who does know? Himself, perhaps. However, Gavroche was well

up in all the popular tunes in circulation, and he mingled with them

his own chirpings. An observing urchin and a rogue, he made a potpourri

of the voices of nature and the voices of Paris. He combined the

repertory of the birds with the repertory of the workshops. He was

acquainted with thieves, a tribe contiguous to his own. He had, it

appears, been for three months apprenticed to a printer. He had one day

executed a commission for M. Baour-Lormian, one of the Forty. Gavroche

was a gamin of letters.

Moreover, Gavroche had no suspicion of the fact that when he had

offered the hospitality of his elephant to two brats on that

villainously rainy night, it was to his own brothers that he had played

the part of Providence. His brothers in the evening, his father in the

morning; that is what his night had been like. On quitting the Rue des

Ballets at daybreak, he had returned in haste to the elephant, had

artistically extracted from it the two brats, had shared with them some

sort of breakfast which he had invented, and had then gone away,

confiding them to that good mother, the street, who had brought him up,

almost entirely. On leaving them, he had appointed to meet them at the

same spot in the evening, and had left them this discourse by way of a

farewell: “I break a cane, otherwise expressed, I cut my stick, or, as

they say at the court, I file off. If you don’t find papa and mamma,

young ’uns, come back here this evening. I’ll scramble you up some

supper, and I’ll give you a shakedown.” The two children, picked up by

some policeman and placed in the refuge, or stolen by some mountebank,

or having simply strayed off in that immense Chinese puzzle of a Paris,

did not return. The lowest depths of the actual social world are full

of these lost traces. Gavroche did not see them again. Ten or twelve

weeks had elapsed since that night. More than once he had scratched the

back of his head and said: “Where the devil are my two children?”

In the meantime, he had arrived, pistol in hand, in the Rue du

Pont-aux-Choux. He noticed that there was but one shop open in that

street, and, a matter worthy of reflection, that was a pastry-cook’s

shop. This presented a providential occasion to eat another

apple-turnover before entering the unknown. Gavroche halted, fumbled in

his fob, turned his pocket inside out, found nothing, not even a sou,

and began to shout: “Help!”

It is hard to miss the last cake.

Nevertheless, Gavroche pursued his way.

Two minutes later he was in the Rue Saint-Louis. While traversing the

Rue du Parc-Royal, he felt called upon to make good the loss of the

apple-turnover which had been impossible, and he indulged himself in

the immense delight of tearing down the theatre posters in broad

daylight.

A little further on, on catching sight of a group of

comfortable-looking persons, who seemed to be landed proprietors, he

shrugged his shoulders and spit out at random before him this mouthful

of philosophical bile as they passed:

“How fat those moneyed men are! They’re drunk! They just wallow in good

dinners. Ask ’em what they do with their money. They don’t know. They

eat it, that’s what they do! As much as their bellies will hold.”

CHAPTER II—GAVROCHE ON THE MARCH

The brandishing of a triggerless pistol, grasped in one’s hand in the

open street, is so much of a public function that Gavroche felt his

fervor increasing with every moment. Amid the scraps of the

Marseillaise which he was singing, he shouted:—

“All goes well. I suffer a great deal in my left paw, I’m all broken up

with rheumatism, but I’m satisfied, citizens. All that the bourgeois

have to do is to bear themselves well, I’ll sneeze them out subversive

couplets. What are the police spies? Dogs. And I’d just like to have

one of them at the end of my pistol. I’m just from the boulevard, my

friends. It’s getting hot there, it’s getting into a little boil, it’s

simmering. It’s time to skim the pot. Forward march, men! Let an impure

blood inundate the furrows! I give my days to my country, I shall never

see my concubine more, Nini, finished, yes, Nini? But never mind! Long

live joy! Let’s fight, crebleu! I’ve had enough of despotism.”

At that moment, the horse of a lancer of the National Guard having

fallen, Gavroche laid his pistol on the pavement, and picked up the

man, then he assisted in raising the horse. After which he picked up

his pistol and resumed his way. In the Rue de Thorigny, all was peace

and silence. This apathy, peculiar to the Marais, presented a contrast

with the vast surrounding uproar. Four gossips were chatting in a

doorway.

Scotland has trios of witches, Paris has quartettes of old gossiping

hags; and the “Thou shalt be King” could be quite as mournfully hurled

at Bonaparte in the Carrefour Baudoyer as at Macbeth on the heath of

Armuyr. The croak would be almost identical.

The gossips of the Rue de Thorigny busied themselves only with their

own concerns. Three of them were portresses, and the fourth was a

rag-picker with her basket on her back.

All four of them seemed to be standing at the four corners of old age,

which are decrepitude, decay, ruin, and sadness.

The rag-picker was humble. In this open-air society, it is the

rag-picker who salutes and the portress who patronizes. This is caused

by the corner for refuse, which is fat or lean, according to the will

of the portresses, and after the fancy of the one who makes the heap.

There may be kindness in the broom.

This rag-picker was a grateful creature, and she smiled, with what a

smile! on the three portresses. Things of this nature were said:—

“Ah, by the way, is your cat still cross?”

“Good gracious, cats are naturally the enemies of dogs, you know. It’s

the dogs who complain.”

“And people also.”

“But the fleas from a cat don’t go after people.”

“That’s not the trouble, dogs are dangerous. I remember one year when

there were so many dogs that it was necessary to put it in the

newspapers. That was at the time when there were at the Tuileries great

sheep that drew the little carriage of the King of Rome. Do you

remember the King of Rome?”

“I liked the Duc de Bordeau better.”

“I knew Louis XVIII. I prefer Louis XVIII.”

“Meat is awfully dear, isn’t it, Mother Patagon?”

“Ah! don’t mention it, the butcher’s shop is a horror. A horrible

horror—one can’t afford anything but the poor cuts nowadays.”

Here the rag-picker interposed:—

“Ladies, business is dull. The refuse heaps are miserable. No one

throws anything away any more. They eat everything.”

“There are poorer people than you, la Vargoulême.”

“Ah, that’s true,” replied the rag-picker, with deference, “I have a

profession.”

A pause succeeded, and the rag-picker, yielding to that necessity for

boasting which lies at the bottom of man, added:—

“In the morning, on my return home, I pick over my basket, I sort my

things. This makes heaps in my room. I put the rags in a basket, the

cores and stalks in a bucket, the linen in my cupboard, the woollen

stuff in my commode, the old papers in the corner of the window, the

things that are good to eat in my bowl, the bits of glass in my

fireplace, the old shoes behind my door, and the bones under my bed.”

Gavroche had stopped behind her and was listening.

“Old ladies,” said he, “what do you mean by talking politics?”

He was assailed by a broadside, composed of a quadruple howl.

“Here’s another rascal.”

“What’s that he’s got in his paddle? A pistol?”

“Well, I’d like to know what sort of a beggar’s brat this is?”

“That sort of animal is never easy unless he’s overturning the

authorities.”

Gavroche disdainfully contented himself, by way of reprisal, with

elevating the tip of his nose with his thumb and opening his hand wide.

The rag-picker cried:—

“You malicious, bare-pawed little wretch!”

The one who answered to the name of Patagon clapped her hands together

in horror.

“There’s going to be evil doings, that’s certain. The errand-boy next

door has a little pointed beard, I have seen him pass every day with a

young person in a pink bonnet on his arm; to-day I saw him pass, and he

had a gun on his arm. Mame Bacheux says, that last week there was a

revolution at—at—at—where’s the calf!—at Pontoise. And then, there you

see him, that horrid scamp, with his pistol! It seems that the

Célestins are full of pistols. What do you suppose the Government can

do with good-for-nothings who don’t know how to do anything but

contrive ways of upsetting the world, when we had just begun to get a

little quiet after all the misfortunes that have happened, good Lord!

to that poor queen whom I saw pass in the tumbril! And all this is

going to make tobacco dearer. It’s infamous! And I shall certainly go

to see him beheaded on the guillotine, the wretch!”

“You’ve got the sniffles, old lady,” said Gavroche. “Blow your

promontory.”

And he passed on. When he was in the Rue Pavée, the rag-picker occurred

to his mind, and he indulged in this soliloquy:—

“You’re in the wrong to insult the revolutionists, Mother

Dust-Heap-Corner. This pistol is in your interests. It’s so that you

may have more good things to eat in your basket.”

All at once, he heard a shout behind him; it was the portress Patagon

who had followed him, and who was shaking her fist at him in the

distance and crying:—

“You’re nothing but a bastard.”

“Oh! Come now,” said Gavroche, “I don’t care a brass farthing for

that!”

Shortly afterwards, he passed the Hotel Lamoignon. There he uttered

this appeal:—

“Forward march to the battle!”

And he was seized with a fit of melancholy. He gazed at his pistol with

an air of reproach which seemed an attempt to appease it:—

“I’m going off,” said he, “but you won’t go off!”

One dog may distract the attention from another dog.45 A very gaunt

poodle came along at the moment. Gavroche felt compassion for him.

“My poor doggy,” said he, “you must have gone and swallowed a cask, for

all the hoops are visible.”

Then he directed his course towards l’Orme-Saint-Gervais.

CHAPTER III—JUST INDIGNATION OF A HAIR-DRESSER

The worthy hair-dresser who had chased from his shop the two little

fellows to whom Gavroche had opened the paternal interior of the

elephant was at that moment in his shop engaged in shaving an old

soldier of the legion who had served under the Empire. They were

talking. The hair-dresser had, naturally, spoken to the veteran of the

riot, then of General Lamarque, and from Lamarque they had passed to

the Emperor. Thence sprang up a conversation between barber and soldier

which Prudhomme, had he been present, would have enriched with

arabesques, and which he would have entitled: “Dialogue between the

razor and the sword.”

“How did the Emperor ride, sir?” said the barber.

“Badly. He did not know how to fall—so he never fell.”

“Did he have fine horses? He must have had fine horses!”

“On the day when he gave me my cross, I noticed his beast. It was a

racing mare, perfectly white. Her ears were very wide apart, her saddle

deep, a fine head marked with a black star, a very long neck, strongly

articulated knees, prominent ribs, oblique shoulders and a powerful

crupper. A little more than fifteen hands in height.”

“A pretty horse,” remarked the hair-dresser.

“It was His Majesty’s beast.”

The hair-dresser felt, that after this observation, a short silence

would be fitting, so he conformed himself to it, and then went on:—

“The Emperor was never wounded but once, was he, sir?”

The old soldier replied with the calm and sovereign tone of a man who

had been there:—

“In the heel. At Ratisbon. I never saw him so well dressed as on that

day. He was as neat as a new sou.”

“And you, Mr. Veteran, you must have been often wounded?”

“I?” said the soldier, “ah! not to amount to anything. At Marengo, I

received two sabre-blows on the back of my neck, a bullet in the right

arm at Austerlitz, another in the left hip at Jena. At Friedland, a

thrust from a bayonet, there,—at the Moskowa seven or eight

lance-thrusts, no matter where, at Lutzen a splinter of a shell crushed

one of my fingers. Ah! and then at Waterloo, a ball from a biscaïen in

the thigh, that’s all.”

“How fine that is!” exclaimed the hair-dresser, in Pindaric accents,

“to die on the field of battle! On my word of honor, rather than die in

bed, of an illness, slowly, a bit by bit each day, with drugs,

cataplasms, syringes, medicines, I should prefer to receive a

cannon-ball in my belly!”

“You’re not over fastidious,” said the soldier.

He had hardly spoken when a fearful crash shook the shop. The

show-window had suddenly been fractured.

The wig-maker turned pale.

“Ah, good God!” he exclaimed, “it’s one of them!”

“What?”

“A cannon-ball.”

“Here it is,” said the soldier.

And he picked up something that was rolling about the floor. It was a

pebble.

The hair-dresser ran to the broken window and beheld Gavroche fleeing

at the full speed, towards the Marché Saint-Jean. As he passed the

hair-dresser’s shop Gavroche, who had the two brats still in his mind,

had not been able to resist the impulse to say good day to him, and had

flung a stone through his panes.

“You see!” shrieked the hair-dresser, who from white had turned blue,

“that fellow returns and does mischief for the pure pleasure of it.

What has any one done to that gamin?”

CHAPTER IV—THE CHILD IS AMAZED AT THE OLD MAN

In the meantime, in the Marché Saint-Jean, where the post had already

been disarmed, Gavroche had just “effected a junction” with a band led

by Enjolras, Courfeyrac, Combeferre, and Feuilly. They were armed after

a fashion. Bahorel and Jean Prouvaire had found them and swelled the

group. Enjolras had a double-barrelled hunting-gun, Combeferre the gun

of a National Guard bearing the number of his legion, and in his belt,

two pistols which his unbuttoned coat allowed to be seen, Jean

Prouvaire an old cavalry musket, Bahorel a rifle; Courfeyrac was

brandishing an unsheathed sword-cane. Feuilly, with a naked sword in

his hand, marched at their head shouting: “Long live Poland!”

They reached the Quai Morland. Cravatless, hatless, breathless, soaked

by the rain, with lightning in their eyes. Gavroche accosted them

calmly:—

“Where are we going?”

“Come along,” said Courfeyrac.

Behind Feuilly marched, or rather bounded, Bahorel, who was like a fish

in water in a riot. He wore a scarlet waistcoat, and indulged in the

sort of words which break everything. His waistcoat astounded a

passer-by, who cried in bewilderment:—

“Here are the reds!”

“The reds, the reds!” retorted Bahorel. “A queer kind of fear,

bourgeois. For my part I don’t tremble before a poppy, the little red

hat inspires me with no alarm. Take my advice, bourgeois, let’s leave

fear of the red to horned cattle.”

He caught sight of a corner of the wall on which was placarded the most

peaceable sheet of paper in the world, a permission to eat eggs, a

Lenten admonition addressed by the Archbishop of Paris to his “flock.”

Bahorel exclaimed:—

“‘Flock’; a polite way of saying geese.”

And he tore the charge from the nail. This conquered Gavroche. From

that instant Gavroche set himself to study Bahorel.

“Bahorel,” observed Enjolras, “you are wrong. You should have let that

charge alone, he is not the person with whom we have to deal, you are

wasting your wrath to no purpose. Take care of your supply. One does

not fire out of the ranks with the soul any more than with a gun.”

“Each one in his own fashion, Enjolras,” retorted Bahorel. “This

bishop’s prose shocks me; I want to eat eggs without being permitted.

Your style is the hot and cold; I am amusing myself. Besides, I’m not

wasting myself, I’m getting a start; and if I tore down that charge,

Hercle! ’twas only to whet my appetite.”

This word, \_Hercle\_, struck Gavroche. He sought all occasions for

learning, and that tearer-down of posters possessed his esteem. He

inquired of him:—

“What does \_Hercle\_ mean?”

Bahorel answered:—

“It means cursed name of a dog, in Latin.”

Here Bahorel recognized at a window a pale young man with a black beard

who was watching them as they passed, probably a Friend of the A B C.

He shouted to him:—

“Quick, cartridges, \_para bellum\_.”

“A fine man! that’s true,” said Gavroche, who now understood Latin.

A tumultuous retinue accompanied them,—students, artists, young men

affiliated to the Cougourde of Aix, artisans, longshoremen, armed with

clubs and bayonets; some, like Combeferre, with pistols thrust into

their trousers.

An old man, who appeared to be extremely aged, was walking in the band.

He had no arms, and he made great haste, so that he might not be left

behind, although he had a thoughtful air.

Gavroche caught sight of him:—

“Keksekça?” said he to Courfeyrac.

“He’s an old duffer.”

It was M. Mabeuf.

CHAPTER V—THE OLD MAN

Let us recount what had taken place.

Enjolras and his friends had been on the Boulevard Bourdon, near the

public storehouses, at the moment when the dragoons had made their

charge. Enjolras, Courfeyrac, and Combeferre were among those who had

taken to the Rue Bassompierre, shouting: “To the barricades!” In the

Rue Lesdiguières they had met an old man walking along. What had

attracted their attention was that the goodman was walking in a

zig-zag, as though he were intoxicated. Moreover, he had his hat in his

hand, although it had been raining all the morning, and was raining

pretty briskly at the very time. Courfeyrac had recognized Father

Mabeuf. He knew him through having many times accompanied Marius as far

as his door. As he was acquainted with the peaceful and more than timid

habits of the old beadle-book-collector, and was amazed at the sight of

him in the midst of that uproar, a couple of paces from the cavalry

charges, almost in the midst of a fusillade, hatless in the rain, and

strolling about among the bullets, he had accosted him, and the

following dialogue had been exchanged between the rioter of fire and

the octogenarian:—

“M. Mabeuf, go to your home.”

“Why?”

“There’s going to be a row.”

“That’s well.”

“Thrusts with the sword and firing, M. Mabeuf.”

“That is well.”

“Firing from cannon.”

“That is good. Where are the rest of you going?”

“We are going to fling the government to the earth.”

“That is good.”

And he had set out to follow them. From that moment forth he had not

uttered a word. His step had suddenly become firm; artisans had offered

him their arms; he had refused with a sign of the head. He advanced

nearly to the front rank of the column, with the movement of a man who

is marching and the countenance of a man who is sleeping.

“What a fierce old fellow!” muttered the students. The rumor spread

through the troop that he was a former member of the Convention,—an old

regicide. The mob had turned in through the Rue de la Verrerie.

Little Gavroche marched in front with that deafening song which made of

him a sort of trumpet.

He sang:

“Voici la lune qui paraît,

Quand irons-nous dans la forêt?

Demandait Charlot à Charlotte.

Tou tou tou

Pour Chatou.

Je n’ai qu’un Dieu, qu’un roi, qu’un liard, et qu’une botte.

“Pour avoir bu de grand matin

La rosée à même le thym,

Deux moineaux étaient en ribotte.

Zi zi zi

Pour Passy.

Je n’ai qu’un Dieu, qu’un roi, qu’un liard, et qu’une botte.

“Et ces deux pauvres petits loups,

Comme deux grives étaient soûls;

Un tigre en riait dans sa grotte.

Don don don

Pour Meudon.

Je n’ai qu’un Dieu, qu’un roi, qu’un liard, et qu’une botte.

“L’un jurait et l’autre sacrait.

Quand irons nous dans la forêt?

Demandait Charlot à Charlotte.

Tin tin tin

Pour Pantin.

Je n’ai qu’un Dieu, qu’un roi, qu’un liard, et qu’une botte.”46

They directed their course towards Saint-Merry.

CHAPTER VI—RECRUITS

The band augmented every moment. Near the Rue des Billettes, a man of

lofty stature, whose hair was turning gray, and whose bold and daring

mien was remarked by Courfeyrac, Enjolras, and Combeferre, but whom

none of them knew, joined them. Gavroche, who was occupied in singing,

whistling, humming, running on ahead and pounding on the shutters of

the shops with the butt of his triggerless pistol; paid no attention to

this man.

It chanced that in the Rue de la Verrerie, they passed in front of

Courfeyrac’s door.

“This happens just right,” said Courfeyrac, “I have forgotten my purse,

and I have lost my hat.”

He quitted the mob and ran up to his quarters at full speed. He seized

an old hat and his purse.

He also seized a large square coffer, of the dimensions of a large

valise, which was concealed under his soiled linen.

As he descended again at a run, the portress hailed him:—

“Monsieur de Courfeyrac!”

“What’s your name, portress?”

The portress stood bewildered.

“Why, you know perfectly well, I’m the concierge; my name is Mother

Veuvain.”

“Well, if you call me Monsieur de Courfeyrac again, I shall call you

Mother de Veuvain. Now speak, what’s the matter? What do you want?”

“There is some one who wants to speak with you.”

“Who is it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Where is he?”

“In my lodge.”

“The devil!” ejaculated Courfeyrac.

“But the person has been waiting your return for over an hour,” said

the portress.

At the same time, a sort of pale, thin, small, freckled, and youthful

artisan, clad in a tattered blouse and patched trousers of ribbed

velvet, and who had rather the air of a girl accoutred as a man than of

a man, emerged from the lodge and said to Courfeyrac in a voice which

was not the least in the world like a woman’s voice:—

“Monsieur Marius, if you please.”

“He is not here.”

“Will he return this evening?”

“I know nothing about it.”

And Courfeyrac added:—

“For my part, I shall not return.”

The young man gazed steadily at him and said:—

“Why not?”

“Because.”

“Where are you going, then?”

“What business is that of yours?”

“Would you like to have me carry your coffer for you?”

“I am going to the barricades.”

“Would you like to have me go with you?”

“If you like!” replied Courfeyrac. “The street is free, the pavements

belong to every one.”

And he made his escape at a run to join his friends. When he had

rejoined them, he gave the coffer to one of them to carry. It was only

a quarter of an hour after this that he saw the young man, who had

actually followed them.

A mob does not go precisely where it intends. We have explained that a

gust of wind carries it away. They overshot Saint-Merry and found

themselves, without precisely knowing how, in the Rue Saint-Denis.

BOOK TWELFTH—CORINTHE

CHAPTER I—HISTORY OF CORINTHE FROM ITS FOUNDATION

The Parisians who nowadays on entering on the Rue Rambuteau at the end

near the Halles, notice on their right, opposite the Rue Mondétour, a

basket-maker’s shop having for its sign a basket in the form of

Napoleon the Great with this inscription:—

NAPOLEON IS MADE

WHOLLY OF WILLOW,

have no suspicion of the terrible scenes which this very spot witnessed

hardly thirty years ago.

It was there that lay the Rue de la Chanvrerie, which ancient deeds

spell Chanverrerie, and the celebrated public-house called \_Corinthe\_.

The reader will remember all that has been said about the barricade

effected at this point, and eclipsed, by the way, by the barricade

Saint-Merry. It was on this famous barricade of the Rue de la

Chanvrerie, now fallen into profound obscurity, that we are about to

shed a little light.

May we be permitted to recur, for the sake of clearness in the recital,

to the simple means which we have already employed in the case of

Waterloo. Persons who wish to picture to themselves in a tolerably

exact manner the constitution of the houses which stood at that epoch

near the Pointe Saint-Eustache, at the northeast angle of the Halles of

Paris, where to-day lies the embouchure of the Rue Rambuteau, have only

to imagine an N touching the Rue Saint-Denis with its summit and the

Halles with its base, and whose two vertical bars should form the Rue

de la Grande-Truanderie, and the Rue de la Chanvrerie, and whose

transverse bar should be formed by the Rue de la Petite-Truanderie. The

old Rue Mondétour cut the three strokes of the N at the most crooked

angles. So that the labyrinthine confusion of these four streets

sufficed to form, on a space three fathoms square, between the Halles

and the Rue Saint-Denis on the one hand, and between the Rue du Cygne

and the Rue des Prêcheurs on the other, seven islands of houses, oddly

cut up, of varying sizes, placed crosswise and hap-hazard, and barely

separated, like the blocks of stone in a dock, by narrow crannies.

We say narrow crannies, and we can give no more just idea of those

dark, contracted, many-angled alleys, lined with eight-story buildings.

These buildings were so decrepit that, in the Rue de la Chanvrerie and

the Rue de la Petite-Truanderie, the fronts were shored up with beams

running from one house to another. The street was narrow and the gutter

broad, the pedestrian there walked on a pavement that was always wet,

skirting little stalls resembling cellars, big posts encircled with

iron hoops, excessive heaps of refuse, and gates armed with enormous,

century-old gratings. The Rue Rambuteau has devastated all that.

The name of Mondétour paints marvellously well the sinuosities of that

whole set of streets. A little further on, they are found still better

expressed by the \_Rue Pirouette\_, which ran into the Rue Mondétour.

The passer-by who got entangled from the Rue Saint-Denis in the Rue de

la Chanvrerie beheld it gradually close in before him as though he had

entered an elongated funnel. At the end of this street, which was very

short, he found further passage barred in the direction of the Halles

by a tall row of houses, and he would have thought himself in a blind

alley, had he not perceived on the right and left two dark cuts through

which he could make his escape. This was the Rue Mondétour, which on

one side ran into the Rue de Prêcheurs, and on the other into the Rue

du Cygne and the Petite-Truanderie. At the bottom of this sort of

cul-de-sac, at the angle of the cutting on the right, there was to be

seen a house which was not so tall as the rest, and which formed a sort

of cape in the street. It is in this house, of two stories only, that

an illustrious wine-shop had been merrily installed three hundred years

before. This tavern created a joyous noise in the very spot which old

Theophilus described in the following couplet:—

Là branle le squelette horrible

D’un pauvre amant qui se pendit.47

The situation was good, and tavern-keepers succeeded each other there,

from father to son.

In the time of Mathurin Regnier, this cabaret was called the

\_Pot-aux-Roses\_, and as the rebus was then in fashion, it had for its

sign-board, a post (\_poteau\_) painted rose-color. In the last century,

the worthy Natoire, one of the fantastic masters nowadays despised by

the stiff school, having got drunk many times in this wine-shop at the

very table where Regnier had drunk his fill, had painted, by way of

gratitude, a bunch of Corinth grapes on the pink post. The keeper of

the cabaret, in his joy, had changed his device and had caused to be

placed in gilt letters beneath the bunch these words: “At the Bunch of

Corinth Grapes” (\_“Au Raisin de Corinthe”\_). Hence the name of

Corinthe. Nothing is more natural to drunken men than ellipses. The

ellipsis is the zig-zag of the phrase. Corinthe gradually dethroned the

Pot-aux-Roses. The last proprietor of the dynasty, Father Hucheloup, no

longer acquainted even with the tradition, had the post painted blue.

A room on the ground floor, where the bar was situated, one on the

first floor containing a billiard-table, a wooden spiral staircase

piercing the ceiling, wine on the tables, smoke on the walls, candles

in broad daylight,—this was the style of this cabaret. A staircase with

a trap-door in the lower room led to the cellar. On the second floor

were the lodgings of the Hucheloup family. They were reached by a

staircase which was a ladder rather than a staircase, and had for their

entrance only a private door in the large room on the first floor.

Under the roof, in two mansard attics, were the nests for the servants.

The kitchen shared the ground floor with the tap-room.

Father Hucheloup had, possibly, been born a chemist, but the fact is

that he was a cook; people did not confine themselves to drinking alone

in his wine-shop, they also ate there. Hucheloup had invented a capital

thing which could be eaten nowhere but in his house, stuffed carps,

which he called \_carpes au gras\_. These were eaten by the light of a

tallow candle or of a lamp of the time of Louis XVI., on tables to

which were nailed waxed cloths in lieu of table-cloths. People came

thither from a distance. Hucheloup, one fine morning, had seen fit to

notify passers-by of this “specialty”; he had dipped a brush in a pot

of black paint, and as he was an orthographer on his own account, as

well as a cook after his own fashion, he had improvised on his wall

this remarkable inscription:—

CARPES HO GRAS.

One winter, the rain-storms and the showers had taken a fancy to

obliterate the S which terminated the first word, and the G which began

the third; this is what remained:—

CARPE HO RAS.

Time and rain assisting, a humble gastronomical announcement had become

a profound piece of advice.

In this way it came about, that though he knew no French, Father

Hucheloup understood Latin, that he had evoked philosophy from his

kitchen, and that, desirous simply of effacing Lent, he had equalled

Horace. And the striking thing about it was, that that also meant:

“Enter my wine-shop.”

Nothing of all this is in existence now. The Mondétour labyrinth was

disembowelled and widely opened in 1847, and probably no longer exists

at the present moment. The Rue de la Chanvrerie and Corinthe have

disappeared beneath the pavement of the Rue Rambuteau.

As we have already said, Corinthe was the meeting-place if not the

rallying-point, of Courfeyrac and his friends. It was Grantaire who had

discovered Corinthe. He had entered it on account of the \_Carpe horas\_,

and had returned thither on account of the \_Carpes au gras\_. There they

drank, there they ate, there they shouted; they did not pay much, they

paid badly, they did not pay at all, but they were always welcome.

Father Hucheloup was a jovial host.

Hucheloup, that amiable man, as was just said, was a wine-shop-keeper

with a moustache; an amusing variety. He always had an ill-tempered

air, seemed to wish to intimidate his customers, grumbled at the people

who entered his establishment, and had rather the mien of seeking a

quarrel with them than of serving them with soup. And yet, we insist

upon the word, people were always welcome there. This oddity had

attracted customers to his shop, and brought him young men, who said to

each other: “Come hear Father Hucheloup growl.” He had been a

fencing-master. All of a sudden, he would burst out laughing. A big

voice, a good fellow. He had a comic foundation under a tragic

exterior, he asked nothing better than to frighten you, very much like

those snuff-boxes which are in the shape of a pistol. The detonation

makes one sneeze.

Mother Hucheloup, his wife, was a bearded and a very homely creature.

About 1830, Father Hucheloup died. With him disappeared the secret of

stuffed carps. His inconsolable widow continued to keep the wine-shop.

But the cooking deteriorated, and became execrable; the wine, which had

always been bad, became fearfully bad. Nevertheless, Courfeyrac and his

friends continued to go to Corinthe,—out of pity, as Bossuet said.

The Widow Hucheloup was breathless and misshapen and given to rustic

recollections. She deprived them of their flatness by her

pronunciation. She had a way of her own of saying things, which spiced

her reminiscences of the village and of her springtime. It had formerly

been her delight, so she affirmed, to hear the \_loups-de-gorge\_

(\_rouges-gorges\_) \_chanter dans les ogrepines\_ (\_aubépines\_)—to hear

the redbreasts sing in the hawthorn-trees.

The hall on the first floor, where “the restaurant” was situated, was a

large and long apartment encumbered with stools, chairs, benches, and

tables, and with a crippled, lame, old billiard-table. It was reached

by a spiral staircase which terminated in the corner of the room at a

square hole like the hatchway of a ship.

This room, lighted by a single narrow window, and by a lamp that was

always burning, had the air of a garret. All the four-footed furniture

comported itself as though it had but three legs—the whitewashed walls

had for their only ornament the following quatrain in honor of Mame

Hucheloup:—

Elle étonne à dix pas, elle épouvente à deux,

Une verrue habite en son nez hasardeux;

On tremble à chaque instant qu’elle ne vous la mouche

Et qu’un beau jour son nez ne tombe dans sa bouche.48

This was scrawled in charcoal on the wall.

Mame Hucheloup, a good likeness, went and came from morning till night

before this quatrain with the most perfect tranquillity. Two

serving-maids, named Matelote and Gibelotte,49 and who had never been

known by any other names, helped Mame Hucheloup to set on the tables

the jugs of poor wine, and the various broths which were served to the

hungry patrons in earthenware bowls. Matelote, large, plump, redhaired,

and noisy, the favorite ex-sultana of the defunct Hucheloup, was

homelier than any mythological monster, be it what it may; still, as it

becomes the servant to always keep in the rear of the mistress, she was

less homely than Mame Hucheloup. Gibelotte, tall, delicate, white with

a lymphatic pallor, with circles round her eyes, and drooping lids,

always languid and weary, afflicted with what may be called chronic

lassitude, the first up in the house and the last in bed, waited on

every one, even the other maid, silently and gently, smiling through

her fatigue with a vague and sleepy smile.

Before entering the restaurant room, the visitor read on the door the

following line written there in chalk by Courfeyrac:—

Régale si tu peux et mange si tu l’oses.50

CHAPTER II—PRELIMINARY GAYETIES

Laigle de Meaux, as the reader knows, lived more with Joly than

elsewhere. He had a lodging, as a bird has one on a branch. The two

friends lived together, ate together, slept together. They had

everything in common, even Musichetta, to some extent. They were, what

the subordinate monks who accompany monks are called, \_bini\_. On the

morning of the 5th of June, they went to Corinthe to breakfast. Joly,

who was all stuffed up, had a catarrh which Laigle was beginning to

share. Laigle’s coat was threadbare, but Joly was well dressed.

It was about nine o’clock in the morning, when they opened the door of

Corinthe.

They ascended to the first floor.

Matelote and Gibelotte received them.

“Oysters, cheese, and ham,” said Laigle.

And they seated themselves at a table.

The wine-shop was empty; there was no one there but themselves.

Gibelotte, knowing Joly and Laigle, set a bottle of wine on the table.

While they were busy with their first oysters, a head appeared at the

hatchway of the staircase, and a voice said:—

“I am passing by. I smell from the street a delicious odor of Brie

cheese. I enter.” It was Grantaire.

Grantaire took a stool and drew up to the table.

At the sight of Grantaire, Gibelotte placed two bottles of wine on the

table.

That made three.

“Are you going to drink those two bottles?” Laigle inquired of

Grantaire.

Grantaire replied:—

“All are ingenious, thou alone art ingenuous. Two bottles never yet

astonished a man.”

The others had begun by eating, Grantaire began by drinking. Half a

bottle was rapidly gulped down.

“So you have a hole in your stomach?” began Laigle again.

“You have one in your elbow,” said Grantaire.

And after having emptied his glass, he added:—

“Ah, by the way, Laigle of the funeral oration, your coat is old.”

“I should hope so,” retorted Laigle. “That’s why we get on well

together, my coat and I. It has acquired all my folds, it does not bind

me anywhere, it is moulded on my deformities, it falls in with all my

movements, I am only conscious of it because it keeps me warm. Old

coats are just like old friends.”

“That’s true,” ejaculated Joly, striking into the dialogue, “an old

goat is an old abi” (\_ami\_, friend).

“Especially in the mouth of a man whose head is stuffed up,” said

Grantaire.

“Grantaire,” demanded Laigle, “have you just come from the boulevard?”

“No.”

“We have just seen the head of the procession pass, Joly and I.”

“It’s a marvellous sight,” said Joly.

“How quiet this street is!” exclaimed Laigle. “Who would suspect that

Paris was turned upside down? How plainly it is to be seen that in

former days there were nothing but convents here! In this neighborhood!

Du Breul and Sauval give a list of them, and so does the Abbé Lebeuf.

They were all round here, they fairly swarmed, booted and barefooted,

shaven, bearded, gray, black, white, Franciscans, Minims, Capuchins,

Carmelites, Little Augustines, Great Augustines, old Augustines—there

was no end of them.”

“Don’t let’s talk of monks,” interrupted Grantaire, “it makes one want

to scratch one’s self.”

Then he exclaimed:—

“Bouh! I’ve just swallowed a bad oyster. Now hypochondria is taking

possession of me again. The oysters are spoiled, the servants are ugly.

I hate the human race. I just passed through the Rue Richelieu, in

front of the big public library. That pile of oyster-shells which is

called a library is disgusting even to think of. What paper! What ink!

What scrawling! And all that has been written! What rascal was it who

said that man was a featherless biped?51 And then, I met a pretty girl

of my acquaintance, who is as beautiful as the spring, worthy to be

called Floréal, and who is delighted, enraptured, as happy as the

angels, because a wretch yesterday, a frightful banker all spotted with

small-pox, deigned to take a fancy to her! Alas! woman keeps on the

watch for a protector as much as for a lover; cats chase mice as well

as birds. Two months ago that young woman was virtuous in an attic, she

adjusted little brass rings in the eyelet-holes of corsets, what do you

call it? She sewed, she had a camp bed, she dwelt beside a pot of

flowers, she was contented. Now here she is a bankeress. This

transformation took place last night. I met the victim this morning in

high spirits. The hideous point about it is, that the jade is as pretty

to-day as she was yesterday. Her financier did not show in her face.

Roses have this advantage or disadvantage over women, that the traces

left upon them by caterpillars are visible. Ah! there is no morality on

earth. I call to witness the myrtle, the symbol of love, the laurel,

the symbol of air, the olive, that ninny, the symbol of peace, the

apple-tree which came nearest rangling Adam with its pips, and the

fig-tree, the grandfather of petticoats. As for right, do you know what

right is? The Gauls covet Clusium, Rome protects Clusium, and demands

what wrong Clusium has done to them. Brennus answers: ‘The wrong that

Alba did to you, the wrong that Fidenæ did to you, the wrong that the

Eques, the Volsci, and the Sabines have done to you. They were your

neighbors. The Clusians are ours. We understand neighborliness just as

you do. You have stolen Alba, we shall take Clusium.’ Rome said: ‘You

shall not take Clusium.’ Brennus took Rome. Then he cried: ‘Væ victis!’

That is what right is. Ah! what beasts of prey there are in this world!

What eagles! It makes my flesh creep.”

He held out his glass to Joly, who filled it, then he drank and went

on, having hardly been interrupted by this glass of wine, of which no

one, not even himself, had taken any notice:—

“Brennus, who takes Rome, is an eagle; the banker who takes the

grisette is an eagle. There is no more modesty in the one case than in

the other. So we believe in nothing. There is but one reality: drink.

Whatever your opinion may be in favor of the lean cock, like the Canton

of Uri, or in favor of the fat cock, like the Canton of Glaris, it

matters little, drink. You talk to me of the boulevard, of that

procession, \_et cætera, et cætera\_. Come now, is there going to be

another revolution? This poverty of means on the part of the good God

astounds me. He has to keep greasing the groove of events every moment.

There is a hitch, it won’t work. Quick, a revolution! The good God has

his hands perpetually black with that cart-grease. If I were in his

place, I’d be perfectly simple about it, I would not wind up my

mechanism every minute, I’d lead the human race in a straightforward

way, I’d weave matters mesh by mesh, without breaking the thread, I

would have no provisional arrangements, I would have no extraordinary

repertory. What the rest of you call progress advances by means of two

motors, men and events. But, sad to say, from time to time, the

exceptional becomes necessary. The ordinary troupe suffices neither for

event nor for men: among men geniuses are required, among events

revolutions. Great accidents are the law; the order of things cannot do

without them; and, judging from the apparition of comets, one would be

tempted to think that Heaven itself finds actors needed for its

performance. At the moment when one expects it the least, God placards

a meteor on the wall of the firmament. Some queer star turns up,

underlined by an enormous tail. And that causes the death of Cæsar.

Brutus deals him a blow with a knife, and God a blow with a comet.

\_Crac\_, and behold an aurora borealis, behold a revolution, behold a

great man; ’93 in big letters, Napoleon on guard, the comet of 1811 at

the head of the poster. Ah! what a beautiful blue theatre all studded

with unexpected flashes! Boum! Boum! extraordinary show! Raise your

eyes, boobies. Everything is in disorder, the star as well as the

drama. Good God, it is too much and not enough. These resources,

gathered from exception, seem magnificence and poverty. My friends,

Providence has come down to expedients. What does a revolution prove?

That God is in a quandry. He effects a \_coup d’état\_ because he, God,

has not been able to make both ends meet. In fact, this confirms me in

my conjectures as to Jehovah’s fortune; and when I see so much distress

in heaven and on earth, from the bird who has not a grain of millet to

myself without a hundred thousand livres of income, when I see human

destiny, which is very badly worn, and even royal destiny, which is

threadbare, witness the Prince de Condé hung, when I see winter, which

is nothing but a rent in the zenith through which the wind blows, when

I see so many rags even in the perfectly new purple of the morning on

the crests of hills, when I see the drops of dew, those mock pearls,

when I see the frost, that paste, when I see humanity ripped apart and

events patched up, and so many spots on the sun and so many holes in

the moon, when I see so much misery everywhere, I suspect that God is

not rich. The appearance exists, it is true, but I feel that he is hard

up. He gives a revolution as a tradesman whose money-box is empty gives

a ball. God must not be judged from appearances. Beneath the gilding of

heaven I perceive a poverty-stricken universe. Creation is bankrupt.

That is why I am discontented. Here it is the 4th of June, it is almost

night; ever since this morning I have been waiting for daylight to

come; it has not come, and I bet that it won’t come all day. This is

the inexactness of an ill-paid clerk. Yes, everything is badly

arranged, nothing fits anything else, this old world is all warped, I

take my stand on the opposition, everything goes awry; the universe is

a tease. It’s like children, those who want them have none, and those

who don’t want them have them. Total: I’m vexed. Besides, Laigle de

Meaux, that bald-head, offends my sight. It humiliates me to think that

I am of the same age as that baldy. However, I criticise, but I do not

insult. The universe is what it is. I speak here without evil intent

and to ease my conscience. Receive, Eternal Father, the assurance of my

distinguished consideration. Ah! by all the saints of Olympus and by

all the gods of paradise, I was not intended to be a Parisian, that is

to say, to rebound forever, like a shuttlecock between two battledores,

from the group of the loungers to the group of the roysterers. I was

made to be a Turk, watching oriental houris all day long, executing

those exquisite Egyptian dances, as sensuous as the dream of a chaste

man, or a Beauceron peasant, or a Venetian gentleman surrounded by

gentlewoman, or a petty German prince, furnishing the half of a

foot-soldier to the Germanic confederation, and occupying his leisure

with drying his breeches on his hedge, that is to say, his frontier.

Those are the positions for which I was born! Yes, I have said a Turk,

and I will not retract. I do not understand how people can habitually

take Turks in bad part; Mohammed had his good points; respect for the

inventor of seraglios with houris and paradises with odalisques! Let us

not insult Mohammedanism, the only religion which is ornamented with a

hen-roost! Now, I insist on a drink. The earth is a great piece of

stupidity. And it appears that they are going to fight, all those

imbeciles, and to break each other’s profiles and to massacre each

other in the heart of summer, in the month of June, when they might go

off with a creature on their arm, to breathe the immense heaps of

new-mown hay in the meadows! Really, people do commit altogether too

many follies. An old broken lantern which I have just seen at a

bric-à-brac merchant’s suggests a reflection to my mind; it is time to

enlighten the human race. Yes, behold me sad again. That’s what comes

of swallowing an oyster and a revolution the wrong way! I am growing

melancholy once more. Oh! frightful old world. People strive, turn each

other out, prostitute themselves, kill each other, and get used to it!”

And Grantaire, after this fit of eloquence, had a fit of coughing,

which was well earned.

“À propos of revolution,” said Joly, “it is decidedly abberent that

Barius is in lub.”

“Does any one know with whom?” demanded Laigle.

“Do.”

“No?”

“Do! I tell you.”

“Marius’ love affairs!” exclaimed Grantaire. “I can imagine it. Marius

is a fog, and he must have found a vapor. Marius is of the race of

poets. He who says poet, says fool, madman, \_Tymbræus Apollo\_. Marius

and his Marie, or his Marion, or his Maria, or his Mariette. They must

make a queer pair of lovers. I know just what it is like. Ecstasies in

which they forget to kiss. Pure on earth, but joined in heaven. They

are souls possessed of senses. They lie among the stars.”

Grantaire was attacking his second bottle and, possibly, his second

harangue, when a new personage emerged from the square aperture of the

stairs. It was a boy less than ten years of age, ragged, very small,

yellow, with an odd phiz, a vivacious eye, an enormous amount of hair

drenched with rain, and wearing a contented air.

The child unhesitatingly making his choice among the three, addressed

himself to Laigle de Meaux.

“Are you Monsieur Bossuet?”

“That is my nickname,” replied Laigle. “What do you want with me?”

“This. A tall blonde fellow on the boulevard said to me: ‘Do you know

Mother Hucheloup?’ I said: ‘Yes, Rue Chanvrerie, the old man’s widow;’

he said to me: ‘Go there. There you will find M. Bossuet. Tell him from

me: “A B C”.’ It’s a joke that they’re playing on you, isn’t it. He

gave me ten sous.”

“Joly, lend me ten sous,” said Laigle; and, turning to Grantaire:

“Grantaire, lend me ten sous.”

This made twenty sous, which Laigle handed to the lad.

“Thank you, sir,” said the urchin.

“What is your name?” inquired Laigle.

“Navet, Gavroche’s friend.”

“Stay with us,” said Laigle.

“Breakfast with us,” said Grantaire.

The child replied:—

“I can’t, I belong in the procession, I’m the one to shout ‘Down with

Polignac!’”

And executing a prolonged scrape of his foot behind him, which is the

most respectful of all possible salutes, he took his departure.

The child gone, Grantaire took the word:—

“That is the pure-bred gamin. There are a great many varieties of the

gamin species. The notary’s gamin is called Skip-the-Gutter, the cook’s

gamin is called a scullion, the baker’s gamin is called a \_mitron\_, the

lackey’s gamin is called a groom, the marine gamin is called the

cabin-boy, the soldier’s gamin is called the drummer-boy, the painter’s

gamin is called paint-grinder, the tradesman’s gamin is called an

errand-boy, the courtesan gamin is called the minion, the kingly gamin

is called the dauphin, the god gamin is called the bambino.”

In the meantime, Laigle was engaged in reflection; he said half aloud:—

“A B C, that is to say: the burial of Lamarque.”

“The tall blonde,” remarked Grantaire, “is Enjolras, who is sending you

a warning.”

“Shall we go?” ejaculated Bossuet.

“It’s raiding,” said Joly. “I have sworn to go through fire, but not

through water. I don’t wand to ged a gold.”

“I shall stay here,” said Grantaire. “I prefer a breakfast to a

hearse.”

“Conclusion: we remain,” said Laigle. “Well, then, let us drink.

Besides, we might miss the funeral without missing the riot.”

“Ah! the riot, I am with you!” cried Joly.

Laigle rubbed his hands.

“Now we’re going to touch up the revolution of 1830. As a matter of

fact, it does hurt the people along the seams.”

“I don’t think much of your revolution,” said Grantaire. “I don’t

execrate this Government. It is the crown tempered by the cotton

night-cap. It is a sceptre ending in an umbrella. In fact, I think that

to-day, with the present weather, Louis Philippe might utilize his

royalty in two directions, he might extend the tip of the sceptre end

against the people, and open the umbrella end against heaven.”

The room was dark, large clouds had just finished the extinction of

daylight. There was no one in the wine-shop, or in the street, every

one having gone off “to watch events.”

“Is it midday or midnight?” cried Bossuet. “You can’t see your hand

before your face. Gibelotte, fetch a light.”

Grantaire was drinking in a melancholy way.

“Enjolras disdains me,” he muttered. “Enjolras said: ‘Joly is ill,

Grantaire is drunk.’ It was to Bossuet that he sent Navet. If he had

come for me, I would have followed him. So much the worse for Enjolras!

I won’t go to his funeral.”

This resolution once arrived at, Bossuet, Joly, and Grantaire did not

stir from the wine-shop. By two o’clock in the afternoon, the table at

which they sat was covered with empty bottles. Two candles were burning

on it, one in a flat copper candlestick which was perfectly green, the

other in the neck of a cracked carafe. Grantaire had seduced Joly and

Bossuet to wine; Bossuet and Joly had conducted Grantaire back towards

cheerfulness.

As for Grantaire, he had got beyond wine, that merely moderate inspirer

of dreams, ever since midday. Wine enjoys only a conventional

popularity with serious drinkers. There is, in fact, in the matter of

inebriety, white magic and black magic; wine is only white magic.

Grantaire was a daring drinker of dreams. The blackness of a terrible

fit of drunkenness yawning before him, far from arresting him,

attracted him. He had abandoned the bottle and taken to the beerglass.

The beer-glass is the abyss. Having neither opium nor hashish on hand,

and being desirous of filling his brain with twilight, he had had

recourse to that fearful mixture of brandy, stout, absinthe, which

produces the most terrible of lethargies. It is of these three vapors,

beer, brandy, and absinthe, that the lead of the soul is composed. They

are three grooms; the celestial butterfly is drowned in them; and there

are formed there in a membranous smoke, vaguely condensed into the wing

of the bat, three mute furies, Nightmare, Night, and Death, which hover

about the slumbering Psyche.

Grantaire had not yet reached that lamentable phase; far from it. He

was tremendously gay, and Bossuet and Joly retorted. They clinked

glasses. Grantaire added to the eccentric accentuation of words and

ideas, a peculiarity of gesture; he rested his left fist on his knee

with dignity, his arm forming a right angle, and, with cravat untied,

seated astride a stool, his full glass in his right hand, he hurled

solemn words at the big maid-servant Matelote:—

“Let the doors of the palace be thrown open! Let every one be a member

of the French Academy and have the right to embrace Madame Hucheloup.

Let us drink.”

And turning to Madame Hucheloup, he added:—

“Woman ancient and consecrated by use, draw near that I may contemplate

thee!”

And Joly exclaimed:—

“Matelote and Gibelotte, dod’t gib Grantaire anything more to drink. He

has already devoured, since this bording, in wild prodigality, two

francs and ninety-five centibes.”

And Grantaire began again:—

“Who has been unhooking the stars without my permission, and putting

them on the table in the guise of candles?”

Bossuet, though very drunk, preserved his equanimity.

He was seated on the sill of the open window, wetting his back in the

falling rain, and gazing at his two friends.

All at once, he heard a tumult behind him, hurried footsteps, cries of

“To arms!” He turned round and saw in the Rue Saint-Denis, at the end

of the Rue de la Chanvrerie, Enjolras passing, gun in hand, and

Gavroche with his pistol, Feuilly with his sword, Courfeyrac with his

sword, and Jean Prouvaire with his blunderbuss, Combeferre with his

gun, Bahorel with his gun, and the whole armed and stormy rabble which

was following them.

The Rue de la Chanvrerie was not more than a gunshot long. Bossuet

improvised a speaking-trumpet from his two hands placed around his

mouth, and shouted:—

“Courfeyrac! Courfeyrac! Hohée!”

Courfeyrac heard the shout, caught sight of Bossuet, and advanced a few

paces into the Rue de la Chanvrerie, shouting: “What do you want?”

which crossed a “Where are you going?”

“To make a barricade,” replied Courfeyrac.

“Well, here! This is a good place! Make it here!”

“That’s true, Aigle,” said Courfeyrac.

And at a signal from Courfeyrac, the mob flung themselves into the Rue

de la Chanvrerie.

CHAPTER III—NIGHT BEGINS TO DESCEND UPON GRANTAIRE

The spot was, in fact, admirably adapted, the entrance to the street

widened out, the other extremity narrowed together into a pocket

without exit. Corinthe created an obstacle, the Rue Mondétour was

easily barricaded on the right and the left, no attack was possible

except from the Rue Saint-Denis, that is to say, in front, and in full

sight. Bossuet had the comprehensive glance of a fasting Hannibal.

Terror had seized on the whole street at the irruption of the mob.

There was not a passer-by who did not get out of sight. In the space of

a flash of lightning, in the rear, to right and left, shops, stables,

area-doors, windows, blinds, attic skylights, shutters of every

description were closed, from the ground floor to the roof. A terrified

old woman fixed a mattress in front of her window on two clothes-poles

for drying linen, in order to deaden the effect of musketry. The

wine-shop alone remained open; and that for a very good reason, that

the mob had rushed into it.—“Ah my God! Ah my God!” sighed Mame

Hucheloup.

Bossuet had gone down to meet Courfeyrac.

Joly, who had placed himself at the window, exclaimed:—

“Courfeyrac, you ought to have brought an umbrella. You will gatch

gold.”

In the meantime, in the space of a few minutes, twenty iron bars had

been wrenched from the grated front of the wine-shop, ten fathoms of

street had been unpaved; Gavroche and Bahorel had seized in its

passage, and overturned, the dray of a lime-dealer named Anceau; this

dray contained three barrels of lime, which they placed beneath the

piles of paving-stones: Enjolras raised the cellar trap, and all the

widow Hucheloup’s empty casks were used to flank the barrels of lime;

Feuilly, with his fingers skilled in painting the delicate sticks of

fans, had backed up the barrels and the dray with two massive heaps of

blocks of rough stone. Blocks which were improvised like the rest and

procured no one knows where. The beams which served as props were torn

from the neighboring house-fronts and laid on the casks. When Bossuet

and Courfeyrac turned round, half the street was already barred with a

rampart higher than a man. There is nothing like the hand of the

populace for building everything that is built by demolishing.

Matelote and Gibelotte had mingled with the workers. Gibelotte went and

came loaded with rubbish. Her lassitude helped on the barricade. She

served the barricade as she would have served wine, with a sleepy air.

An omnibus with two white horses passed the end of the street.

Bossuet strode over the paving-stones, ran to it, stopped the driver,

made the passengers alight, offered his hand to “the ladies,” dismissed

the conductor, and returned, leading the vehicle and the horses by the

bridle.

“Omnibuses,” said he, “do not pass the Corinthe. \_Non licet omnibus

adire Corinthum\_.”

An instant later, the horses were unharnessed and went off at their

will, through the Rue Mondétour, and the omnibus lying on its side

completed the bar across the street.

Mame Hucheloup, quite upset, had taken refuge in the first story.

Her eyes were vague, and stared without seeing anything, and she cried

in a low tone. Her terrified shrieks did not dare to emerge from her

throat.

“The end of the world has come,” she muttered.

Joly deposited a kiss on Mame Hucheloup’s fat, red, wrinkled neck, and

said to Grantaire: “My dear fellow, I have always regarded a woman’s

neck as an infinitely delicate thing.”

But Grantaire attained to the highest regions of dithryamb. Matelote

had mounted to the first floor once more, Grantaire seized her round

her waist, and gave vent to long bursts of laughter at the window.

“Matelote is homely!” he cried: “Matelote is of a dream of ugliness!

Matelote is a chimæra. This is the secret of her birth: a Gothic

Pygmalion, who was making gargoyles for cathedrals, fell in love with

one of them, the most horrible, one fine morning. He besought Love to

give it life, and this produced Matelote. Look at her, citizens! She

has chromate-of-lead-colored hair, like Titian’s mistress, and she is a

good girl. I guarantee that she will fight well. Every good girl

contains a hero. As for Mother Hucheloup, she’s an old warrior. Look at

her moustaches! She inherited them from her husband. A hussar indeed!

She will fight too. These two alone will strike terror to the heart of

the banlieue. Comrades, we shall overthrow the government as true as

there are fifteen intermediary acids between margaric acid and formic

acid; however, that is a matter of perfect indifference to me.

Gentlemen, my father always detested me because I could not understand

mathematics. I understand only love and liberty. I am Grantaire, the

good fellow. Having never had any money, I never acquired the habit of

it, and the result is that I have never lacked it; but, if I had been

rich, there would have been no more poor people! You would have seen!

Oh, if the kind hearts only had fat purses, how much better things

would go! I picture myself Jesus Christ with Rothschild’s fortune! How

much good he would do! Matelote, embrace me! You are voluptuous and

timid! You have cheeks which invite the kiss of a sister, and lips

which claim the kiss of a lover.”

“Hold your tongue, you cask!” said Courfeyrac.

Grantaire retorted:—

“I am the capitoul52 and the master of the floral games!”

Enjolras, who was standing on the crest of the barricade, gun in hand,

raised his beautiful, austere face. Enjolras, as the reader knows, had

something of the Spartan and of the Puritan in his composition. He

would have perished at Thermopylæ with Leonidas, and burned at Drogheda

with Cromwell.

“Grantaire,” he shouted, “go get rid of the fumes of your wine

somewhere else than here. This is the place for enthusiasm, not for

drunkenness. Don’t disgrace the barricade!”

This angry speech produced a singular effect on Grantaire. One would

have said that he had had a glass of cold water flung in his face. He

seemed to be rendered suddenly sober.

He sat down, put his elbows on a table near the window, looked at

Enjolras with indescribable gentleness, and said to him:—

“Let me sleep here.”

“Go and sleep somewhere else,” cried Enjolras.

But Grantaire, still keeping his tender and troubled eyes fixed on him,

replied:—

“Let me sleep here,—until I die.”

Enjolras regarded him with disdainful eyes:—

“Grantaire, you are incapable of believing, of thinking, of willing, of

living, and of dying.”

Grantaire replied in a grave tone:—

“You will see.”

He stammered a few more unintelligible words, then his head fell

heavily on the table, and, as is the usual effect of the second period

of inebriety, into which Enjolras had roughly and abruptly thrust him,

an instant later he had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER IV—AN ATTEMPT TO CONSOLE THE WIDOW HUCHELOUP

Bahorel, in ecstasies over the barricade, shouted:—

“Here’s the street in its low-necked dress! How well it looks!”

Courfeyrac, as he demolished the wine-shop to some extent, sought to

console the widowed proprietress.

“Mother Hucheloup, weren’t you complaining the other day because you

had had a notice served on you for infringing the law, because

Gibelotte shook a counterpane out of your window?”

“Yes, my good Monsieur Courfeyrac. Ah! good Heavens, are you going to

put that table of mine in your horror, too? And it was for the

counterpane, and also for a pot of flowers which fell from the attic

window into the street, that the government collected a fine of a

hundred francs. If that isn’t an abomination, what is!”

“Well, Mother Hucheloup, we are avenging you.”

Mother Hucheloup did not appear to understand very clearly the benefit

which she was to derive from these reprisals made on her account. She

was satisfied after the manner of that Arab woman, who, having received

a box on the ear from her husband, went to complain to her father, and

cried for vengeance, saying: “Father, you owe my husband affront for

affront.” The father asked: “On which cheek did you receive the blow?”

“On the left cheek.” The father slapped her right cheek and said: “Now

you are satisfied. Go tell your husband that he boxed my daughter’s

ears, and that I have accordingly boxed his wife’s.”

The rain had ceased. Recruits had arrived. Workmen had brought under

their blouses a barrel of powder, a basket containing bottles of

vitriol, two or three carnival torches, and a basket filled with

fire-pots, “left over from the King’s festival.” This festival was very

recent, having taken place on the 1st of May. It was said that these

munitions came from a grocer in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine named Pépin.

They smashed the only street lantern in the Rue de la Chanvrerie, the

lantern corresponding to one in the Rue Saint-Denis, and all the

lanterns in the surrounding streets, de Mondétour, du Cygne, des

Prêcheurs, and de la Grande and de la Petite-Truanderie.

Enjolras, Combeferre, and Courfeyrac directed everything. Two

barricades were now in process of construction at once, both of them

resting on the Corinthe house and forming a right angle; the larger

shut off the Rue de la Chanvrerie, the other closed the Rue Mondétour,

on the side of the Rue de Cygne. This last barricade, which was very

narrow, was constructed only of casks and paving-stones. There were

about fifty workers on it; thirty were armed with guns; for, on their

way, they had effected a wholesale loan from an armorer’s shop.

Nothing could be more bizarre and at the same time more motley than

this troop. One had a round-jacket, a cavalry sabre, and two

holster-pistols, another was in his shirt-sleeves, with a round hat,

and a powder-horn slung at his side, a third wore a plastron of nine

sheets of gray paper and was armed with a saddler’s awl. There was one

who was shouting: “Let us exterminate them to the last man and die at

the point of our bayonet.” This man had no bayonet. Another spread out

over his coat the cross-belt and cartridge-box of a National Guardsman,

the cover of the cartridge-box being ornamented with this inscription

in red worsted: \_Public Order\_. There were a great many guns bearing

the numbers of the legions, few hats, no cravats, many bare arms, some

pikes. Add to this, all ages, all sorts of faces, small, pale young

men, and bronzed longshoremen. All were in haste; and as they helped

each other, they discussed the possible chances. That they would

receive succor about three o’clock in the morning—that they were sure

of one regiment, that Paris would rise. Terrible sayings with which was

mingled a sort of cordial joviality. One would have pronounced them

brothers, but they did not know each other’s names. Great perils have

this fine characteristic, that they bring to light the fraternity of

strangers. A fire had been lighted in the kitchen, and there they were

engaged in moulding into bullets, pewter mugs, spoons, forks, and all

the brass table-ware of the establishment. In the midst of it all, they

drank. Caps and buckshot were mixed pell-mell on the tables with

glasses of wine. In the billiard-hall, Mame Hucheloup, Matelote, and

Gibelotte, variously modified by terror, which had stupefied one,

rendered another breathless, and roused the third, were tearing up old

dish-cloths and making lint; three insurgents were assisting them,

three bushy-haired, jolly blades with beards and moustaches, who

plucked away at the linen with the fingers of seamstresses and who made

them tremble.

The man of lofty stature whom Courfeyrac, Combeferre, and Enjolras had

observed at the moment when he joined the mob at the corner of the Rue

des Billettes, was at work on the smaller barricade and was making

himself useful there. Gavroche was working on the larger one. As for

the young man who had been waiting for Courfeyrac at his lodgings, and

who had inquired for M. Marius, he had disappeared at about the time

when the omnibus had been overturned.

Gavroche, completely carried away and radiant, had undertaken to get

everything in readiness. He went, came, mounted, descended, re-mounted,

whistled, and sparkled. He seemed to be there for the encouragement of

all. Had he any incentive? Yes, certainly, his poverty; had he wings?

yes, certainly, his joy. Gavroche was a whirlwind. He was constantly

visible, he was incessantly audible. He filled the air, as he was

everywhere at once. He was a sort of almost irritating ubiquity; no

halt was possible with him. The enormous barricade felt him on its

haunches. He troubled the loungers, he excited the idle, he reanimated

the weary, he grew impatient over the thoughtful, he inspired gayety in

some, and breath in others, wrath in others, movement in all, now

pricking a student, now biting an artisan; he alighted, paused, flew

off again, hovered over the tumult, and the effort, sprang from one

party to another, murmuring and humming, and harassed the whole

company; a fly on the immense revolutionary coach.

Perpetual motion was in his little arms and perpetual clamor in his

little lungs.

“Courage! more paving-stones! more casks! more machines! Where are you

now? A hod of plaster for me to stop this hole with! Your barricade is

very small. It must be carried up. Put everything on it, fling

everything there, stick it all in. Break down the house. A barricade is

Mother Gibou’s tea. Hullo, here’s a glass door.”

This elicited an exclamation from the workers.

“A glass door? what do you expect us to do with a glass door,

tubercle?”

“Hercules yourselves!” retorted Gavroche. “A glass door is an excellent

thing in a barricade. It does not prevent an attack, but it prevents

the enemy taking it. So you’ve never prigged apples over a wall where

there were broken bottles? A glass door cuts the corns of the National

Guard when they try to mount on the barricade. Pardi! glass is a

treacherous thing. Well, you haven’t a very wildly lively imagination,

comrades.”

However, he was furious over his triggerless pistol. He went from one

to another, demanding: “A gun, I want a gun! Why don’t you give me a

gun?”

“Give you a gun!” said Combeferre.

“Come now!” said Gavroche, “why not? I had one in 1830 when we had a

dispute with Charles X.”

Enjolras shrugged his shoulders.

“When there are enough for the men, we will give some to the children.”

Gavroche wheeled round haughtily, and answered:—

“If you are killed before me, I shall take yours.”

“Gamin!” said Enjolras.

“Greenhorn!” said Gavroche.

A dandy who had lost his way and who lounged past the end of the street

created a diversion! Gavroche shouted to him:—

“Come with us, young fellow! well now, don’t we do anything for this

old country of ours?”

The dandy fled.

CHAPTER V—PREPARATIONS

The journals of the day which said that that \_nearly impregnable

structure\_, of the barricade of the Rue de la Chanvrerie, as they call

it, reached to the level of the first floor, were mistaken. The fact

is, that it did not exceed an average height of six or seven feet. It

was built in such a manner that the combatants could, at their will,

either disappear behind it or dominate the barrier and even scale its

crest by means of a quadruple row of paving-stones placed on top of

each other and arranged as steps in the interior. On the outside, the

front of the barricade, composed of piles of paving-stones and casks

bound together by beams and planks, which were entangled in the wheels

of Anceau’s dray and of the overturned omnibus, had a bristling and

inextricable aspect.

An aperture large enough to allow a man to pass through had been made

between the wall of the houses and the extremity of the barricade which

was furthest from the wine-shop, so that an exit was possible at this

point. The pole of the omnibus was placed upright and held up with

ropes, and a red flag, fastened to this pole, floated over the

barricade.

The little Mondétour barricade, hidden behind the wine-shop building,

was not visible. The two barricades united formed a veritable redoubt.

Enjolras and Courfeyrac had not thought fit to barricade the other

fragment of the Rue Mondétour which opens through the Rue des Prêcheurs

an issue into the Halles, wishing, no doubt, to preserve a possible

communication with the outside, and not entertaining much fear of an

attack through the dangerous and difficult street of the Rue des

Prêcheurs.

With the exception of this issue which was left free, and which

constituted what Folard in his strategical style would have termed a

branch and taking into account, also, the narrow cutting arranged on

the Rue de la Chanvrerie, the interior of the barricade, where the

wine-shop formed a salient angle, presented an irregular square, closed

on all sides. There existed an interval of twenty paces between the

grand barrier and the lofty houses which formed the background of the

street, so that one might say that the barricade rested on these

houses, all inhabited, but closed from top to bottom.

All this work was performed without any hindrance, in less than an

hour, and without this handful of bold men seeing a single bear-skin

cap or a single bayonet make their appearance. The very bourgeois who

still ventured at this hour of riot to enter the Rue Saint-Denis cast a

glance at the Rue de la Chanvrerie, caught sight of the barricade, and

redoubled their pace.

The two barricades being finished, and the flag run up, a table was

dragged out of the wine-shop; and Courfeyrac mounted on the table.

Enjolras brought the square coffer, and Courfeyrac opened it. This

coffer was filled with cartridges. When the mob saw the cartridges, a

tremor ran through the bravest, and a momentary silence ensued.

Courfeyrac distributed them with a smile.

Each one received thirty cartridges. Many had powder, and set about

making others with the bullets which they had run. As for the barrel of

powder, it stood on a table on one side, near the door, and was held in

reserve.

The alarm beat which ran through all Paris, did not cease, but it had

finally come to be nothing more than a monotonous noise to which they

no longer paid any attention. This noise retreated at times, and again

drew near, with melancholy undulations.

They loaded the guns and carbines, all together, without haste, with

solemn gravity. Enjolras went and stationed three sentinels outside the

barricades, one in the Rue de la Chanvrerie, the second in the Rue des

Prêcheurs, the third at the corner of the Rue de la Petite Truanderie.

Then, the barricades having been built, the posts assigned, the guns

loaded, the sentinels stationed, they waited, alone in those

redoubtable streets through which no one passed any longer, surrounded

by those dumb houses which seemed dead and in which no human movement

palpitated, enveloped in the deepening shades of twilight which was

drawing on, in the midst of that silence through which something could

be felt advancing, and which had about it something tragic and

terrifying, isolated, armed, determined, and tranquil.

CHAPTER VI—WAITING

During those hours of waiting, what did they do?

We must needs tell, since this is a matter of history.

While the men made bullets and the women lint, while a large saucepan

of melted brass and lead, destined to the bullet-mould smoked over a

glowing brazier, while the sentinels watched, weapon in hand, on the

barricade, while Enjolras, whom it was impossible to divert, kept an

eye on the sentinels, Combeferre, Courfeyrac, Jean Prouvaire, Feuilly,

Bossuet, Joly, Bahorel, and some others, sought each other out and

united as in the most peaceful days of their conversations in their

student life, and, in one corner of this wine-shop which had been

converted into a casement, a couple of paces distant from the redoubt

which they had built, with their carbines loaded and primed resting

against the backs of their chairs, these fine young fellows, so close

to a supreme hour, began to recite love verses.

What verses? These:—

Vous rappelez-vous notre douce vie,

Lorsque nous étions si jeunes tous deux,

Et que nous n’avions au cœur d’autre envie

Que d’être bien mis et d’être amoureux,

Lorsqu’en ajoutant votre âge à mon âge,

Nous ne comptions pas à deux quarante ans,

Et que, dans notre humble et petit ménage,

Tout, même l’hiver, nous était printemps?

Beaux jours! Manuel était fier et sage,

Paris s’asseyait à de saints banquets,

Foy lançait la foudre, et votre corsage

Avait une épingle où je me piquais.

Tout vous contemplait. Avocat sans causes,

Quand je vous menais au Prado dîner,

Vous étiez jolie au point que les roses

Me faisaient l’effet de se retourner.

Je les entendais dire: Est elle belle!

Comme elle sent bon! Quels cheveux à flots!

Sous son mantelet elle cache une aile,

Son bonnet charmant est à peine éclos.

J’errais avec toi, pressant ton bras souple.

Les passants croyaient que l’amour charmé

Avait marié, dans notre heureux couple,

Le doux mois d’avril au beau mois de mai.

Nous vivions cachés, contents, porte close,

Dévorant l’amour, bon fruit défendu,

Ma bouche n’avait pas dit une chose

Que déjà ton cœur avait répondu.

La Sorbonne était l’endroit bucolique

Où je t’adorais du soir au matin.

C’est ainsi qu’une âme amoureuse applique

La carte du Tendre au pays Latin.

O place Maubert! O place Dauphine!

Quand, dans le taudis frais et printanier,

Tu tirais ton bas sur ta jambe fine,

Je voyais un astre au fond du grenier.

J’ai fort lu Platon, mais rien ne m’en reste;

Mieux que Malebranche et que Lamennais,

Tu me démontrais la bonté céleste

Avec une fleur que tu me donnais.

Je t’obéissais, tu m’étais soumise;

O grenier doré! te lacer! te voir

Aller et venir dès l’aube en chemise,

Mirant ton jeune front à ton vieux miroir.

Et qui donc pourrait perdre la mémoire

De ces temps d’aurore et de firmament,

De rubans, de fleurs, de gaze et de moire,

Où l’amour bégaye un argot charmant?

Nos jardins étaient un pot de tulipe;

Tu masquais la vitre avec un jupon;

Je prenais le bol de terre de pipe,

Et je te donnais le tasse en japon.

Et ces grands malheurs qui nous faisaient rire!

Ton manchon brûlé, ton boa perdu!

Et ce cher portrait du divin Shakespeare

Qu’un soir pour souper nons avons vendu!

J’étais mendiant et toi charitable.

Je baisais au vol tes bras frais et ronds.

Dante in folio nous servait de table

Pour manger gaîment un cent de marrons.

La première fois qu’en mon joyeux bouge

Je pris un baiser à ta lèvre en feu,

Quand tu t’en allais décoiffée et rouge,

Je restai tout pâle et je crus en Dieu!

Te rappelles-tu nos bonheurs sans nombre,

Et tous ces fichus changés en chiffons?

Oh que de soupirs, de nos cœurs pleins d’ombre,

Se sont envolés dans les cieux profonds!53

The hour, the spot, these souvenirs of youth recalled, a few stars

which began to twinkle in the sky, the funeral repose of those deserted

streets, the imminence of the inexorable adventure, which was in

preparation, gave a pathetic charm to these verses murmured in a low

tone in the dusk by Jean Prouvaire, who, as we have said, was a gentle

poet.

In the meantime, a lamp had been lighted in the small barricade, and in

the large one, one of those wax torches such as are to be met with on

Shrove-Tuesday in front of vehicles loaded with masks, on their way to

la Courtille. These torches, as the reader has seen, came from the

Faubourg Saint-Antoine.

The torch had been placed in a sort of cage of paving-stones closed on

three sides to shelter it from the wind, and disposed in such a fashion

that all the light fell on the flag. The street and the barricade

remained sunk in gloom, and nothing was to be seen except the red flag

formidably illuminated as by an enormous dark-lantern.

This light enhanced the scarlet of the flag, with an indescribable and

terrible purple.

CHAPTER VII—THE MAN RECRUITED IN THE RUE DES BILLETTES

Night was fully come, nothing made its appearance. All that they heard

was confused noises, and at intervals, fusillades; but these were rare,

badly sustained and distant. This respite, which was thus prolonged,

was a sign that the Government was taking its time, and collecting its

forces. These fifty men were waiting for sixty thousand.

Enjolras felt attacked by that impatience which seizes on strong souls

on the threshold of redoubtable events. He went in search of Gavroche,

who had set to making cartridges in the tap-room, by the dubious light

of two candles placed on the counter by way of precaution, on account

of the powder which was scattered on the tables. These two candles cast

no gleam outside. The insurgents had, moreover, taken pains not to have

any light in the upper stories.

Gavroche was deeply preoccupied at that moment, but not precisely with

his cartridges. The man of the Rue des Billettes had just entered the

tap-room and had seated himself at the table which was the least

lighted. A musket of large model had fallen to his share, and he held

it between his legs. Gavroche, who had been, up to that moment,

distracted by a hundred “amusing” things, had not even seen this man.

When he entered, Gavroche followed him mechanically with his eyes,

admiring his gun; then, all at once, when the man was seated, the

street urchin sprang to his feet. Any one who had spied upon that man

up to that moment, would have seen that he was observing everything in

the barricade and in the band of insurgents, with singular attention;

but, from the moment when he had entered this room, he had fallen into

a sort of brown study, and no longer seemed to see anything that was

going on. The gamin approached this pensive personage, and began to

step around him on tiptoe, as one walks in the vicinity of a person

whom one is afraid of waking. At the same time, over his childish

countenance which was, at once so impudent and so serious, so giddy and

so profound, so gay and so heart-breaking, passed all those grimaces of

an old man which signify: Ah bah! impossible! My sight is bad! I am

dreaming! can this be? no, it is not! but yes! why, no! etc. Gavroche

balanced on his heels, clenched both fists in his pockets, moved his

neck around like a bird, expended in a gigantic pout all the sagacity

of his lower lip. He was astounded, uncertain, incredulous, convinced,

dazzled. He had the mien of the chief of the eunuchs in the slave mart,

discovering a Venus among the blowsy females, and the air of an amateur

recognizing a Raphael in a heap of daubs. His whole being was at work,

the instinct which scents out, and the intelligence which combines. It

was evident that a great event had happened in Gavroche’s life.

It was at the most intense point of this preoccupation that Enjolras

accosted him.

“You are small,” said Enjolras, “you will not be seen. Go out of the

barricade, slip along close to the houses, skirmish about a bit in the

streets, and come back and tell me what is going on.”

Gavroche raised himself on his haunches.

“So the little chaps are good for something! that’s very lucky! I’ll

go! In the meanwhile, trust to the little fellows, and distrust the big

ones.” And Gavroche, raising his head and lowering his voice, added, as

he indicated the man of the Rue des Billettes: “Do you see that big

fellow there?”

“Well?”

“He’s a police spy.”

“Are you sure of it?”

“It isn’t two weeks since he pulled me off the cornice of the Port

Royal, where I was taking the air, by my ear.”

Enjolras hastily quitted the urchin and murmured a few words in a very

low tone to a longshoreman from the winedocks who chanced to be at

hand. The man left the room, and returned almost immediately,

accompanied by three others. The four men, four porters with broad

shoulders, went and placed themselves without doing anything to attract

his attention, behind the table on which the man of the Rue des

Billettes was leaning with his elbows. They were evidently ready to

hurl themselves upon him.

Then Enjolras approached the man and demanded of him:—

“Who are you?”

At this abrupt query, the man started. He plunged his gaze deep into

Enjolras’ clear eyes and appeared to grasp the latter’s meaning. He

smiled with a smile than which nothing more disdainful, more energetic,

and more resolute could be seen in the world, and replied with haughty

gravity:—

“I see what it is. Well, yes!”

“You are a police spy?”

“I am an agent of the authorities.”

“And your name?”

“Javert.”

Enjolras made a sign to the four men. In the twinkling of an eye,

before Javert had time to turn round, he was collared, thrown down,

pinioned and searched.

They found on him a little round card pasted between two pieces of

glass, and bearing on one side the arms of France, engraved, and with

this motto: \_Supervision and vigilance\_, and on the other this note:

“JAVERT, inspector of police, aged fifty-two,” and the signature of the

Prefect of Police of that day, M. Gisquet.

Besides this, he had his watch and his purse, which contained several

gold pieces. They left him his purse and his watch. Under the watch, at

the bottom of his fob, they felt and seized a paper in an envelope,

which Enjolras unfolded, and on which he read these five lines, written

in the very hand of the Prefect of Police:—

“As soon as his political mission is accomplished, Inspector Javert

will make sure, by special supervision, whether it is true that the

malefactors have instituted intrigues on the right bank of the Seine,

near the Jena bridge.”

The search ended, they lifted Javert to his feet, bound his arms behind

his back, and fastened him to that celebrated post in the middle of the

room which had formerly given the wine-shop its name.

Gavroche, who had looked on at the whole of this scene and had approved

of everything with a silent toss of his head, stepped up to Javert and

said to him:—

“It’s the mouse who has caught the cat.”

All this was so rapidly executed, that it was all over when those about

the wine-shop noticed it.

Javert had not uttered a single cry.

At the sight of Javert bound to the post, Courfeyrac, Bossuet, Joly,

Combeferre, and the men scattered over the two barricades came running

up.

Javert, with his back to the post, and so surrounded with ropes that he

could not make a movement, raised his head with the intrepid serenity

of the man who has never lied.

“He is a police spy,” said Enjolras.

And turning to Javert: “You will be shot ten minutes before the

barricade is taken.”

Javert replied in his most imperious tone:—

“Why not at once?”

“We are saving our powder.”

“Then finish the business with a blow from a knife.”

“Spy,” said the handsome Enjolras, “we are judges and not assassins.”

Then he called Gavroche:—

“Here you! go about your business! Do what I told you!”

“I’m going!” cried Gavroche.

And halting as he was on the point of setting out:—

“By the way, you will give me his gun!” and he added: “I leave you the

musician, but I want the clarinet.”

The gamin made the military salute and passed gayly through the opening

in the large barricade.

CHAPTER VIII—MANY INTERROGATION POINTS WITH REGARD TO A CERTAIN LE

CABUC WHOSE NAME MAY NOT HAVE BEEN LE CABUC

The tragic picture which we have undertaken would not be complete, the

reader would not see those grand moments of social birth-pangs in a

revolutionary birth, which contain convulsion mingled with effort, in

their exact and real relief, were we to omit, in the sketch here

outlined, an incident full of epic and savage horror which occurred

almost immediately after Gavroche’s departure.

Mobs, as the reader knows, are like a snowball, and collect as they

roll along, a throng of tumultuous men. These men do not ask each other

whence they come. Among the passers-by who had joined the rabble led by

Enjolras, Combeferre, and Courfeyrac, there had been a person wearing

the jacket of a street porter, which was very threadbare on the

shoulders, who gesticulated and vociferated, and who had the look of a

drunken savage. This man, whose name or nickname was Le Cabuc, and who

was, moreover, an utter stranger to those who pretended to know him,

was very drunk, or assumed the appearance of being so, and had seated

himself with several others at a table which they had dragged outside

of the wine-shop. This Cabuc, while making those who vied with him

drunk seemed to be examining with a thoughtful air the large house at

the extremity of the barricade, whose five stories commanded the whole

street and faced the Rue Saint-Denis. All at once he exclaimed:—

“Do you know, comrades, it is from that house yonder that we must fire.

When we are at the windows, the deuce is in it if any one can advance

into the street!”

“Yes, but the house is closed,” said one of the drinkers.

“Let us knock!”

“They will not open.”

“Let us break in the door!”

Le Cabuc runs to the door, which had a very massive knocker, and

knocks. The door opens not. He strikes a second blow. No one answers. A

third stroke. The same silence.

“Is there any one here?” shouts Cabuc.

Nothing stirs.

Then he seizes a gun and begins to batter the door with the butt end.

It was an ancient alley door, low, vaulted, narrow, solid, entirely of

oak, lined on the inside with a sheet of iron and iron stays, a genuine

prison postern. The blows from the butt end of the gun made the house

tremble, but did not shake the door.

Nevertheless, it is probable that the inhabitants were disturbed, for a

tiny, square window was finally seen to open on the third story, and at

this aperture appeared the reverend and terrified face of a gray-haired

old man, who was the porter, and who held a candle.

The man who was knocking paused.

“Gentlemen,” said the porter, “what do you want?”

“Open!” said Cabuc.

“That cannot be, gentlemen.”

“Open, nevertheless.”

“Impossible, gentlemen.”

Le Cabuc took his gun and aimed at the porter; but as he was below, and

as it was very dark, the porter did not see him.

“Will you open, yes or no?”

“No, gentlemen.”

“Do you say no?”

“I say no, my goo—”

The porter did not finish. The shot was fired; the ball entered under

his chin and came out at the nape of his neck, after traversing the

jugular vein.

The old man fell back without a sigh. The candle fell and was

extinguished, and nothing more was to be seen except a motionless head

lying on the sill of the small window, and a little whitish smoke which

floated off towards the roof.

“There!” said Le Cabuc, dropping the butt end of his gun to the

pavement.

He had hardly uttered this word, when he felt a hand laid on his

shoulder with the weight of an eagle’s talon, and he heard a voice

saying to him:—

“On your knees.”

The murderer turned round and saw before him Enjolras’ cold, white

face.

Enjolras held a pistol in his hand.

He had hastened up at the sound of the discharge.

He had seized Cabuc’s collar, blouse, shirt, and suspender with his

left hand.

“On your knees!” he repeated.

And, with an imperious motion, the frail young man of twenty years bent

the thickset and sturdy porter like a reed, and brought him to his

knees in the mire.

Le Cabuc attempted to resist, but he seemed to have been seized by a

superhuman hand.

Enjolras, pale, with bare neck and dishevelled hair, and his woman’s

face, had about him at that moment something of the antique Themis. His

dilated nostrils, his downcast eyes, gave to his implacable Greek

profile that expression of wrath and that expression of Chastity which,

as the ancient world viewed the matter, befit Justice.

The whole barricade hastened up, then all ranged themselves in a circle

at a distance, feeling that it was impossible to utter a word in the

presence of the thing which they were about to behold.

Le Cabuc, vanquished, no longer tried to struggle, and trembled in

every limb.

Enjolras released him and drew out his watch.

“Collect yourself,” said he. “Think or pray. You have one minute.”

“Mercy!” murmured the murderer; then he dropped his head and stammered

a few inarticulate oaths.

Enjolras never took his eyes off of him: he allowed a minute to pass,

then he replaced his watch in his fob. That done, he grasped Le Cabuc

by the hair, as the latter coiled himself into a ball at his knees and

shrieked, and placed the muzzle of the pistol to his ear. Many of those

intrepid men, who had so tranquilly entered upon the most terrible of

adventures, turned aside their heads.

An explosion was heard, the assassin fell to the pavement face

downwards.

Enjolras straightened himself up, and cast a convinced and severe

glance around him. Then he spurned the corpse with his foot and said:—

“Throw that outside.”

Three men raised the body of the unhappy wretch, which was still

agitated by the last mechanical convulsions of the life that had fled,

and flung it over the little barricade into the Rue Mondétour.

Enjolras was thoughtful. It is impossible to say what grandiose shadows

slowly spread over his redoubtable serenity. All at once he raised his

voice.

A silence fell upon them.

“Citizens,” said Enjolras, “what that man did is frightful, what I have

done is horrible. He killed, therefore I killed him. I had to do it,

because insurrection must have its discipline. Assassination is even

more of a crime here than elsewhere; we are under the eyes of the

Revolution, we are the priests of the Republic, we are the victims of

duty, and must not be possible to slander our combat. I have,

therefore, tried that man, and condemned him to death. As for myself,

constrained as I am to do what I have done, and yet abhorring it, I

have judged myself also, and you shall soon see to what I have

condemned myself.”

Those who listened to him shuddered.

“We will share thy fate,” cried Combeferre.

“So be it,” replied Enjolras. “One word more. In executing this man, I

have obeyed necessity; but necessity is a monster of the old world,

necessity’s name is Fatality. Now, the law of progress is, that

monsters shall disappear before the angels, and that Fatality shall

vanish before Fraternity. It is a bad moment to pronounce the word

love. No matter, I do pronounce it. And I glorify it. Love, the future

is thine. Death, I make use of thee, but I hate thee. Citizens, in the

future there will be neither darkness nor thunderbolts; neither

ferocious ignorance, nor bloody retaliation. As there will be no more

Satan, there will be no more Michael. In the future no one will kill

any one else, the earth will beam with radiance, the human race will

love. The day will come, citizens, when all will be concord, harmony,

light, joy and life; it will come, and it is in order that it may come

that we are about to die.”

Enjolras ceased. His virgin lips closed; and he remained for some time

standing on the spot where he had shed blood, in marble immobility. His

staring eye caused those about him to speak in low tones.

Jean Prouvaire and Combeferre pressed each other’s hands silently, and,

leaning against each other in an angle of the barricade, they watched

with an admiration in which there was some compassion, that grave young

man, executioner and priest, composed of light, like crystal, and also

of rock.

Let us say at once that later on, after the action, when the bodies

were taken to the morgue and searched, a police agent’s card was found

on Le Cabuc. The author of this book had in his hands, in 1848, the

special report on this subject made to the Prefect of Police in 1832.

We will add, that if we are to believe a tradition of the police, which

is strange but probably well founded, Le Cabuc was Claquesous. The fact

is, that dating from the death of Le Cabuc, there was no longer any

question of Claquesous. Claquesous had nowhere left any trace of his

disappearance; he would seem to have amalgamated himself with the

invisible. His life had been all shadows, his end was night.

The whole insurgent group was still under the influence of the emotion

of that tragic case which had been so quickly tried and so quickly

terminated, when Courfeyrac again beheld on the barricade, the small

young man who had inquired of him that morning for Marius.

This lad, who had a bold and reckless air, had come by night to join

the insurgents.

BOOK THIRTEENTH—MARIUS ENTERS THE SHADOW

CHAPTER I—FROM THE RUE PLUMET TO THE QUARTIER SAINT-DENIS

The voice which had summoned Marius through the twilight to the

barricade of the Rue de la Chanvrerie, had produced on him the effect

of the voice of destiny. He wished to die; the opportunity presented

itself; he knocked at the door of the tomb, a hand in the darkness

offered him the key. These melancholy openings which take place in the

gloom before despair, are tempting. Marius thrust aside the bar which

had so often allowed him to pass, emerged from the garden, and said: “I

will go.”

Mad with grief, no longer conscious of anything fixed or solid in his

brain, incapable of accepting anything thenceforth of fate after those

two months passed in the intoxication of youth and love, overwhelmed at

once by all the reveries of despair, he had but one desire remaining,

to make a speedy end of all.

He set out at rapid pace. He found himself most opportunely armed, as

he had Javert’s pistols with him.

The young man of whom he thought that he had caught a glimpse, had

vanished from his sight in the street.

Marius, who had emerged from the Rue Plumet by the boulevard, traversed

the Esplanade and the bridge of the Invalides, the Champs-Élysées, the

Place Louis XV., and reached the Rue de Rivoli. The shops were open

there, the gas was burning under the arcades, women were making their

purchases in the stalls, people were eating ices in the Café Laiter,

and nibbling small cakes at the English pastry-cook’s shop. Only a few

posting-chaises were setting out at a gallop from the Hôtel des Princes

and the Hôtel Meurice.

Marius entered the Rue Saint-Honoré through the Passage Delorme. There

the shops were closed, the merchants were chatting in front of their

half-open doors, people were walking about, the street lanterns were

lighted, beginning with the first floor, all the windows were lighted

as usual. There was cavalry on the Place du Palais-Royal.

Marius followed the Rue Saint-Honoré. In proportion as he left the

Palais-Royal behind him, there were fewer lighted windows, the shops

were fast shut, no one was chatting on the thresholds, the street grew

sombre, and, at the same time, the crowd increased in density. For the

passers-by now amounted to a crowd. No one could be seen to speak in

this throng, and yet there arose from it a dull, deep murmur.

Near the fountain of the Arbre-Sec, there were “assemblages”,

motionless and gloomy groups which were to those who went and came as

stones in the midst of running water.

At the entrance to the Rue des Prouvaires, the crowd no longer walked.

It formed a resisting, massive, solid, compact, almost impenetrable

block of people who were huddled together, and conversing in low tones.

There were hardly any black coats or round hats now, but smock frocks,

blouses, caps, and bristling and cadaverous heads. This multitude

undulated confusedly in the nocturnal gloom. Its whisperings had the

hoarse accent of a vibration. Although not one of them was walking, a

dull trampling was audible in the mire. Beyond this dense portion of

the throng, in the Rue du Roule, in the Rue des Prouvaires, and in the

extension of the Rue Saint-Honoré, there was no longer a single window

in which a candle was burning. Only the solitary and diminishing rows

of lanterns could be seen vanishing into the street in the distance.

The lanterns of that date resembled large red stars, hanging to ropes,

and shed upon the pavement a shadow which had the form of a huge

spider. These streets were not deserted. There could be descried piles

of guns, moving bayonets, and troops bivouacking. No curious observer

passed that limit. There circulation ceased. There the rabble ended and

the army began.

Marius willed with the will of a man who hopes no more. He had been

summoned, he must go. He found a means to traverse the throng and to

pass the bivouac of the troops, he shunned the patrols, he avoided the

sentinels. He made a circuit, reached the Rue de Béthisy, and directed

his course towards the Halles. At the corner of the Rue des

Bourdonnais, there were no longer any lanterns.

After having passed the zone of the crowd, he had passed the limits of

the troops; he found himself in something startling. There was no

longer a passer-by, no longer a soldier, no longer a light, there was

no one; solitude, silence, night, I know not what chill which seized

hold upon one. Entering a street was like entering a cellar.

He continued to advance.

He took a few steps. Some one passed close to him at a run. Was it a

man? Or a woman? Were there many of them? he could not have told. It

had passed and vanished.

Proceeding from circuit to circuit, he reached a lane which he judged

to be the Rue de la Poterie; near the middle of this street, he came in

contact with an obstacle. He extended his hands. It was an overturned

wagon; his foot recognized pools of water, gullies, and paving-stones

scattered and piled up. A barricade had been begun there and abandoned.

He climbed over the stones and found himself on the other side of the

barrier. He walked very near the street-posts, and guided himself along

the walls of the houses. A little beyond the barricade, it seemed to

him that he could make out something white in front of him. He

approached, it took on a form. It was two white horses; the horses of

the omnibus harnessed by Bossuet in the morning, who had been straying

at random all day from street to street, and had finally halted there,

with the weary patience of brutes who no more understand the actions of

men, than man understands the actions of Providence.

Marius left the horses behind him. As he was approaching a street which

seemed to him to be the Rue du Contrat-Social, a shot coming no one

knows whence, and traversing the darkness at random, whistled close by

him, and the bullet pierced a brass shaving-dish suspended above his

head over a hairdresser’s shop. This pierced shaving-dish was still to

be seen in 1848, in the Rue du Contrat-Social, at the corner of the

pillars of the market.

This shot still betokened life. From that instant forth he encountered

nothing more.

The whole of this itinerary resembled a descent of black steps.

Nevertheless, Marius pressed forward.

CHAPTER II—AN OWL’S VIEW OF PARIS

A being who could have hovered over Paris that night with the wing of

the bat or the owl would have had beneath his eyes a gloomy spectacle.

All that old quarter of the Halles, which is like a city within a city,

through which run the Rues Saint-Denis and Saint-Martin, where a

thousand lanes cross, and of which the insurgents had made their

redoubt and their stronghold, would have appeared to him like a dark

and enormous cavity hollowed out in the centre of Paris. There the

glance fell into an abyss. Thanks to the broken lanterns, thanks to the

closed windows, there all radiance, all life, all sound, all movement

ceased. The invisible police of the insurrection were on the watch

everywhere, and maintained order, that is to say, night. The necessary

tactics of insurrection are to drown small numbers in a vast obscurity,

to multiply every combatant by the possibilities which that obscurity

contains. At dusk, every window where a candle was burning received a

shot. The light was extinguished, sometimes the inhabitant was killed.

Hence nothing was stirring. There was nothing but fright, mourning,

stupor in the houses; and in the streets, a sort of sacred horror. Not

even the long rows of windows and stores, the indentations of the

chimneys, and the roofs, and the vague reflections which are cast back

by the wet and muddy pavements, were visible. An eye cast upward at

that mass of shadows might, perhaps, have caught a glimpse here and

there, at intervals, of indistinct gleams which brought out broken and

eccentric lines, and profiles of singular buildings, something like the

lights which go and come in ruins; it was at such points that the

barricades were situated. The rest was a lake of obscurity, foggy,

heavy, and funereal, above which, in motionless and melancholy

outlines, rose the tower of Saint-Jacques, the church of Saint-Merry,

and two or three more of those grand edifices of which man makes giants

and the night makes phantoms.

All around this deserted and disquieting labyrinth, in the quarters

where the Parisian circulation had not been annihilated, and where a

few street lanterns still burned, the aerial observer might have

distinguished the metallic gleam of swords and bayonets, the dull

rumble of artillery, and the swarming of silent battalions whose ranks

were swelling from minute to minute; a formidable girdle which was

slowly drawing in and around the insurrection.

The invested quarter was no longer anything more than a monstrous

cavern; everything there appeared to be asleep or motionless, and, as

we have just seen, any street which one might come to offered nothing

but darkness.

A wild darkness, full of traps, full of unseen and formidable shocks,

into which it was alarming to penetrate, and in which it was terrible

to remain, where those who entered shivered before those whom they

awaited, where those who waited shuddered before those who were coming.

Invisible combatants were entrenched at every corner of the street;

snares of the sepulchre concealed in the density of night. All was

over. No more light was to be hoped for, henceforth, except the

lightning of guns, no further encounter except the abrupt and rapid

apparition of death. Where? How? When? No one knew, but it was certain

and inevitable. In this place which had been marked out for the

struggle, the Government and the insurrection, the National Guard, and

popular societies, the bourgeois and the uprising, groping their way,

were about to come into contact. The necessity was the same for both.

The only possible issue thenceforth was to emerge thence killed or

conquerors. A situation so extreme, an obscurity so powerful, that the

most timid felt themselves seized with resolution, and the most daring

with terror.

Moreover, on both sides, the fury, the rage, and the determination were

equal. For the one party, to advance meant death, and no one dreamed of

retreating; for the other, to remain meant death, and no one dreamed of

flight.

It was indispensable that all should be ended on the following day,

that triumph should rest either here or there, that the insurrection

should prove itself a revolution or a skirmish. The Government

understood this as well as the parties; the most insignificant

bourgeois felt it. Hence a thought of anguish which mingled with the

impenetrable gloom of this quarter where all was at the point of being

decided; hence a redoubled anxiety around that silence whence a

catastrophe was on the point of emerging. Here only one sound was

audible, a sound as heart-rending as the death rattle, as menacing as a

malediction, the tocsin of Saint-Merry. Nothing could be more

blood-curdling than the clamor of that wild and desperate bell, wailing

amid the shadows.

As it often happens, nature seemed to have fallen into accord with what

men were about to do. Nothing disturbed the harmony of the whole

effect. The stars had disappeared, heavy clouds filled the horizon with

their melancholy folds. A black sky rested on these dead streets, as

though an immense winding-sheet were being outspread over this immense

tomb.

While a battle that was still wholly political was in preparation in

the same locality which had already witnessed so many revolutionary

events, while youth, the secret associations, the schools, in the name

of principles, and the middle classes, in the name of interests, were

approaching preparatory to dashing themselves together, clasping and

throwing each other, while each one hastened and invited the last and

decisive hour of the crisis, far away and quite outside of this fatal

quarter, in the most profound depths of the unfathomable cavities of

that wretched old Paris which disappears under the splendor of happy

and opulent Paris, the sombre voice of the people could be heard giving

utterance to a dull roar.

A fearful and sacred voice which is composed of the roar of the brute

and of the word of God, which terrifies the weak and which warns the

wise, which comes both from below like the voice of the lion, and from

on high like the voice of the thunder.

CHAPTER III—THE EXTREME EDGE

Marius had reached the Halles.

There everything was still calmer, more obscure and more motionless

than in the neighboring streets. One would have said that the glacial

peace of the sepulchre had sprung forth from the earth and had spread

over the heavens.

Nevertheless, a red glow brought out against this black background the

lofty roofs of the houses which barred the Rue de la Chanvrerie on the

Saint-Eustache side. It was the reflection of the torch which was

burning in the Corinthe barricade. Marius directed his steps towards

that red light. It had drawn him to the Marché-aux-Poirées, and he

caught a glimpse of the dark mouth of the Rue des Prêcheurs. He entered

it. The insurgents’ sentinel, who was guarding the other end, did not

see him. He felt that he was very close to that which he had come in

search of, and he walked on tiptoe. In this manner he reached the elbow

of that short section of the Rue Mondétour which was, as the reader

will remember, the only communication which Enjolras had preserved with

the outside world. At the corner of the last house, on his left, he

thrust his head forward, and looked into the fragment of the Rue

Mondétour.

A little beyond the angle of the lane and the Rue de la Chanvrerie

which cast a broad curtain of shadow, in which he was himself engulfed,

he perceived some light on the pavement, a bit of the wine-shop, and

beyond, a flickering lamp within a sort of shapeless wall, and men

crouching down with guns on their knees. All this was ten fathoms

distant from him. It was the interior of the barricade.

The houses which bordered the lane on the right concealed the rest of

the wine-shop, the large barricade, and the flag from him.

Marius had but a step more to take.

Then the unhappy young man seated himself on a post, folded his arms,

and fell to thinking about his father.

He thought of that heroic Colonel Pontmercy, who had been so proud a

soldier, who had guarded the frontier of France under the Republic, and

had touched the frontier of Asia under Napoleon, who had beheld Genoa,

Alexandria, Milan, Turin, Madrid, Vienna, Dresden, Berlin, Moscow, who

had left on all the victorious battle-fields of Europe drops of that

same blood, which he, Marius, had in his veins, who had grown gray

before his time in discipline and command, who had lived with his

sword-belt buckled, his epaulets falling on his breast, his cockade

blackened with powder, his brow furrowed with his helmet, in barracks,

in camp, in the bivouac, in ambulances, and who, at the expiration of

twenty years, had returned from the great wars with a scarred cheek, a

smiling countenance, tranquil, admirable, pure as a child, having done

everything for France and nothing against her.

He said to himself that his day had also come now, that his hour had

struck, that following his father, he too was about to show himself

brave, intrepid, bold, to run to meet the bullets, to offer his breast

to bayonets, to shed his blood, to seek the enemy, to seek death, that

he was about to wage war in his turn and descend to the field of

battle, and that the field of battle upon which he was to descend was

the street, and that the war in which he was about to engage was civil

war!

He beheld civil war laid open like a gulf before him, and into this he

was about to fall. Then he shuddered.

He thought of his father’s sword, which his grandfather had sold to a

second-hand dealer, and which he had so mournfully regretted. He said

to himself that that chaste and valiant sword had done well to escape

from him, and to depart in wrath into the gloom; that if it had thus

fled, it was because it was intelligent and because it had foreseen the

future; that it had had a presentiment of this rebellion, the war of

the gutters, the war of the pavements, fusillades through

cellar-windows, blows given and received in the rear; it was because,

coming from Marengo and Friedland, it did not wish to go to the Rue de

la Chanvrerie; it was because, after what it had done with the father,

it did not wish to do this for the son! He told himself that if that

sword were there, if after taking possession of it at his father’s

pillow, he had dared to take it and carry it off for this combat of

darkness between Frenchmen in the streets, it would assuredly have

scorched his hands and burst out aflame before his eyes, like the sword

of the angel! He told himself that it was fortunate that it was not

there and that it had disappeared, that that was well, that that was

just, that his grandfather had been the true guardian of his father’s

glory, and that it was far better that the colonel’s sword should be

sold at auction, sold to the old-clothes man, thrown among the old

junk, than that it should, to-day, wound the side of his country.

And then he fell to weeping bitterly.

This was horrible. But what was he to do? Live without Cosette he could

not. Since she was gone, he must needs die. Had he not given her his

word of honor that he would die? She had gone knowing that; this meant

that it pleased her that Marius should die. And then, it was clear that

she no longer loved him, since she had departed thus without warning,

without a word, without a letter, although she knew his address! What

was the good of living, and why should he live now? And then, what!

should he retreat after going so far? should he flee from danger after

having approached it? should he slip away after having come and peeped

into the barricade? slip away, all in a tremble, saying: “After all, I

have had enough of it as it is. I have seen it, that suffices, this is

civil war, and I shall take my leave!” Should he abandon his friends

who were expecting him? Who were in need of him possibly! who were a

mere handful against an army! Should he be untrue at once to his love,

to country, to his word? Should he give to his cowardice the pretext of

patriotism? But this was impossible, and if the phantom of his father

was there in the gloom, and beheld him retreating, he would beat him on

the loins with the flat of his sword, and shout to him: “March on, you

poltroon!”

Thus a prey to the conflicting movements of his thoughts, he dropped

his head.

All at once he raised it. A sort of splendid rectification had just

been effected in his mind. There is a widening of the sphere of thought

which is peculiar to the vicinity of the grave; it makes one see

clearly to be near death. The vision of the action into which he felt

that he was, perhaps, on the point of entering, appeared to him no more

as lamentable, but as superb. The war of the street was suddenly

transfigured by some unfathomable inward working of his soul, before

the eye of his thought. All the tumultuous interrogation points of

reverie recurred to him in throngs, but without troubling him. He left

none of them unanswered.

Let us see, why should his father be indignant? Are there not cases

where insurrection rises to the dignity of duty? What was there that

was degrading for the son of Colonel Pontmercy in the combat which was

about to begin? It is no longer Montmirail nor Champaubert; it is

something quite different. The question is no longer one of sacred

territory,—but of a holy idea. The country wails, that may be, but

humanity applauds. But is it true that the country does wail? France

bleeds, but liberty smiles; and in the presence of liberty’s smile,

France forgets her wound. And then if we look at things from a still

more lofty point of view, why do we speak of civil war?

Civil war—what does that mean? Is there a foreign war? Is not all war

between men, war between brothers? War is qualified only by its object.

There is no such thing as foreign or civil war; there is only just and

unjust war. Until that day when the grand human agreement is concluded,

war, that at least which is the effort of the future, which is

hastening on against the past, which is lagging in the rear, may be

necessary. What have we to reproach that war with? War does not become

a disgrace, the sword does not become a disgrace, except when it is

used for assassinating the right, progress, reason, civilization,

truth. Then war, whether foreign or civil, is iniquitous; it is called

crime. Outside the pale of that holy thing, justice, by what right does

one form of man despise another? By what right should the sword of

Washington disown the pike of Camille Desmoulins? Leonidas against the

stranger, Timoleon against the tyrant, which is the greater? the one is

the defender, the other the liberator. Shall we brand every appeal to

arms within a city’s limits without taking the object into a

consideration? Then note the infamy of Brutus, Marcel, Arnould von

Blankenheim, Coligny, Hedgerow war? War of the streets? Why not? That

was the war of Ambiorix, of Artevelde, of Marnix, of Pelagius. But

Ambiorix fought against Rome, Artevelde against France, Marnix against

Spain, Pelagius against the Moors; all against the foreigner. Well, the

monarchy is a foreigner; oppression is a stranger; the right divine is

a stranger. Despotism violates the moral frontier, an invasion violates

the geographical frontier. Driving out the tyrant or driving out the

English, in both cases, regaining possession of one’s own territory.

There comes an hour when protestation no longer suffices; after

philosophy, action is required; live force finishes what the idea has

sketched out; Prometheus chained begins, Arostogeiton ends; the

encyclopedia enlightens souls, the 10th of August electrifies them.

After Æschylus, Thrasybulus; after Diderot, Danton. Multitudes have a

tendency to accept the master. Their mass bears witness to apathy. A

crowd is easily led as a whole to obedience. Men must be stirred up,

pushed on, treated roughly by the very benefit of their deliverance,

their eyes must be wounded by the true, light must be hurled at them in

terrible handfuls. They must be a little thunderstruck themselves at

their own well-being; this dazzling awakens them. Hence the necessity

of tocsins and wars. Great combatants must rise, must enlighten nations

with audacity, and shake up that sad humanity which is covered with

gloom by the right divine, Cæsarian glory, force, fanaticism,

irresponsible power, and absolute majesty; a rabble stupidly occupied

in the contemplation, in their twilight splendor, of these sombre

triumphs of the night. Down with the tyrant! Of whom are you speaking?

Do you call Louis Philippe the tyrant? No; no more than Louis XVI. Both

of them are what history is in the habit of calling good kings; but

principles are not to be parcelled out, the logic of the true is

rectilinear, the peculiarity of truth is that it lacks complaisance; no

concessions, then; all encroachments on man should be repressed. There

is a divine right in Louis XVI., there is \_because a Bourbon\_ in Louis

Philippe; both represent in a certain measure the confiscation of

right, and, in order to clear away universal insurrection, they must be

combated; it must be done, France being always the one to begin. When

the master falls in France, he falls everywhere. In short, what cause

is more just, and consequently, what war is greater, than that which

re-establishes social truth, restores her throne to liberty, restores

the people to the people, restores sovereignty to man, replaces the

purple on the head of France, restores equity and reason in their

plenitude, suppresses every germ of antagonism by restoring each one to

himself, annihilates the obstacle which royalty presents to the whole

immense universal concord, and places the human race once more on a

level with the right? These wars build up peace. An enormous fortress

of prejudices, privileges, superstitions, lies, exactions, abuses,

violences, iniquities, and darkness still stands erect in this world,

with its towers of hatred. It must be cast down. This monstrous mass

must be made to crumble. To conquer at Austerlitz is grand; to take the

Bastille is immense.

There is no one who has not noticed it in his own case—the soul,—and

therein lies the marvel of its unity complicated with ubiquity, has a

strange aptitude for reasoning almost coldly in the most violent

extremities, and it often happens that heartbroken passion and profound

despair in the very agony of their blackest monologues, treat subjects

and discuss theses. Logic is mingled with convulsion, and the thread of

the syllogism floats, without breaking, in the mournful storm of

thought. This was the situation of Marius’ mind.

As he meditated thus, dejected but resolute, hesitating in every

direction, and, in short, shuddering at what he was about to do, his

glance strayed to the interior of the barricade. The insurgents were

here conversing in a low voice, without moving, and there was

perceptible that quasi-silence which marks the last stage of

expectation. Overhead, at the small window in the third story Marius

descried a sort of spectator who appeared to him to be singularly

attentive. This was the porter who had been killed by Le Cabuc. Below,

by the lights of the torch, which was thrust between the paving-stones,

this head could be vaguely distinguished. Nothing could be stranger, in

that sombre and uncertain gleam, than that livid, motionless,

astonished face, with its bristling hair, its eyes fixed and staring,

and its yawning mouth, bent over the street in an attitude of

curiosity. One would have said that the man who was dead was surveying

those who were about to die. A long trail of blood which had flowed

from that head, descended in reddish threads from the window to the

height of the first floor, where it stopped.

BOOK FOURTEENTH—THE GRANDEURS OF DESPAIR

[Illustration: The Grandeurs of Despair]

CHAPTER I—THE FLAG: ACT FIRST

As yet, nothing had come. Ten o’clock had sounded from Saint-Merry.

Enjolras and Combeferre had gone and seated themselves, carbines in

hand, near the outlet of the grand barricade. They no longer addressed

each other, they listened, seeking to catch even the faintest and most

distant sound of marching.

Suddenly, in the midst of the dismal calm, a clear, gay, young voice,

which seemed to come from the Rue Saint-Denis, rose and began to sing

distinctly, to the old popular air of “By the Light of the Moon,” this

bit of poetry, terminated by a cry like the crow of a cock:—

Mon nez est en larmes,

Mon ami Bugeaud,

Prête moi tes gendarmes

Pour leur dire un mot.

En capote bleue,

La poule au shako,

Voici la banlieue!

Co-cocorico!54

They pressed each other’s hands.

“That is Gavroche,” said Enjolras.

“He is warning us,” said Combeferre.

A hasty rush troubled the deserted street; they beheld a being more

agile than a clown climb over the omnibus, and Gavroche bounded into

the barricade, all breathless, saying:—

“My gun! Here they are!”

An electric quiver shot through the whole barricade, and the sound of

hands seeking their guns became audible.

“Would you like my carbine?” said Enjolras to the lad.

“I want a big gun,” replied Gavroche.

And he seized Javert’s gun.

Two sentinels had fallen back, and had come in almost at the same

moment as Gavroche. They were the sentinels from the end of the street,

and the vidette of the Rue de la Petite-Truanderie. The vidette of the

Lane des Prêcheurs had remained at his post, which indicated that

nothing was approaching from the direction of the bridges and Halles.

The Rue de la Chanvrerie, of which a few paving-stones alone were dimly

visible in the reflection of the light projected on the flag, offered

to the insurgents the aspect of a vast black door vaguely opened into a

smoke.

Each man had taken up his position for the conflict.

Forty-three insurgents, among whom were Enjolras, Combeferre,

Courfeyrac, Bossuet, Joly, Bahorel, and Gavroche, were kneeling inside

the large barricade, with their heads on a level with the crest of the

barrier, the barrels of their guns and carbines aimed on the stones as

though at loop-holes, attentive, mute, ready to fire. Six, commanded by

Feuilly, had installed themselves, with their guns levelled at their

shoulders, at the windows of the two stories of Corinthe.

Several minutes passed thus, then a sound of footsteps, measured,

heavy, and numerous, became distinctly audible in the direction of

Saint-Leu. This sound, faint at first, then precise, then heavy and

sonorous, approached slowly, without halt, without intermission, with a

tranquil and terrible continuity. Nothing was to be heard but this. It

was that combined silence and sound, of the statue of the commander,

but this stony step had something indescribably enormous and multiple

about it which awakened the idea of a throng, and, at the same time,

the idea of a spectre. One thought one heard the terrible statue Legion

marching onward. This tread drew near; it drew still nearer, and

stopped. It seemed as though the breathing of many men could be heard

at the end of the street. Nothing was to be seen, however, but at the

bottom of that dense obscurity there could be distinguished a multitude

of metallic threads, as fine as needles and almost imperceptible, which

moved about like those indescribable phosphoric networks which one sees

beneath one’s closed eyelids, in the first mists of slumber at the

moment when one is dropping off to sleep. These were bayonets and

gun-barrels confusedly illuminated by the distant reflection of the

torch.

A pause ensued, as though both sides were waiting. All at once, from

the depths of this darkness, a voice, which was all the more sinister,

since no one was visible, and which appeared to be the gloom itself

speaking, shouted:—

“Who goes there?”

At the same time, the click of guns, as they were lowered into

position, was heard.

Enjolras replied in a haughty and vibrating tone:—

“The French Revolution!”

“Fire!” shouted the voice.

A flash empurpled all the façades in the street as though the door of a

furnace had been flung open, and hastily closed again.

A fearful detonation burst forth on the barricade. The red flag fell.

The discharge had been so violent and so dense that it had cut the

staff, that is to say, the very tip of the omnibus pole.

Bullets which had rebounded from the cornices of the houses penetrated

the barricade and wounded several men.

The impression produced by this first discharge was freezing. The

attack had been rough, and of a nature to inspire reflection in the

boldest. It was evident that they had to deal with an entire regiment

at the very least.

“Comrades!” shouted Courfeyrac, “let us not waste our powder. Let us

wait until they are in the street before replying.”

“And, above all,” said Enjolras, “let us raise the flag again.”

He picked up the flag, which had fallen precisely at his feet.

Outside, the clatter of the ramrods in the guns could be heard; the

troops were re-loading their arms.

Enjolras went on:—

“Who is there here with a bold heart? Who will plant the flag on the

barricade again?”

Not a man responded. To mount on the barricade at the very moment when,

without any doubt, it was again the object of their aim, was simply

death. The bravest hesitated to pronounce his own condemnation.

Enjolras himself felt a thrill. He repeated:—

“Does no one volunteer?”

CHAPTER II—THE FLAG: ACT SECOND

Since they had arrived at Corinthe, and had begun the construction of

the barricade, no attention had been paid to Father Mabeuf. M. Mabeuf

had not quitted the mob, however; he had entered the ground floor of

the wine-shop and had seated himself behind the counter. There he had,

so to speak, retreated into himself. He no longer seemed to look or to

think. Courfeyrac and others had accosted him two or three times,

warning him of his peril, beseeching him to withdraw, but he did not

hear them. When they were not speaking to him, his mouth moved as

though he were replying to some one, and as soon as he was addressed,

his lips became motionless and his eyes no longer had the appearance of

being alive.

Several hours before the barricade was attacked, he had assumed an

attitude which he did not afterwards abandon, with both fists planted

on his knees and his head thrust forward as though he were gazing over

a precipice. Nothing had been able to move him from this attitude; it

did not seem as though his mind were in the barricade. When each had

gone to take up his position for the combat, there remained in the

tap-room where Javert was bound to the post, only a single insurgent

with a naked sword, watching over Javert, and himself, Mabeuf. At the

moment of the attack, at the detonation, the physical shock had reached

him and had, as it were, awakened him; he started up abruptly, crossed

the room, and at the instant when Enjolras repeated his appeal: “Does

no one volunteer?” the old man was seen to make his appearance on the

threshold of the wine-shop. His presence produced a sort of commotion

in the different groups. A shout went up:—

“It is the voter! It is the member of the Convention! It is the

representative of the people!”

It is probable that he did not hear them.

He strode straight up to Enjolras, the insurgents withdrawing before

him with a religious fear; he tore the flag from Enjolras, who recoiled

in amazement and then, since no one dared to stop or to assist him,

this old man of eighty, with shaking head but firm foot, began slowly

to ascend the staircase of paving-stones arranged in the barricade.

This was so melancholy and so grand that all around him cried: “Off

with your hats!” At every step that he mounted, it was a frightful

spectacle; his white locks, his decrepit face, his lofty, bald, and

wrinkled brow, his amazed and open mouth, his aged arm upholding the

red banner, rose through the gloom and were enlarged in the bloody

light of the torch, and the bystanders thought that they beheld the

spectre of ’93 emerging from the earth, with the flag of terror in his

hand.

When he had reached the last step, when this trembling and terrible

phantom, erect on that pile of rubbish in the presence of twelve

hundred invisible guns, drew himself up in the face of death and as

though he were more powerful than it, the whole barricade assumed amid

the darkness, a supernatural and colossal form.

There ensued one of those silences which occur only in the presence of

prodigies. In the midst of this silence, the old man waved the red flag

and shouted:—

“Long live the Revolution! Long live the Republic! Fraternity!

Equality! and Death!”

Those in the barricade heard a low and rapid whisper, like the murmur

of a priest who is despatching a prayer in haste. It was probably the

commissary of police who was making the legal summons at the other end

of the street.

Then the same piercing voice which had shouted: “Who goes there?”

shouted:—

“Retire!”

M. Mabeuf, pale, haggard, his eyes lighted up with the mournful flame

of aberration, raised the flag above his head and repeated:—

“Long live the Republic!”

“Fire!” said the voice.

A second discharge, similar to the first, rained down upon the

barricade.

The old man fell on his knees, then rose again, dropped the flag and

fell backwards on the pavement, like a log, at full length, with

outstretched arms.

Rivulets of blood flowed beneath him. His aged head, pale and sad,

seemed to be gazing at the sky.

One of those emotions which are superior to man, which make him forget

even to defend himself, seized upon the insurgents, and they approached

the body with respectful awe.

“What men these regicides were!” said Enjolras.

Courfeyrac bent down to Enjolras’ ear:—

“This is for yourself alone, I do not wish to dampen the enthusiasm.

But this man was anything rather than a regicide. I knew him. His name

was Father Mabeuf. I do not know what was the matter with him to-day.

But he was a brave blockhead. Just look at his head.”

“The head of a blockhead and the heart of a Brutus,” replied Enjolras.

Then he raised his voice:—

“Citizens! This is the example which the old give to the young. We

hesitated, he came! We were drawing back, he advanced! This is what

those who are trembling with age teach to those who tremble with fear!

This aged man is august in the eyes of his country. He has had a long

life and a magnificent death! Now, let us place the body under cover,

that each one of us may defend this old man dead as he would his father

living, and may his presence in our midst render the barricade

impregnable!”

A murmur of gloomy and energetic assent followed these words.

Enjolras bent down, raised the old man’s head, and fierce as he was, he

kissed him on the brow, then, throwing wide his arms, and handling this

dead man with tender precaution, as though he feared to hurt it, he

removed his coat, showed the bloody holes in it to all, and said:—

“This is our flag now.”

CHAPTER III—GAVROCHE WOULD HAVE DONE BETTER TO ACCEPT ENJOLRAS’ CARBINE

They threw a long black shawl of Widow Hucheloup’s over Father Mabeuf.

Six men made a litter of their guns; on this they laid the body, and

bore it, with bared heads, with solemn slowness, to the large table in

the tap-room.

These men, wholly absorbed in the grave and sacred task in which they

were engaged, thought no more of the perilous situation in which they

stood.

When the corpse passed near Javert, who was still impassive, Enjolras

said to the spy:—

“It will be your turn presently!”

During all this time, Little Gavroche, who alone had not quitted his

post, but had remained on guard, thought he espied some men stealthily

approaching the barricade. All at once he shouted:—

“Look out!”

Courfeyrac, Enjolras, Jean Prouvaire, Combeferre, Joly, Bahorel,

Bossuet, and all the rest ran tumultuously from the wine-shop. It was

almost too late. They saw a glistening density of bayonets undulating

above the barricade. Municipal guards of lofty stature were making

their way in, some striding over the omnibus, others through the cut,

thrusting before them the urchin, who retreated, but did not flee.

The moment was critical. It was that first, redoubtable moment of

inundation, when the stream rises to the level of the levee and when

the water begins to filter through the fissures of dike. A second more

and the barricade would have been taken.

Bahorel dashed upon the first municipal guard who was entering, and

killed him on the spot with a blow from his gun; the second killed

Bahorel with a blow from his bayonet. Another had already overthrown

Courfeyrac, who was shouting: “Follow me!” The largest of all, a sort

of colossus, marched on Gavroche with his bayonet fixed. The urchin

took in his arms Javert’s immense gun, levelled it resolutely at the

giant, and fired. No discharge followed. Javert’s gun was not loaded.

The municipal guard burst into a laugh and raised his bayonet at the

child.

Before the bayonet had touched Gavroche, the gun slipped from the

soldier’s grasp, a bullet had struck the municipal guardsman in the

centre of the forehead, and he fell over on his back. A second bullet

struck the other guard, who had assaulted Courfeyrac in the breast, and

laid him low on the pavement.

This was the work of Marius, who had just entered the barricade.

CHAPTER IV—THE BARREL OF POWDER

Marius, still concealed in the turn of the Rue Mondétour, had

witnessed, shuddering and irresolute, the first phase of the combat.

But he had not long been able to resist that mysterious and sovereign

vertigo which may be designated as the call of the abyss. In the

presence of the imminence of the peril, in the presence of the death of

M. Mabeuf, that melancholy enigma, in the presence of Bahorel killed,

and Courfeyrac shouting: “Follow me!” of that child threatened, of his

friends to succor or to avenge, all hesitation had vanished, and he had

flung himself into the conflict, his two pistols in hand. With his

first shot he had saved Gavroche, and with the second delivered

Courfeyrac.

Amid the sound of the shots, amid the cries of the assaulted guards,

the assailants had climbed the entrenchment, on whose summit Municipal

Guards, soldiers of the line and National Guards from the suburbs could

now be seen, gun in hand, rearing themselves to more than half the

height of their bodies.

They already covered more than two-thirds of the barrier, but they did

not leap into the enclosure, as though wavering in the fear of some

trap. They gazed into the dark barricade as one would gaze into a

lion’s den. The light of the torch illuminated only their bayonets,

their bear-skin caps, and the upper part of their uneasy and angry

faces.

Marius had no longer any weapons; he had flung away his discharged

pistols after firing them; but he had caught sight of the barrel of

powder in the tap-room, near the door.

As he turned half round, gazing in that direction, a soldier took aim

at him. At the moment when the soldier was sighting Marius, a hand was

laid on the muzzle of the gun and obstructed it. This was done by some

one who had darted forward,—the young workman in velvet trousers. The

shot sped, traversed the hand and possibly, also, the workman, since he

fell, but the ball did not strike Marius. All this, which was rather to

be apprehended than seen through the smoke, Marius, who was entering

the tap-room, hardly noticed. Still, he had, in a confused way,

perceived that gun-barrel aimed at him, and the hand which had blocked

it, and he had heard the discharge. But in moments like this, the

things which one sees vacillate and are precipitated, and one pauses

for nothing. One feels obscurely impelled towards more darkness still,

and all is cloud.

The insurgents, surprised but not terrified, had rallied. Enjolras had

shouted: “Wait! Don’t fire at random!” In the first confusion, they

might, in fact, wound each other. The majority of them had ascended to

the window on the first story and to the attic windows, whence they

commanded the assailants.

The most determined, with Enjolras, Courfeyrac, Jean Prouvaire, and

Combeferre, had proudly placed themselves with their backs against the

houses at the rear, unsheltered and facing the ranks of soldiers and

guards who crowned the barricade.

All this was accomplished without haste, with that strange and

threatening gravity which precedes engagements. They took aim, point

blank, on both sides: they were so close that they could talk together

without raising their voices.

When they had reached this point where the spark is on the brink of

darting forth, an officer in a gorget extended his sword and said:—

“Lay down your arms!”

“Fire!” replied Enjolras.

The two discharges took place at the same moment, and all disappeared

in smoke.

An acrid and stifling smoke in which dying and wounded lay with weak,

dull groans. When the smoke cleared away, the combatants on both sides

could be seen to be thinned out, but still in the same positions,

reloading in silence. All at once, a thundering voice was heard,

shouting:—

“Be off with you, or I’ll blow up the barricade!”

All turned in the direction whence the voice proceeded.

Marius had entered the tap-room, and had seized the barrel of powder,

then he had taken advantage of the smoke, and the sort of obscure mist

which filled the entrenched enclosure, to glide along the barricade as

far as that cage of paving-stones where the torch was fixed. To tear it

from the torch, to replace it by the barrel of powder, to thrust the

pile of stones under the barrel, which was instantly staved in, with a

sort of horrible obedience,—all this had cost Marius but the time

necessary to stoop and rise again; and now all, National Guards,

Municipal Guards, officers, soldiers, huddled at the other extremity of

the barricade, gazed stupidly at him, as he stood with his foot on the

stones, his torch in his hand, his haughty face illuminated by a fatal

resolution, drooping the flame of the torch towards that redoubtable

pile where they could make out the broken barrel of powder, and giving

vent to that startling cry:—

“Be off with you, or I’ll blow up the barricade!”

Marius on that barricade after the octogenarian was the vision of the

young revolution after the apparition of the old.

“Blow up the barricade!” said a sergeant, “and yourself with it!”

Marius retorted: “And myself also.”

And he dropped the torch towards the barrel of powder.

But there was no longer any one on the barrier. The assailants,

abandoning their dead and wounded, flowed back pell-mell and in

disorder towards the extremity of the street, and there were again lost

in the night. It was a headlong flight.

The barricade was free.

CHAPTER V—END OF THE VERSES OF JEAN PROUVAIRE

All flocked around Marius. Courfeyrac flung himself on his neck.

“Here you are!”

“What luck!” said Combeferre.

“You came in opportunely!” ejaculated Bossuet.

“If it had not been for you, I should have been dead!” began Courfeyrac

again.

“If it had not been for you, I should have been gobbled up!” added

Gavroche.

Marius asked:—

“Where is the chief?”

“You are he!” said Enjolras.

Marius had had a furnace in his brain all day long; now it was a

whirlwind. This whirlwind which was within him, produced on him the

effect of being outside of him and of bearing him away. It seemed to

him that he was already at an immense distance from life. His two

luminous months of joy and love, ending abruptly at that frightful

precipice, Cosette lost to him, that barricade, M. Mabeuf getting

himself killed for the Republic, himself the leader of the

insurgents,—all these things appeared to him like a tremendous

nightmare. He was obliged to make a mental effort to recall the fact

that all that surrounded him was real. Marius had already seen too much

of life not to know that nothing is more imminent than the impossible,

and that what it is always necessary to foresee is the unforeseen. He

had looked on at his own drama as a piece which one does not

understand.

In the mists which enveloped his thoughts, he did not recognize Javert,

who, bound to his post, had not so much as moved his head during the

whole of the attack on the barricade, and who had gazed on the revolt

seething around him with the resignation of a martyr and the majesty of

a judge. Marius had not even seen him.

In the meanwhile, the assailants did not stir, they could be heard

marching and swarming through at the end of the street but they did not

venture into it, either because they were awaiting orders or because

they were awaiting reinforcements before hurling themselves afresh on

this impregnable redoubt. The insurgents had posted sentinels, and some

of them, who were medical students, set about caring for the wounded.

They had thrown the tables out of the wine-shop, with the exception of

the two tables reserved for lint and cartridges, and of the one on

which lay Father Mabeuf; they had added them to the barricade, and had

replaced them in the tap-room with mattresses from the bed of the widow

Hucheloup and her servants. On these mattresses they had laid the

wounded. As for the three poor creatures who inhabited Corinthe, no one

knew what had become of them. They were finally found, however, hidden

in the cellar.

A poignant emotion clouded the joy of the disencumbered barricade.

The roll was called. One of the insurgents was missing. And who was it?

One of the dearest. One of the most valiant. Jean Prouvaire. He was

sought among the wounded, he was not there. He was sought among the

dead, he was not there. He was evidently a prisoner. Combeferre said to

Enjolras:—

“They have our friend; we have their agent. Are you set on the death of

that spy?”

“Yes,” replied Enjolras; “but less so than on the life of Jean

Prouvaire.”

This took place in the tap-room near Javert’s post.

“Well,” resumed Combeferre, “I am going to fasten my handkerchief to my

cane, and go as a flag of truce, to offer to exchange our man for

theirs.”

“Listen,” said Enjolras, laying his hand on Combeferre’s arm.

At the end of the street there was a significant clash of arms.

They heard a manly voice shout:—

“Vive la France! Long live France! Long live the future!”

They recognized the voice of Prouvaire.

A flash passed, a report rang out.

Silence fell again.

“They have killed him,” exclaimed Combeferre.

Enjolras glanced at Javert, and said to him:—

“Your friends have just shot you.”

CHAPTER VI—THE AGONY OF DEATH AFTER THE AGONY OF LIFE

A peculiarity of this species of war is, that the attack of the

barricades is almost always made from the front, and that the

assailants generally abstain from turning the position, either because

they fear ambushes, or because they are afraid of getting entangled in

the tortuous streets. The insurgents’ whole attention had been

directed, therefore, to the grand barricade, which was, evidently, the

spot always menaced, and there the struggle would infallibly

recommence. But Marius thought of the little barricade, and went

thither. It was deserted and guarded only by the fire-pot which

trembled between the paving-stones. Moreover, the Mondétour alley, and

the branches of the Rue de la Petite Truanderie and the Rue du Cygne

were profoundly calm.

As Marius was withdrawing, after concluding his inspection, he heard

his name pronounced feebly in the darkness.

“Monsieur Marius!”

He started, for he recognized the voice which had called to him two

hours before through the gate in the Rue Plumet.

Only, the voice now seemed to be nothing more than a breath.

He looked about him, but saw no one.

Marius thought he had been mistaken, that it was an illusion added by

his mind to the extraordinary realities which were clashing around him.

He advanced a step, in order to quit the distant recess where the

barricade lay.

“Monsieur Marius!” repeated the voice.

This time he could not doubt that he had heard it distinctly; he looked

and saw nothing.

“At your feet,” said the voice.

He bent down, and saw in the darkness a form which was dragging itself

towards him.

It was crawling along the pavement. It was this that had spoken to him.

The fire-pot allowed him to distinguish a blouse, torn trousers of

coarse velvet, bare feet, and something which resembled a pool of

blood. Marius indistinctly made out a pale head which was lifted

towards him and which was saying to him:—

“You do not recognize me?”

“No.”

“Éponine.”

Marius bent hastily down. It was, in fact, that unhappy child. She was

dressed in men’s clothes.

“How come you here? What are you doing here?”

“I am dying,” said she.

There are words and incidents which arouse dejected beings. Marius

cried out with a start:—

“You are wounded! Wait, I will carry you into the room! They will

attend to you there. Is it serious? How must I take hold of you in

order not to hurt you? Where do you suffer? Help! My God! But why did

you come hither?”

And he tried to pass his arm under her, in order to raise her.

She uttered a feeble cry.

“Have I hurt you?” asked Marius.

“A little.”

“But I only touched your hand.”

She raised her hand to Marius, and in the middle of that hand Marius

saw a black hole.

“What is the matter with your hand?” said he.

“It is pierced.”

“Pierced?”

“Yes.”

“What with?”

“A bullet.”

“How?”

“Did you see a gun aimed at you?”

“Yes, and a hand stopping it.”

“It was mine.”

Marius was seized with a shudder.

“What madness! Poor child! But so much the better, if that is all, it

is nothing, let me carry you to a bed. They will dress your wound; one

does not die of a pierced hand.”

She murmured:—

“The bullet traversed my hand, but it came out through my back. It is

useless to remove me from this spot. I will tell you how you can care

for me better than any surgeon. Sit down near me on this stone.”

He obeyed; she laid her head on Marius’ knees, and, without looking at

him, she said:—

“Oh! How good this is! How comfortable this is! There; I no longer

suffer.”

She remained silent for a moment, then she turned her face with an

effort, and looked at Marius.

“Do you know what, Monsieur Marius? It puzzled me because you entered

that garden; it was stupid, because it was I who showed you that house;

and then, I ought to have said to myself that a young man like you—”

She paused, and overstepping the sombre transitions that undoubtedly

existed in her mind, she resumed with a heartrending smile:—

“You thought me ugly, didn’t you?”

She continued:—

“You see, you are lost! Now, no one can get out of the barricade. It

was I who led you here, by the way! You are going to die, I count upon

that. And yet, when I saw them taking aim at you, I put my hand on the

muzzle of the gun. How queer it is! But it was because I wanted to die

before you. When I received that bullet, I dragged myself here, no one

saw me, no one picked me up, I was waiting for you, I said: ‘So he is

not coming!’ Oh, if you only knew. I bit my blouse, I suffered so! Now

I am well. Do you remember the day I entered your chamber and when I

looked at myself in your mirror, and the day when I came to you on the

boulevard near the washerwomen? How the birds sang! That was a long

time ago. You gave me a hundred sous, and I said to you: ‘I don’t want

your money.’ I hope you picked up your coin? You are not rich. I did

not think to tell you to pick it up. The sun was shining bright, and it

was not cold. Do you remember, Monsieur Marius? Oh! How happy I am!

Every one is going to die.”

She had a mad, grave, and heart-breaking air. Her torn blouse disclosed

her bare throat.

As she talked, she pressed her pierced hand to her breast, where there

was another hole, and whence there spurted from moment to moment a

stream of blood, like a jet of wine from an open bung-hole.

Marius gazed at this unfortunate creature with profound compassion.

“Oh!” she resumed, “it is coming again, I am stifling!”

She caught up her blouse and bit it, and her limbs stiffened on the

pavement.

At that moment the young cock’s crow executed by little Gavroche

resounded through the barricade.

The child had mounted a table to load his gun, and was singing gayly

the song then so popular:—

“En voyant Lafayette,

Le gendarme répète:—

Sauvons nous! sauvons nous!

sauvons nous!”

“On beholding Lafayette,

The gendarme repeats:—

Let us flee! let us flee!

let us flee!

Éponine raised herself and listened; then she murmured:—

“It is he.”

And turning to Marius:—

“My brother is here. He must not see me. He would scold me.”

“Your brother?” inquired Marius, who was meditating in the most bitter

and sorrowful depths of his heart on the duties to the Thénardiers

which his father had bequeathed to him; “who is your brother?”

“That little fellow.”

“The one who is singing?”

“Yes.”

Marius made a movement.

“Oh! don’t go away,” said she, “it will not be long now.”

She was sitting almost upright, but her voice was very low and broken

by hiccoughs.

At intervals, the death rattle interrupted her. She put her face as

near that of Marius as possible. She added with a strange expression:—

“Listen, I do not wish to play you a trick. I have a letter in my

pocket for you. I was told to put it in the post. I kept it. I did not

want to have it reach you. But perhaps you will be angry with me for it

when we meet again presently? Take your letter.”

She grasped Marius’ hand convulsively with her pierced hand, but she no

longer seemed to feel her sufferings. She put Marius’ hand in the

pocket of her blouse. There, in fact, Marius felt a paper.

“Take it,” said she.

Marius took the letter.

She made a sign of satisfaction and contentment.

“Now, for my trouble, promise me—”

And she stopped.

“What?” asked Marius.

“Promise me!”

“I promise.”

“Promise to give me a kiss on my brow when I am dead.—I shall feel it.”

She dropped her head again on Marius’ knees, and her eyelids closed. He

thought the poor soul had departed. Éponine remained motionless. All at

once, at the very moment when Marius fancied her asleep forever, she

slowly opened her eyes in which appeared the sombre profundity of

death, and said to him in a tone whose sweetness seemed already to

proceed from another world:—

“And by the way, Monsieur Marius, I believe that I was a little bit in

love with you.”

She tried to smile once more and expired.

CHAPTER VII—GAVROCHE AS A PROFOUND CALCULATOR OF DISTANCES

Marius kept his promise. He dropped a kiss on that livid brow, where

the icy perspiration stood in beads.

This was no infidelity to Cosette; it was a gentle and pensive farewell

to an unhappy soul.

It was not without a tremor that he had taken the letter which Éponine

had given him. He had immediately felt that it was an event of weight.

He was impatient to read it. The heart of man is so constituted that

the unhappy child had hardly closed her eyes when Marius began to think

of unfolding this paper.

He laid her gently on the ground, and went away. Something told him

that he could not peruse that letter in the presence of that body.

He drew near to a candle in the tap-room. It was a small note, folded

and sealed with a woman’s elegant care. The address was in a woman’s

hand and ran:—

“To Monsieur, Monsieur Marius Pontmercy, at M. Courfeyrac’s, Rue de la

Verrerie, No. 16.”

He broke the seal and read:—

“My dearest, alas! my father insists on our setting out immediately.

We shall be this evening in the Rue de l’Homme Armé, No. 7.

In a week we shall be in England. COSETTE. June 4th.”

Such was the innocence of their love that Marius was not even

acquainted with Cosette’s handwriting.

What had taken place may be related in a few words. Éponine had been

the cause of everything. After the evening of the 3d of June she had

cherished a double idea, to defeat the projects of her father and the

ruffians on the house of the Rue Plumet, and to separate Marius and

Cosette. She had exchanged rags with the first young scamp she came

across who had thought it amusing to dress like a woman, while Éponine

disguised herself like a man. It was she who had conveyed to Jean

Valjean in the Champ de Mars the expressive warning: “Leave your

house.” Jean Valjean had, in fact, returned home, and had said to

Cosette: “We set out this evening and we go to the Rue de l’Homme Armé

with Toussaint. Next week, we shall be in London.” Cosette, utterly

overwhelmed by this unexpected blow, had hastily penned a couple of

lines to Marius. But how was she to get the letter to the post? She

never went out alone, and Toussaint, surprised at such a commission,

would certainly show the letter to M. Fauchelevent. In this dilemma,

Cosette had caught sight through the fence of Éponine in man’s clothes,

who now prowled incessantly around the garden. Cosette had called to

“this young workman” and had handed him five francs and the letter,

saying: “Carry this letter immediately to its address.” Éponine had put

the letter in her pocket. The next day, on the 5th of June, she went to

Courfeyrac’s quarters to inquire for Marius, not for the purpose of

delivering the letter, but,—a thing which every jealous and loving soul

will comprehend,—“to see.” There she had waited for Marius, or at least

for Courfeyrac, still for the purpose of \_seeing\_. When Courfeyrac had

told her: “We are going to the barricades,” an idea flashed through her

mind, to fling herself into that death, as she would have done into any

other, and to thrust Marius into it also. She had followed Courfeyrac,

had made sure of the locality where the barricade was in process of

construction; and, quite certain, since Marius had received no warning,

and since she had intercepted the letter, that he would go at dusk to

his trysting place for every evening, she had betaken herself to the

Rue Plumet, had there awaited Marius, and had sent him, in the name of

his friends, the appeal which would, she thought, lead him to the

barricade. She reckoned on Marius’ despair when he should fail to find

Cosette; she was not mistaken. She had returned to the Rue de la

Chanvrerie herself. What she did there the reader has just seen. She

died with the tragic joy of jealous hearts who drag the beloved being

into their own death, and who say: “No one shall have him!”

Marius covered Cosette’s letter with kisses. So she loved him! For one

moment the idea occurred to him that he ought not to die now. Then he

said to himself: “She is going away. Her father is taking her to

England, and my grandfather refuses his consent to the marriage.

Nothing is changed in our fates.” Dreamers like Marius are subject to

supreme attacks of dejection, and desperate resolves are the result.

The fatigue of living is insupportable; death is sooner over with. Then

he reflected that he had still two duties to fulfil: to inform Cosette

of his death and send her a final farewell, and to save from the

impending catastrophe which was in preparation, that poor child,

Éponine’s brother and Thénardier’s son.

He had a pocket-book about him; the same one which had contained the

note-book in which he had inscribed so many thoughts of love for

Cosette. He tore out a leaf and wrote on it a few lines in pencil:—

“Our marriage was impossible. I asked my grandfather, he refused; I

have no fortune, neither hast thou. I hastened to thee, thou wert no

longer there. Thou knowest the promise that I gave thee, I shall keep

it. I die. I love thee. When thou readest this, my soul will be near

thee, and thou wilt smile.”

Having nothing wherewith to seal this letter, he contented himself with

folding the paper in four, and added the address:—

“To Mademoiselle Cosette Fauchelevent, at M. Fauchelevent’s, Rue de

l’Homme Armé, No. 7.”

Having folded the letter, he stood in thought for a moment, drew out

his pocket-book again, opened it, and wrote, with the same pencil,

these four lines on the first page:—

“My name is Marius Pontmercy. Carry my body to my grandfather, M.

Gillenormand, Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, No. 6, in the Marais.”

He put his pocketbook back in his pocket, then he called Gavroche.

The gamin, at the sound of Marius’ voice, ran up to him with his merry

and devoted air.

“Will you do something for me?”

“Anything,” said Gavroche. “Good God! if it had not been for you, I

should have been done for.”

“Do you see this letter?”

“Yes.”

“Take it. Leave the barricade instantly” (Gavroche began to scratch his

ear uneasily) “and to-morrow morning, you will deliver it at its

address to Mademoiselle Cosette, at M. Fauchelevent’s, Rue de l’Homme

Armé, No. 7.”

The heroic child replied

“Well, but! in the meanwhile the barricade will be taken, and I shall

not be there.”

“The barricade will not be attacked until daybreak, according to all

appearances, and will not be taken before to-morrow noon.”

The fresh respite which the assailants were granting to the barricade

had, in fact, been prolonged. It was one of those intermissions which

frequently occur in nocturnal combats, which are always followed by an

increase of rage.

“Well,” said Gavroche, “what if I were to go and carry your letter

to-morrow?”

“It will be too late. The barricade will probably be blockaded, all the

streets will be guarded, and you will not be able to get out. Go at

once.”

Gavroche could think of no reply to this, and stood there in

indecision, scratching his ear sadly.

All at once, he took the letter with one of those birdlike movements

which were common with him.

“All right,” said he.

And he started off at a run through Mondétour lane.

An idea had occurred to Gavroche which had brought him to a decision,

but he had not mentioned it for fear that Marius might offer some

objection to it.

This was the idea:—

“It is barely midnight, the Rue de l’Homme Armé is not far off; I will

go and deliver the letter at once, and I shall get back in time.”

BOOK FIFTEENTH—THE RUE DE L’HOMME ARMÉ

CHAPTER I—A DRINKER IS A BABBLER

What are the convulsions of a city in comparison with the insurrections

of the soul? Man is a depth still greater than the people. Jean Valjean

at that very moment was the prey of a terrible upheaval. Every sort of

gulf had opened again within him. He also was trembling, like Paris, on

the brink of an obscure and formidable revolution. A few hours had

sufficed to bring this about. His destiny and his conscience had

suddenly been covered with gloom. Of him also, as well as of Paris, it

might have been said: “Two principles are face to face. The white angel

and the black angel are about to seize each other on the bridge of the

abyss. Which of the two will hurl the other over? Who will carry the

day?”

On the evening preceding this same 5th of June, Jean Valjean,

accompanied by Cosette and Toussaint had installed himself in the Rue

de l’Homme Armé. A change awaited him there.

Cosette had not quitted the Rue Plumet without making an effort at

resistance. For the first time since they had lived side by side,

Cosette’s will and the will of Jean Valjean had proved to be distinct,

and had been in opposition, at least, if they had not clashed. There

had been objections on one side and inflexibility on the other. The

abrupt advice: “Leave your house,” hurled at Jean Valjean by a

stranger, had alarmed him to the extent of rendering him peremptory. He

thought that he had been traced and followed. Cosette had been obliged

to give way.

Both had arrived in the Rue de l’Homme Armé without opening their lips,

and without uttering a word, each being absorbed in his own personal

preoccupation; Jean Valjean so uneasy that he did not notice Cosette’s

sadness, Cosette so sad that she did not notice Jean Valjean’s

uneasiness.

Jean Valjean had taken Toussaint with him, a thing which he had never

done in his previous absences. He perceived the possibility of not

returning to the Rue Plumet, and he could neither leave Toussaint

behind nor confide his secret to her. Besides, he felt that she was

devoted and trustworthy. Treachery between master and servant begins in

curiosity. Now Toussaint, as though she had been destined to be Jean

Valjean’s servant, was not curious. She stammered in her peasant

dialect of Barneville: “I am made so; I do my work; the rest is no

affair of mine.”

In this departure from the Rue Plumet, which had been almost a flight,

Jean Valjean had carried away nothing but the little embalmed valise,

baptized by Cosette “the inseparable.” Full trunks would have required

porters, and porters are witnesses. A fiacre had been summoned to the

door on the Rue de Babylone, and they had taken their departure.

It was with difficulty that Toussaint had obtained permission to pack

up a little linen and clothes and a few toilet articles. Cosette had

taken only her portfolio and her blotting-book.

Jean Valjean, with a view to augmenting the solitude and the mystery of

this departure, had arranged to quit the pavilion of the Rue Plumet

only at dusk, which had allowed Cosette time to write her note to

Marius. They had arrived in the Rue de l’Homme Armé after night had

fully fallen.

They had gone to bed in silence.

The lodgings in the Rue de l’Homme Armé were situated on a back court,

on the second floor, and were composed of two sleeping-rooms, a

dining-room and a kitchen adjoining the dining-room, with a garret

where there was a folding-bed, and which fell to Toussaint’s share. The

dining-room was an antechamber as well, and separated the two bedrooms.

The apartment was provided with all necessary utensils.

People re-acquire confidence as foolishly as they lose it; human nature

is so constituted. Hardly had Jean Valjean reached the Rue de l’Homme

Armé when his anxiety was lightened and by degrees dissipated. There

are soothing spots which act in some sort mechanically on the mind. An

obscure street, peaceable inhabitants. Jean Valjean experienced an

indescribable contagion of tranquillity in that alley of ancient Paris,

which is so narrow that it is barred against carriages by a transverse

beam placed on two posts, which is deaf and dumb in the midst of the

clamorous city, dimly lighted at midday, and is, so to speak, incapable

of emotions between two rows of lofty houses centuries old, which hold

their peace like ancients as they are. There was a touch of stagnant

oblivion in that street. Jean Valjean drew his breath once more there.

How could he be found there?

His first care was to place \_the inseparable\_ beside him.

He slept well. Night brings wisdom; we may add, night soothes. On the

following morning he awoke in a mood that was almost gay. He thought

the dining-room charming, though it was hideous, furnished with an old

round table, a long sideboard surmounted by a slanting mirror, a

dilapidated armchair, and several plain chairs which were encumbered

with Toussaint’s packages. In one of these packages Jean Valjean’s

uniform of a National Guard was visible through a rent.

As for Cosette, she had had Toussaint take some broth to her room, and

did not make her appearance until evening.

About five o’clock, Toussaint, who was going and coming and busying

herself with the tiny establishment, set on the table a cold chicken,

which Cosette, out of deference to her father, consented to glance at.

That done, Cosette, under the pretext of an obstinate sick headache,

had bade Jean Valjean good night and had shut herself up in her

chamber. Jean Valjean had eaten a wing of the chicken with a good

appetite, and with his elbows on the table, having gradually recovered

his serenity, had regained possession of his sense of security.

While he was discussing this modest dinner, he had, twice or thrice,

noticed in a confused way, Toussaint’s stammering words as she said to

him: “Monsieur, there is something going on, they are fighting in

Paris.” But absorbed in a throng of inward calculations, he had paid no

heed to it. To tell the truth, he had not heard her. He rose and began

to pace from the door to the window and from the window to the door,

growing ever more serene.

With this calm, Cosette, his sole anxiety, recurred to his thoughts.

Not that he was troubled by this headache, a little nervous crisis, a

young girl’s fit of sulks, the cloud of a moment, there would be

nothing left of it in a day or two; but he meditated on the future,

and, as was his habit, he thought of it with pleasure. After all, he

saw no obstacle to their happy life resuming its course. At certain

hours, everything seems impossible, at others everything appears easy;

Jean Valjean was in the midst of one of these good hours. They

generally succeed the bad ones, as day follows night, by virtue of that

law of succession and of contrast which lies at the very foundation of

nature, and which superficial minds call antithesis. In this peaceful

street where he had taken refuge, Jean Valjean got rid of all that had

been troubling him for some time past. This very fact, that he had seen

many shadows, made him begin to perceive a little azure. To have

quitted the Rue Plumet without complications or incidents was one good

step already accomplished. Perhaps it would be wise to go abroad, if

only for a few months, and to set out for London. Well, they would go.

What difference did it make to him whether he was in France or in

England, provided he had Cosette beside him? Cosette was his nation.

Cosette sufficed for his happiness; the idea that he, perhaps, did not

suffice for Cosette’s happiness, that idea which had formerly been the

cause of his fever and sleeplessness, did not even present itself to

his mind. He was in a state of collapse from all his past sufferings,

and he was fully entered on optimism. Cosette was by his side, she

seemed to be his; an optical illusion which every one has experienced.

He arranged in his own mind, with all sorts of felicitous devices, his

departure for England with Cosette, and he beheld his felicity

reconstituted wherever he pleased, in the perspective of his reverie.

As he paced to and fro with long strides, his glance suddenly

encountered something strange.

In the inclined mirror facing him which surmounted the sideboard, he

saw the four lines which follow:—

“My dearest, alas! my father insists on our setting out immediately. We

shall be this evening in the Rue de l’Homme Armé, No. 7. In a week we

shall be in England. COSETTE. June 4th.”

Jean Valjean halted, perfectly haggard.

Cosette on her arrival had placed her blotting-book on the sideboard in

front of the mirror, and, utterly absorbed in her agony of grief, had

forgotten it and left it there, without even observing that she had

left it wide open, and open at precisely the page on which she had laid

to dry the four lines which she had penned, and which she had given in

charge of the young workman in the Rue Plumet. The writing had been

printed off on the blotter.

The mirror reflected the writing.

The result was, what is called in geometry, \_the symmetrical image\_; so

that the writing, reversed on the blotter, was righted in the mirror

and presented its natural appearance; and Jean Valjean had beneath his

eyes the letter written by Cosette to Marius on the preceding evening.

It was simple and withering.

Jean Valjean stepped up to the mirror. He read the four lines again,

but he did not believe them. They produced on him the effect of

appearing in a flash of lightning. It was a hallucination, it was

impossible. It was not so.

Little by little, his perceptions became more precise; he looked at

Cosette’s blotting-book, and the consciousness of the reality returned

to him. He caught up the blotter and said: “It comes from there.” He

feverishly examined the four lines imprinted on the blotter, the

reversal of the letters converted into an odd scrawl, and he saw no

sense in it. Then he said to himself: “But this signifies nothing;

there is nothing written here.” And he drew a long breath with

inexpressible relief. Who has not experienced those foolish joys in

horrible instants? The soul does not surrender to despair until it has

exhausted all illusions.

He held the blotter in his hand and contemplated it in stupid delight,

almost ready to laugh at the hallucination of which he had been the

dupe. All at once his eyes fell upon the mirror again, and again he

beheld the vision. There were the four lines outlined with inexorable

clearness. This time it was no mirage. The recurrence of a vision is a

reality; it was palpable, it was the writing restored in the mirror. He

understood.

Jean Valjean tottered, dropped the blotter, and fell into the old

armchair beside the buffet, with drooping head, and glassy eyes, in

utter bewilderment. He told himself that it was plain, that the light

of the world had been eclipsed forever, and that Cosette had written

that to some one. Then he heard his soul, which had become terrible

once more, give vent to a dull roar in the gloom. Try then the effect

of taking from the lion the dog which he has in his cage!

Strange and sad to say, at that very moment, Marius had not yet

received Cosette’s letter; chance had treacherously carried it to Jean

Valjean before delivering it to Marius. Up to that day, Jean Valjean

had not been vanquished by trial. He had been subjected to fearful

proofs; no violence of bad fortune had been spared him; the ferocity of

fate, armed with all vindictiveness and all social scorn, had taken him

for her prey and had raged against him. He had accepted every extremity

when it had been necessary; he had sacrificed his inviolability as a

reformed man, had yielded up his liberty, risked his head, lost

everything, suffered everything, and he had remained disinterested and

stoical to such a point that he might have been thought to be absent

from himself like a martyr. His conscience inured to every assault of

destiny, might have appeared to be forever impregnable. Well, any one

who had beheld his spiritual self would have been obliged to concede

that it weakened at that moment. It was because, of all the tortures

which he had undergone in the course of this long inquisition to which

destiny had doomed him, this was the most terrible. Never had such

pincers seized him hitherto. He felt the mysterious stirring of all his

latent sensibilities. He felt the plucking at the strange chord. Alas!

the supreme trial, let us say rather, the only trial, is the loss of

the beloved being.

Poor old Jean Valjean certainly did not love Cosette otherwise than as

a father; but we have already remarked, above, that into this paternity

the widowhood of his life had introduced all the shades of love; he

loved Cosette as his daughter, and he loved her as his mother, and he

loved her as his sister; and, as he had never had either a woman to

love or a wife, as nature is a creditor who accepts no protest, that

sentiment also, the most impossible to lose, was mingled with the rest,

vague, ignorant, pure with the purity of blindness, unconscious,

celestial, angelic, divine; less like a sentiment than like an

instinct, less like an instinct than like an imperceptible and

invisible but real attraction; and love, properly speaking, was, in his

immense tenderness for Cosette, like the thread of gold in the

mountain, concealed and virgin.

Let the reader recall the situation of heart which we have already

indicated. No marriage was possible between them; not even that of

souls; and yet, it is certain that their destinies were wedded. With

the exception of Cosette, that is to say, with the exception of a

childhood, Jean Valjean had never, in the whole of his long life, known

anything of that which may be loved. The passions and loves which

succeed each other had not produced in him those successive green

growths, tender green or dark green, which can be seen in foliage which

passes through the winter and in men who pass fifty. In short, and we

have insisted on it more than once, all this interior fusion, all this

whole, of which the sum total was a lofty virtue, ended in rendering

Jean Valjean a father to Cosette. A strange father, forged from the

grandfather, the son, the brother, and the husband, that existed in

Jean Valjean; a father in whom there was included even a mother; a

father who loved Cosette and adored her, and who held that child as his

light, his home, his family, his country, his paradise.

Thus when he saw that the end had absolutely come, that she was

escaping from him, that she was slipping from his hands, that she was

gliding from him, like a cloud, like water, when he had before his eyes

this crushing proof: “another is the goal of her heart, another is the

wish of her life; there is a dearest one, I am no longer anything but

her father, I no longer exist”; when he could no longer doubt, when he

said to himself: “She is going away from me!” the grief which he felt

surpassed the bounds of possibility. To have done all that he had done

for the purpose of ending like this! And the very idea of being

nothing! Then, as we have just said, a quiver of revolt ran through him

from head to foot. He felt, even in the very roots of his hair, the

immense reawakening of egotism, and the \_I\_ in this man’s abyss howled.

There is such a thing as the sudden giving way of the inward subsoil. A

despairing certainty does not make its way into a man without thrusting

aside and breaking certain profound elements which, in some cases, are

the very man himself. Grief, when it attains this shape, is a headlong

flight of all the forces of the conscience. These are fatal crises. Few

among us emerge from them still like ourselves and firm in duty. When

the limit of endurance is overstepped, the most imperturbable virtue is

disconcerted. Jean Valjean took the blotter again, and convinced

himself afresh; he remained bowed and as though petrified and with

staring eyes, over those four unobjectionable lines; and there arose

within him such a cloud that one might have thought that everything in

this soul was crumbling away.

He examined this revelation, athwart the exaggerations of reverie, with

an apparent and terrifying calmness, for it is a fearful thing when a

man’s calmness reaches the coldness of the statue.

He measured the terrible step which his destiny had taken without his

having a suspicion of the fact; he recalled his fears of the preceding

summer, so foolishly dissipated; he recognized the precipice, it was

still the same; only, Jean Valjean was no longer on the brink, he was

at the bottom of it.

The unprecedented and heart-rending thing about it was that he had

fallen without perceiving it. All the light of his life had departed,

while he still fancied that he beheld the sun.

His instinct did not hesitate. He put together certain circumstances,

certain dates, certain blushes and certain pallors on Cosette’s part,

and he said to himself: “It is he.”

The divination of despair is a sort of mysterious bow which never

misses its aim. He struck Marius with his first conjecture. He did not

know the name, but he found the man instantly. He distinctly perceived,

in the background of the implacable conjuration of his memories, the

unknown prowler of the Luxembourg, that wretched seeker of love

adventures, that idler of romance, that idiot, that coward, for it is

cowardly to come and make eyes at young girls who have beside them a

father who loves them.

After he had thoroughly verified the fact that this young man was at

the bottom of this situation, and that everything proceeded from that

quarter, he, Jean Valjean, the regenerated man, the man who had so

labored over his soul, the man who had made so many efforts to resolve

all life, all misery, and all unhappiness into love, looked into his

own breast and there beheld a spectre, Hate.

Great griefs contain something of dejection. They discourage one with

existence. The man into whom they enter feels something within him

withdraw from him. In his youth, their visits are lugubrious; later on

they are sinister. Alas, if despair is a fearful thing when the blood

is hot, when the hair is black, when the head is erect on the body like

the flame on the torch, when the roll of destiny still retains its full

thickness, when the heart, full of desirable love, still possesses

beats which can be returned to it, when one has time for redress, when

all women and all smiles and all the future and all the horizon are

before one, when the force of life is complete, what is it in old age,

when the years hasten on, growing ever paler, to that twilight hour

when one begins to behold the stars of the tomb?

While he was meditating, Toussaint entered. Jean Valjean rose and asked

her:—

“In what quarter is it? Do you know?”

Toussaint was struck dumb, and could only answer him:—

“What is it, sir?”

Jean Valjean began again: “Did you not tell me that just now that there

is fighting going on?”

“Ah! yes, sir,” replied Toussaint. “It is in the direction of

Saint-Merry.”

There is a mechanical movement which comes to us, unconsciously, from

the most profound depths of our thought. It was, no doubt, under the

impulse of a movement of this sort, and of which he was hardly

conscious, that Jean Valjean, five minutes later, found himself in the

street.

Bareheaded, he sat upon the stone post at the door of his house. He

seemed to be listening.

Night had come.

CHAPTER II—THE STREET URCHIN AN ENEMY OF LIGHT

How long did he remain thus? What was the ebb and flow of this tragic

meditation? Did he straighten up? Did he remain bowed? Had he been bent

to breaking? Could he still rise and regain his footing in his

conscience upon something solid? He probably would not have been able

to tell himself.

The street was deserted. A few uneasy bourgeois, who were rapidly

returning home, hardly saw him. Each one for himself in times of peril.

The lamp-lighter came as usual to light the lantern which was situated

precisely opposite the door of No. 7, and then went away. Jean Valjean

would not have appeared like a living man to any one who had examined

him in that shadow. He sat there on the post of his door, motionless as

a form of ice. There is congealment in despair. The alarm bells and a

vague and stormy uproar were audible. In the midst of all these

convulsions of the bell mingled with the revolt, the clock of

Saint-Paul struck eleven, gravely and without haste; for the tocsin is

man; the hour is God. The passage of the hour produced no effect on

Jean Valjean; Jean Valjean did not stir. Still, at about that moment, a

brusque report burst forth in the direction of the Halles, a second yet

more violent followed; it was probably that attack on the barricade in

the Rue de la Chanvrerie which we have just seen repulsed by Marius. At

this double discharge, whose fury seemed augmented by the stupor of the

night, Jean Valjean started; he rose, turning towards the quarter

whence the noise proceeded; then he fell back upon the post again,

folded his arms, and his head slowly sank on his bosom again.

He resumed his gloomy dialogue with himself.

All at once, he raised his eyes; some one was walking in the street, he

heard steps near him. He looked, and by the light of the lanterns, in

the direction of the street which ran into the Rue-aux-Archives, he

perceived a young, livid, and beaming face.

Gavroche had just arrived in the Rue de l’Homme Armé.

Gavroche was staring into the air, apparently in search of something.

He saw Jean Valjean perfectly well but he took no notice of him.

Gavroche after staring into the air, stared below; he raised himself on

tiptoe, and felt of the doors and windows of the ground floor; they

were all shut, bolted, and padlocked. After having authenticated the

fronts of five or six barricaded houses in this manner, the urchin

shrugged his shoulders, and took himself to task in these terms:—

“Pardi!”

Then he began to stare into the air again.

Jean Valjean, who, an instant previously, in his then state of mind,

would not have spoken to or even answered any one, felt irresistibly

impelled to accost that child.

“What is the matter with you, my little fellow?” he said.

“The matter with me is that I am hungry,” replied Gavroche frankly. And

he added: “Little fellow yourself.”

Jean Valjean fumbled in his fob and pulled out a five-franc piece.

But Gavroche, who was of the wagtail species, and who skipped

vivaciously from one gesture to another, had just picked up a stone. He

had caught sight of the lantern.

“See here,” said he, “you still have your lanterns here. You are

disobeying the regulations, my friend. This is disorderly. Smash that

for me.”

And he flung the stone at the lantern, whose broken glass fell with

such a clatter that the bourgeois in hiding behind their curtains in

the opposite house cried: “There is ‘Ninety-three’ come again.”

The lantern oscillated violently, and went out. The street had suddenly

become black.

“That’s right, old street,” ejaculated Gavroche, “put on your

night-cap.”

And turning to Jean Valjean:—

“What do you call that gigantic monument that you have there at the end

of the street? It’s the Archives, isn’t it? I must crumble up those big

stupids of pillars a bit and make a nice barricade out of them.”

Jean Valjean stepped up to Gavroche.

“Poor creature,” he said in a low tone, and speaking to himself, “he is

hungry.”

And he laid the hundred-sou piece in his hand.

Gavroche raised his face, astonished at the size of this sou; he stared

at it in the darkness, and the whiteness of the big sou dazzled him. He

knew five-franc pieces by hearsay; their reputation was agreeable to

him; he was delighted to see one close to. He said:—

“Let us contemplate the tiger.”

He gazed at it for several minutes in ecstasy; then, turning to Jean

Valjean, he held out the coin to him, and said majestically to him:—

“Bourgeois, I prefer to smash lanterns. Take back your ferocious beast.

You can’t bribe me. That has got five claws; but it doesn’t scratch

me.”

“Have you a mother?” asked Jean Valjean.

Gavroche replied:—

“More than you have, perhaps.”

“Well,” returned Jean Valjean, “keep the money for your mother!”

Gavroche was touched. Moreover, he had just noticed that the man who

was addressing him had no hat, and this inspired him with confidence.

“Truly,” said he, “so it wasn’t to keep me from breaking the lanterns?”

“Break whatever you please.”

“You’re a fine man,” said Gavroche.

And he put the five-franc piece into one of his pockets.

His confidence having increased, he added:—

“Do you belong in this street?”

“Yes, why?”

“Can you tell me where No. 7 is?”

“What do you want with No. 7?”

Here the child paused, he feared that he had said too much; he thrust

his nails energetically into his hair and contented himself with

replying:—

“Ah! Here it is.”

An idea flashed through Jean Valjean’s mind. Anguish does have these

gleams. He said to the lad:—

“Are you the person who is bringing a letter that I am expecting?”

“You?” said Gavroche. “You are not a woman.”

“The letter is for Mademoiselle Cosette, is it not?”

“Cosette,” muttered Gavroche. “Yes, I believe that is the queer name.”

“Well,” resumed Jean Valjean, “I am the person to whom you are to

deliver the letter. Give it here.”

“In that case, you must know that I was sent from the barricade.”

“Of course,” said Jean Valjean.

Gavroche engulfed his hand in another of his pockets and drew out a

paper folded in four.

Then he made the military salute.

“Respect for despatches,” said he. “It comes from the Provisional

Government.”

“Give it to me,” said Jean Valjean.

Gavroche held the paper elevated above his head.

“Don’t go and fancy it’s a love letter. It is for a woman, but it’s for

the people. We men fight and we respect the fair sex. We are not as

they are in fine society, where there are lions who send chickens55 to

camels.”

“Give it to me.”

“After all,” continued Gavroche, “you have the air of an honest man.”

“Give it to me quick.”

“Catch hold of it.”

And he handed the paper to Jean Valjean.

“And make haste, Monsieur What’s-your-name, for Mamselle Cosette is

waiting.”

Gavroche was satisfied with himself for having produced this remark.

Jean Valjean began again:—

“Is it to Saint-Merry that the answer is to be sent?”

“There you are making some of those bits of pastry vulgarly called

\_brioches\_ [blunders]. This letter comes from the barricade of the Rue

de la Chanvrerie, and I’m going back there. Good evening, citizen.”

That said, Gavroche took himself off, or, to describe it more exactly,

fluttered away in the direction whence he had come with a flight like

that of an escaped bird. He plunged back into the gloom as though he

made a hole in it, with the rigid rapidity of a projectile; the alley

of l’Homme Armé became silent and solitary once more; in a twinkling,

that strange child, who had about him something of the shadow and of

the dream, had buried himself in the mists of the rows of black houses,

and was lost there, like smoke in the dark; and one might have thought

that he had dissipated and vanished, had there not taken place, a few

minutes after his disappearance, a startling shiver of glass, and had

not the magnificent crash of a lantern rattling down on the pavement

once more abruptly awakened the indignant bourgeois. It was Gavroche

upon his way through the Rue du Chaume.

CHAPTER III—WHILE COSETTE AND TOUSSAINT ARE ASLEEP

Jean Valjean went into the house with Marius’ letter.

He groped his way up the stairs, as pleased with the darkness as an owl

who grips his prey, opened and shut his door softly, listened to see

whether he could hear any noise,—made sure that, to all appearances,

Cosette and Toussaint were asleep, and plunged three or four matches

into the bottle of the Fumade lighter before he could evoke a spark, so

greatly did his hand tremble. What he had just done smacked of theft.

At last the candle was lighted; he leaned his elbows on the table,

unfolded the paper, and read.

In violent emotions, one does not read, one flings to the earth, so to

speak, the paper which one holds, one clutches it like a victim, one

crushes it, one digs into it the nails of one’s wrath, or of one’s joy;

one hastens to the end, one leaps to the beginning; attention is at

fever heat; it takes up in the gross, as it were, the essential points;

it seizes on one point, and the rest disappears. In Marius’ note to

Cosette, Jean Valjean saw only these words:—

“I die. When thou readest this, my soul will be near thee.”

In the presence of these two lines, he was horribly dazzled; he

remained for a moment, crushed, as it were, by the change of emotion

which was taking place within him, he stared at Marius’ note with a

sort of intoxicated amazement, he had before his eyes that splendor,

the death of a hated individual.

He uttered a frightful cry of inward joy. So it was all over. The

catastrophe had arrived sooner than he had dared to hope. The being who

obstructed his destiny was disappearing. That man had taken himself off

of his own accord, freely, willingly. This man was going to his death,

and he, Jean Valjean, had had no hand in the matter, and it was through

no fault of his. Perhaps, even, he is already dead. Here his fever

entered into calculations. No, he is not dead yet. The letter had

evidently been intended for Cosette to read on the following morning;

after the two discharges that were heard between eleven o’clock and

midnight, nothing more has taken place; the barricade will not be

attacked seriously until daybreak; but that makes no difference, from

the moment when “that man” is concerned in this war, he is lost; he is

caught in the gearing. Jean Valjean felt himself delivered. So he was

about to find himself alone with Cosette once more. The rivalry would

cease; the future was beginning again. He had but to keep this note in

his pocket. Cosette would never know what had become of that man. All

that there requires to be done is to let things take their own course.

This man cannot escape. If he is not already dead, it is certain that

he is about to die. What good fortune!

Having said all this to himself, he became gloomy.

Then he went downstairs and woke up the porter.

About an hour later, Jean Valjean went out in the complete costume of a

National Guard, and with his arms. The porter had easily found in the

neighborhood the wherewithal to complete his equipment. He had a loaded

gun and a cartridge-box filled with cartridges.

He strode off in the direction of the markets.

CHAPTER IV—GAVROCHE’S EXCESS OF ZEAL

In the meantime, Gavroche had had an adventure.

Gavroche, after having conscientiously stoned the lantern in the Rue du

Chaume, entered the Rue des Vieilles-Haudriettes, and not seeing “even

a cat” there, he thought the opportunity a good one to strike up all

the song of which he was capable. His march, far from being retarded by

his singing, was accelerated by it. He began to sow along the sleeping

or terrified houses these incendiary couplets:—

“L’oiseau médit dans les charmilles,

Et prétend qu’hier Atala

Avec un Russe s’en alla.

Où vont les belles filles,

Lon la.

“Mon ami Pierrot, tu babilles,

Parce que l’autre jour Mila

Cogna sa vitre et m’appela,

Où vont les belles filles,

Lon la.

“Les drôlesses sont fort gentilles,

Leur poison qui m’ensorcela

Griserait Monsieur Orfila.

Où vont les belles filles,

Lon la.

“J’aime l’amour et les bisbilles,

J’aime Agnès, j’aime Paméla,

Lise en m’allumant se brûla.

Où vont les belles filles,

Lon la.

“Jadis, quand je vis les mantilles

De Suzette et de Zéila,

Mon âme à leurs plis se mêla,

Où vont les belles filles,

Lon la.

“Amour, quand dans l’ombre où tu brilles,

Tu coiffes de roses Lola,

Je me damnerais pour cela.

Où vont les belles filles,

Lon la.

“Jeanne à ton miroir tu t’habilles!

Mon cœur un beau jour s’envola.

Je crois que c’est Jeanne qui l’a.

Où vont les belles filles,

Lon la.

“Le soir, en sortant des quadrilles,

Je montre aux étoiles Stella,

Et je leur dis: ‘Regardez-la.’

Où vont les belles filles,

Lon la.”56

Gavroche, as he sang, was lavish of his pantomime. Gesture is the

strong point of the refrain. His face, an inexhaustible repertory of

masks, produced grimaces more convulsing and more fantastic than the

rents of a cloth torn in a high gale. Unfortunately, as he was alone,

and as it was night, this was neither seen nor even visible. Such

wastes of riches do occur.

All at once, he stopped short.

“Let us interrupt the romance,” said he.

His feline eye had just descried, in the recess of a carriage door,

what is called in painting, an \_ensemble\_, that is to say, a person and

a thing; the thing was a hand-cart, the person was a man from Auvergene

who was sleeping therein.

The shafts of the cart rested on the pavement, and the Auvergnat’s head

was supported against the front of the cart. His body was coiled up on

this inclined plane and his feet touched the ground.

Gavroche, with his experience of the things of this world, recognized a

drunken man. He was some corner errand-man who had drunk too much and

was sleeping too much.

“There now,” thought Gavroche, “that’s what the summer nights are good

for. We’ll take the cart for the Republic, and leave the Auvergnat for

the Monarchy.”

His mind had just been illuminated by this flash of light:—

“How bully that cart would look on our barricade!”

The Auvergnat was snoring.

Gavroche gently tugged at the cart from behind, and at the Auvergnat

from the front, that is to say, by the feet, and at the expiration of

another minute the imperturbable Auvergnat was reposing flat on the

pavement.

The cart was free.

Gavroche, habituated to facing the unexpected in all quarters, had

everything about him. He fumbled in one of his pockets, and pulled from

it a scrap of paper and a bit of red pencil filched from some

carpenter.

He wrote:—

\_“French Republic.”\_

“Received thy cart.”

And he signed it: “GAVROCHE.”

That done, he put the paper in the pocket of the still snoring

Auvergnat’s velvet vest, seized the cart shafts in both hands, and set

off in the direction of the Halles, pushing the cart before him at a

hard gallop with a glorious and triumphant uproar.

This was perilous. There was a post at the Royal Printing

Establishment. Gavroche did not think of this. This post was occupied

by the National Guards of the suburbs. The squad began to wake up, and

heads were raised from camp beds. Two street lanterns broken in

succession, that ditty sung at the top of the lungs. This was a great

deal for those cowardly streets, which desire to go to sleep at sunset,

and which put the extinguisher on their candles at such an early hour.

For the last hour, that boy had been creating an uproar in that

peaceable arrondissement, the uproar of a fly in a bottle. The sergeant

of the banlieue lent an ear. He waited. He was a prudent man.

The mad rattle of the cart, filled to overflowing the possible measure

of waiting, and decided the sergeant to make a reconnaisance.

“There’s a whole band of them there!” said he, “let us proceed gently.”

It was clear that the hydra of anarchy had emerged from its box and

that it was stalking abroad through the quarter.

And the sergeant ventured out of the post with cautious tread.

All at once, Gavroche, pushing his cart in front of him, and at the

very moment when he was about to turn into the Rue des

Vieilles-Haudriettes, found himself face to face with a uniform, a

shako, a plume, and a gun.

For the second time, he stopped short.

“Hullo,” said he, “it’s him. Good day, public order.”

Gavroche’s amazement was always brief and speedily thawed.

“Where are you going, you rascal?” shouted the sergeant.

“Citizen,” retorted Gavroche, “I haven’t called you ‘bourgeois’ yet.

Why do you insult me?”

“Where are you going, you rogue?”

“Monsieur,” retorted Gavroche, “perhaps you were a man of wit

yesterday, but you have degenerated this morning.”

“I ask you where are you going, you villain?”

Gavroche replied:—

“You speak prettily. Really, no one would suppose you as old as you

are. You ought to sell all your hair at a hundred francs apiece. That

would yield you five hundred francs.”

“Where are you going? Where are you going? Where are you going,

bandit?”

Gavroche retorted again:—

“What villainous words! You must wipe your mouth better the first time

that they give you suck.”

The sergeant lowered his bayonet.

“Will you tell me where you are going, you wretch?”

“General,” said Gavroche “I’m on my way to look for a doctor for my

wife who is in labor.”

“To arms!” shouted the sergeant.

The master-stroke of strong men consists in saving themselves by the

very means that have ruined them; Gavroche took in the whole situation

at a glance. It was the cart which had told against him, it was the

cart’s place to protect him.

At the moment when the sergeant was on the point of making his descent

on Gavroche, the cart, converted into a projectile and launched with

all the latter’s might, rolled down upon him furiously, and the

sergeant, struck full in the stomach, tumbled over backwards into the

gutter while his gun went off in the air.

The men of the post had rushed out pell-mell at the sergeant’s shout;

the shot brought on a general random discharge, after which they

reloaded their weapons and began again.

This blind-man’s-buff musketry lasted for a quarter of an hour and

killed several panes of glass.

In the meanwhile, Gavroche, who had retraced his steps at full speed,

halted five or six streets distant and seated himself, panting, on the

stone post which forms the corner of the Enfants-Rouges.

He listened.

After panting for a few minutes, he turned in the direction where the

fusillade was raging, lifted his left hand to a level with his nose and

thrust it forward three times, as he slapped the back of his head with

his right hand; an imperious gesture in which Parisian street-urchindom

has condensed French irony, and which is evidently efficacious, since

it has already lasted half a century.

This gayety was troubled by one bitter reflection.

“Yes,” said he, “I’m splitting with laughter, I’m twisting with

delight, I abound in joy, but I’m losing my way, I shall have to take a

roundabout way. If I only reach the barricade in season!”

Thereupon he set out again on a run.

And as he ran:—

“Ah, by the way, where was I?” said he.

And he resumed his ditty, as he plunged rapidly through the streets,

and this is what died away in the gloom:—

“Mais il reste encore des bastilles,

Et je vais mettre le holà

Dans l’ordre public que voilà.

Où vont les belles filles,

Lon la.

“Quelqu’un veut-il jouer aux quilles?

Tout l’ancien monde s’écroula

Quand la grosse boule roula.

Où vont les belles filles,

Lon la.

“Vieux bon peuple, à coups de béquilles,

Cassons ce Louvre où s’étala

La monarchie en falbala.

Où vont les belles filles,

Lon la.

“Nous en avons forcé les grilles,

Le roi Charles-Dix ce jour-là,

Tenait mal et se décolla.

Où vont les belles filles,

Lon la.”57

The post’s recourse to arms was not without result. The cart was

conquered, the drunken man was taken prisoner. The first was put in the

pound, the second was later on somewhat harassed before the councils of

war as an accomplice. The public ministry of the day proved its

indefatigable zeal in the defence of society, in this instance.

Gavroche’s adventure, which has lingered as a tradition in the quarters

of the Temple, is one of the most terrible souvenirs of the elderly

bourgeois of the Marais, and is entitled in their memories: “The

nocturnal attack by the post of the Royal Printing Establishment.”

[THE END OF VOLUME IV “SAINT DENIS”]

VOLUME V

JEAN VALJEAN

[Illustration: Frontispiece Volume Five]

[Illustration: Titlepage Volume Five]

BOOK FIRST—THE WAR BETWEEN FOUR WALLS

CHAPTER I—THE CHARYBDIS OF THE FAUBOURG SAINT ANTOINE AND THE SCYLLA OF

THE FAUBOURG DU TEMPLE

The two most memorable barricades which the observer of social maladies

can name do not belong to the period in which the action of this work

is laid. These two barricades, both of them symbols, under two

different aspects, of a redoubtable situation, sprang from the earth at

the time of the fatal insurrection of June, 1848, the greatest war of

the streets that history has ever beheld.

It sometimes happens that, even contrary to principles, even contrary

to liberty, equality, and fraternity, even contrary to the universal

vote, even contrary to the government, by all for all, from the depths

of its anguish, of its discouragements and its destitutions, of its

fevers, of its distresses, of its miasmas, of its ignorances, of its

darkness, that great and despairing body, the rabble, protests against,

and that the populace wages battle against, the people.

Beggars attack the common right; the ochlocracy rises against demos.

These are melancholy days; for there is always a certain amount of

night even in this madness, there is suicide in this duel, and those

words which are intended to be insults—beggars, canaille, ochlocracy,

populace—exhibit, alas! rather the fault of those who reign than the

fault of those who suffer; rather the fault of the privileged than the

fault of the disinherited.

For our own part, we never pronounce those words without pain and

without respect, for when philosophy fathoms the facts to which they

correspond, it often finds many a grandeur beside these miseries.

Athens was an ochlocracy; the beggars were the making of Holland; the

populace saved Rome more than once; and the rabble followed Jesus

Christ.

There is no thinker who has not at times contemplated the magnificences

of the lower classes.

It was of this rabble that Saint Jerome was thinking, no doubt, and of

all these poor people and all these vagabonds and all these miserable

people whence sprang the apostles and the martyrs, when he uttered this

mysterious saying: \_“Fex urbis, lex orbis,”\_—the dregs of the city, the

law of the earth.

The exasperations of this crowd which suffers and bleeds, its violences

contrary to all sense, directed against the principles which are its

life, its masterful deeds against the right, are its popular \_coups

d’état\_ and should be repressed. The man of probity sacrifices himself,

and out of his very love for this crowd, he combats it. But how

excusable he feels it even while holding out against it! How he

venerates it even while resisting it! This is one of those rare moments

when, while doing that which it is one’s duty to do, one feels

something which disconcerts one, and which would dissuade one from

proceeding further; one persists, it is necessary, but conscience,

though satisfied, is sad, and the accomplishment of duty is complicated

with a pain at the heart.

June, 1848, let us hasten to say, was an exceptional fact, and almost

impossible of classification, in the philosophy of history. All the

words which we have just uttered, must be discarded, when it becomes a

question of this extraordinary revolt, in which one feels the holy

anxiety of toil claiming its rights. It was necessary to combat it, and

this was a duty, for it attacked the republic. But what was June, 1848,

at bottom? A revolt of the people against itself.

Where the subject is not lost sight of, there is no digression; may we,

then, be permitted to arrest the reader’s attention for a moment on the

two absolutely unique barricades of which we have just spoken and which

characterized this insurrection.

One blocked the entrance to the Faubourg Saint Antoine; the other

defended the approach to the Faubourg du Temple; those before whom

these two fearful masterpieces of civil war reared themselves beneath

the brilliant blue sky of June, will never forget them.

The Saint-Antoine barricade was tremendous; it was three stories high,

and seven hundred feet wide. It barred the vast opening of the

faubourg, that is to say, three streets, from angle to angle; ravined,

jagged, cut up, divided, crenelated, with an immense rent, buttressed

with piles that were bastions in themselves throwing out capes here and

there, powerfully backed up by two great promontories of houses of the

faubourg, it reared itself like a cyclopean dike at the end of the

formidable place which had seen the 14th of July. Nineteen barricades

were ranged, one behind the other, in the depths of the streets behind

this principal barricade. At the very sight of it, one felt the

agonizing suffering in the immense faubourg, which had reached that

point of extremity when a distress may become a catastrophe. Of what

was that barricade made? Of the ruins of three six-story houses

demolished expressly, said some. Of the prodigy of all wraths, said

others. It wore the lamentable aspect of all constructions of hatred,

ruin. It might be asked: Who built this? It might also be said: Who

destroyed this? It was the improvisation of the ebullition. Hold! take

this door! this grating! this penthouse! this chimney-piece! this

broken brazier! this cracked pot! Give all! cast away all! Push this

roll, dig, dismantle, overturn, ruin everything! It was the

collaboration of the pavement, the block of stone, the beam, the bar of

iron, the rag, the scrap, the broken pane, the unseated chair, the

cabbage-stalk, the tatter, the rag, and the malediction. It was grand

and it was petty. It was the abyss parodied on the public place by

hubbub. The mass beside the atom; the strip of ruined wall and the

broken bowl,—threatening fraternization of every sort of rubbish.

Sisyphus had thrown his rock there and Job his potsherd. Terrible, in

short. It was the acropolis of the barefooted. Overturned carts broke

the uniformity of the slope; an immense dray was spread out there

crossways, its axle pointing heavenward, and seemed a scar on that

tumultuous façade; an omnibus hoisted gayly, by main force, to the very

summit of the heap, as though the architects of this bit of savagery

had wished to add a touch of the street urchin humor to their terror,

presented its horseless, unharnessed pole to no one knows what horses

of the air. This gigantic heap, the alluvium of the revolt, figured to

the mind an Ossa on Pelion of all revolutions; ’93 on ’89, the 9th of

Thermidor on the 10th of August, the 18th of Brumaire on the 11th of

January, Vendemiaire on Prairial, 1848 on 1830. The situation deserved

the trouble and this barricade was worthy to figure on the very spot

whence the Bastille had disappeared. If the ocean made dikes, it is

thus that it would build. The fury of the flood was stamped upon this

shapeless mass. What flood? The crowd. One thought one beheld hubbub

petrified. One thought one heard humming above this barricade as though

there had been over their hive, enormous, dark bees of violent

progress. Was it a thicket? Was it a bacchanalia? Was it a fortress?

Vertigo seemed to have constructed it with blows of its wings. There

was something of the cesspool in that redoubt and something Olympian in

that confusion. One there beheld in a pell-mell full of despair, the

rafters of roofs, bits of garret windows with their figured paper,

window sashes with their glass planted there in the ruins awaiting the

cannon, wrecks of chimneys, cupboards, tables, benches, howling

topsyturveydom, and those thousand poverty-stricken things, the very

refuse of the mendicant, which contain at the same time fury and

nothingness. One would have said that it was the tatters of a people,

rags of wood, of iron, of bronze, of stone, and that the Faubourg Saint

Antoine had thrust it there at its door, with a colossal flourish of

the broom making of its misery its barricade. Blocks resembling

headsman’s blocks, dislocated chains, pieces of woodwork with brackets

having the form of gibbets, horizontal wheels projecting from the

rubbish, amalgamated with this edifice of anarchy the sombre figure of

the old tortures endured by the people. The barricade Saint Antoine

converted everything into a weapon; everything that civil war could

throw at the head of society proceeded thence; it was not combat, it

was a paroxysm; the carbines which defended this redoubt, among which

there were some blunderbusses, sent bits of earthenware bones,

coat-buttons, even the casters from night-stands, dangerous projectiles

on account of the brass. This barricade was furious; it hurled to the

clouds an inexpressible clamor; at certain moments, when provoking the

army, it was covered with throngs and tempest; a tumultuous crowd of

flaming heads crowned it; a swarm filled it; it had a thorny crest of

guns, of sabres, of cudgels, of axes, of pikes and of bayonets; a vast

red flag flapped in the wind; shouts of command, songs of attack, the

roll of drums, the sobs of women and bursts of gloomy laughter from the

starving were to be heard there. It was huge and living, and, like the

back of an electric beast, there proceeded from it little flashes of

lightning. The spirit of revolution covered with its cloud this summit

where rumbled that voice of the people which resembles the voice of

God; a strange majesty was emitted by this titanic basket of rubbish.

It was a heap of filth and it was Sinai.

As we have said previously, it attacked in the name of the

revolution—what? The revolution. It—that barricade, chance, hazard,

disorder, terror, misunderstanding, the unknown—had facing it the

Constituent Assembly, the sovereignty of the people, universal

suffrage, the nation, the republic; and it was the Carmagnole bidding

defiance to the Marseillaise.

Immense but heroic defiance, for the old faubourg is a hero.

The faubourg and its redoubt lent each other assistance. The faubourg

shouldered the redoubt, the redoubt took its stand under cover of the

faubourg. The vast barricade spread out like a cliff against which the

strategy of the African generals dashed itself. Its caverns, its

excrescences, its warts, its gibbosities, grimaced, so to speak, and

grinned beneath the smoke. The mitraille vanished in shapelessness; the

bombs plunged into it; bullets only succeeded in making holes in it;

what was the use of cannonading chaos? and the regiments, accustomed to

the fiercest visions of war, gazed with uneasy eyes on that species of

redoubt, a wild beast in its boar-like bristling and a mountain by its

enormous size.

A quarter of a league away, from the corner of the Rue du Temple which

debouches on the boulevard near the Château-d’Eau, if one thrust one’s

head bodily beyond the point formed by the front of the Dallemagne

shop, one perceived in the distance, beyond the canal, in the street

which mounts the slopes of Belleville at the culminating point of the

rise, a strange wall reaching to the second story of the house fronts,

a sort of hyphen between the houses on the right and the houses on the

left, as though the street had folded back on itself its loftiest wall

in order to close itself abruptly. This wall was built of

paving-stones. It was straight, correct, cold, perpendicular, levelled

with the square, laid out by rule and line. Cement was lacking, of

course, but, as in the case of certain Roman walls, without interfering

with its rigid architecture. The entablature was mathematically

parallel with the base. From distance to distance, one could

distinguish on the gray surface, almost invisible loopholes which

resembled black threads. These loopholes were separated from each other

by equal spaces. The street was deserted as far as the eye could reach.

All windows and doors were closed. In the background rose this barrier,

which made a blind thoroughfare of the street, a motionless and

tranquil wall; no one was visible, nothing was audible; not a cry, not

a sound, not a breath. A sepulchre.

The dazzling sun of June inundated this terrible thing with light.

It was the barricade of the Faubourg of the Temple.

As soon as one arrived on the spot, and caught sight of it, it was

impossible, even for the boldest, not to become thoughtful before this

mysterious apparition. It was adjusted, jointed, imbricated,

rectilinear, symmetrical and funereal. Science and gloom met there. One

felt that the chief of this barricade was a geometrician or a spectre.

One looked at it and spoke low.

From time to time, if some soldier, an officer or representative of the

people, chanced to traverse the deserted highway, a faint, sharp

whistle was heard, and the passer-by fell dead or wounded, or, if he

escaped the bullet, sometimes a biscaïen was seen to ensconce itself in

some closed shutter, in the interstice between two blocks of stone, or

in the plaster of a wall. For the men in the barricade had made

themselves two small cannons out of two cast-iron lengths of gas-pipe,

plugged up at one end with tow and fire-clay. There was no waste of

useless powder. Nearly every shot told. There were corpses here and

there, and pools of blood on the pavement. I remember a white butterfly

which went and came in the street. Summer does not abdicate.

In the neighborhood, the spaces beneath the portes-cochères were

encumbered with wounded.

One felt oneself aimed at by some person whom one did not see, and one

understood that guns were levelled at the whole length of the street.

Massed behind the sort of sloping ridge which the vaulted canal forms

at the entrance to the Faubourg du Temple, the soldiers of the

attacking column, gravely and thoughtfully, watched this dismal

redoubt, this immobility, this passivity, whence sprang death. Some

crawled flat on their faces as far as the crest of the curve of the

bridge, taking care that their shakos did not project beyond it.

The valiant Colonel Monteynard admired this barricade with a

shudder.—“How that is built!” he said to a Representative. “Not one

paving-stone projects beyond its neighbor. It is made of porcelain.”—At

that moment, a bullet broke the cross on his breast, and he fell.

“The cowards!” people said. “Let them show themselves. Let us see them!

They dare not! They are hiding!”

The barricade of the Faubourg du Temple, defended by eighty men,

attacked by ten thousand, held out for three days. On the fourth, they

did as at Zaatcha, as at Constantine, they pierced the houses, they

came over the roofs, the barricade was taken. Not one of the eighty

cowards thought of flight, all were killed there with the exception of

the leader, Barthélemy, of whom we shall speak presently.

The Saint-Antoine barricade was the tumult of thunders; the barricade

of the Temple was silence. The difference between these two redoubts

was the difference between the formidable and the sinister. One seemed

a maw; the other a mask.

Admitting that the gigantic and gloomy insurrection of June was

composed of a wrath and of an enigma, one divined in the first

barricade the dragon, and behind the second the sphinx.

These two fortresses had been erected by two men named, the one,

Cournet, the other, Barthélemy. Cournet made the Saint-Antoine

barricade; Barthélemy the barricade of the Temple. Each was the image

of the man who had built it.

Cournet was a man of lofty stature; he had broad shoulders, a red face,

a crushing fist, a bold heart, a loyal soul, a sincere and terrible

eye. Intrepid, energetic, irascible, stormy; the most cordial of men,

the most formidable of combatants. War, strife, conflict, were the very

air he breathed and put him in a good humor. He had been an officer in

the navy, and, from his gestures and his voice, one divined that he

sprang from the ocean, and that he came from the tempest; he carried

the hurricane on into battle. With the exception of the genius, there

was in Cournet something of Danton, as, with the exception of the

divinity, there was in Danton something of Hercules.

Barthélemy, thin, feeble, pale, taciturn, was a sort of tragic street

urchin, who, having had his ears boxed by a policeman, lay in wait for

him, and killed him, and at seventeen was sent to the galleys. He came

out and made this barricade.

Later on, fatal circumstance, in London, proscribed by all, Barthélemy

slew Cournet. It was a funereal duel. Some time afterwards, caught in

the gearing of one of those mysterious adventures in which passion

plays a part, a catastrophe in which French justice sees extenuating

circumstances, and in which English justice sees only death, Barthélemy

was hanged. The sombre social construction is so made that, thanks to

material destitution, thanks to moral obscurity, that unhappy being who

possessed an intelligence, certainly firm, possibly great, began in

France with the galleys, and ended in England with the gallows.

Barthélemy, on occasion, flew but one flag, the black flag.

CHAPTER II—WHAT IS TO BE DONE IN THE ABYSS IF ONE DOES NOT CONVERSE

Sixteen years count in the subterranean education of insurrection, and

June, 1848, knew a great deal more about it than June, 1832. So the

barricade of the Rue de la Chanvrerie was only an outline, and an

embryo compared to the two colossal barricades which we have just

sketched; but it was formidable for that epoch.

The insurgents under the eye of Enjolras, for Marius no longer looked

after anything, had made good use of the night. The barricade had been

not only repaired, but augmented. They had raised it two feet. Bars of

iron planted in the pavement resembled lances in rest. All sorts of

rubbish brought and added from all directions complicated the external

confusion. The redoubt had been cleverly made over, into a wall on the

inside and a thicket on the outside.

The staircase of paving-stones which permitted one to mount it like the

wall of a citadel had been reconstructed.

The barricade had been put in order, the tap-room disencumbered, the

kitchen appropriated for the ambulance, the dressing of the wounded

completed, the powder scattered on the ground and on the tables had

been gathered up, bullets run, cartridges manufactured, lint scraped,

the fallen weapons re-distributed, the interior of the redoubt cleaned,

the rubbish swept up, corpses removed.

They laid the dead in a heap in the Mondétour lane, of which they were

still the masters. The pavement was red for a long time at that spot.

Among the dead there were four National Guardsmen of the suburbs.

Enjolras had their uniforms laid aside.

Enjolras had advised two hours of sleep. Advice from Enjolras was a

command. Still, only three or four took advantage of it.

Feuilly employed these two hours in engraving this inscription on the

wall which faced the tavern:—

LONG LIVE THE PEOPLES!

These four words, hollowed out in the rough stone with a nail, could be

still read on the wall in 1848.

The three women had profited by the respite of the night to vanish

definitely; which allowed the insurgents to breathe more freely.

They had found means of taking refuge in some neighboring house.

The greater part of the wounded were able, and wished, to fight still.

On a litter of mattresses and trusses of straw in the kitchen, which

had been converted into an ambulance, there were five men gravely

wounded, two of whom were municipal guardsmen. The municipal guardsmen

were attended to first.

In the tap-room there remained only Mabeuf under his black cloth and

Javert bound to his post.

“This is the hall of the dead,” said Enjolras.

In the interior of this hall, barely lighted by a candle at one end,

the mortuary table being behind the post like a horizontal bar, a sort

of vast, vague cross resulted from Javert erect and Mabeuf lying prone.

The pole of the omnibus, although snapped off by the fusillade, was

still sufficiently upright to admit of their fastening the flag to it.

Enjolras, who possessed that quality of a leader, of always doing what

he said, attached to this staff the bullet-ridden and bloody coat of

the old man’s.

No repast had been possible. There was neither bread nor meat. The

fifty men in the barricade had speedily exhausted the scanty provisions

of the wine-shop during the sixteen hours which they had passed there.

At a given moment, every barricade inevitably becomes the raft of \_la

Méduse\_. They were obliged to resign themselves to hunger. They had

then reached the first hours of that Spartan day of the 6th of June

when, in the barricade Saint-Merry, Jeanne, surrounded by the

insurgents who demanded bread, replied to all combatants crying:

“Something to eat!” with: “Why? It is three o’clock; at four we shall

be dead.”

As they could no longer eat, Enjolras forbade them to drink. He

interdicted wine, and portioned out the brandy.

They had found in the cellar fifteen full bottles hermetically sealed.

Enjolras and Combeferre examined them. Combeferre when he came up again

said:—“It’s the old stock of Father Hucheloup, who began business as a

grocer.”—“It must be real wine,” observed Bossuet. “It’s lucky that

Grantaire is asleep. If he were on foot, there would be a good deal of

difficulty in saving those bottles.”—Enjolras, in spite of all murmurs,

placed his veto on the fifteen bottles, and, in order that no one might

touch them, he had them placed under the table on which Father Mabeuf

was lying.

About two o’clock in the morning, they reckoned up their strength.

There were still thirty-seven of them.

The day began to dawn. The torch, which had been replaced in its cavity

in the pavement, had just been extinguished. The interior of the

barricade, that species of tiny courtyard appropriated from the street,

was bathed in shadows, and resembled, athwart the vague, twilight

horror, the deck of a disabled ship. The combatants, as they went and

came, moved about there like black forms. Above that terrible

nesting-place of gloom the stories of the mute houses were lividly

outlined; at the very top, the chimneys stood palely out. The sky was

of that charming, undecided hue, which may be white and may be blue.

Birds flew about in it with cries of joy. The lofty house which formed

the back of the barricade, being turned to the East, had upon its roof

a rosy reflection. The morning breeze ruffled the gray hair on the head

of the dead man at the third-story window.

“I am delighted that the torch has been extinguished,” said Courfeyrac

to Feuilly. “That torch flickering in the wind annoyed me. It had the

appearance of being afraid. The light of torches resembles the wisdom

of cowards; it gives a bad light because it trembles.”

Dawn awakens minds as it does the birds; all began to talk.

Joly, perceiving a cat prowling on a gutter, extracted philosophy from

it.

“What is the cat?” he exclaimed. “It is a corrective. The good God,

having made the mouse, said: ‘Hullo! I have committed a blunder.’ And

so he made the cat. The cat is the erratum of the mouse. The mouse,

plus the cat, is the proof of creation revised and corrected.”

Combeferre, surrounded by students and artisans, was speaking of the

dead, of Jean Prouvaire, of Bahorel, of Mabeuf, and even of Cabuc, and

of Enjolras’ sad severity. He said:—

“Harmodius and Aristogiton, Brutus, Chereas, Stephanus, Cromwell,

Charlotte Corday, Sand, have all had their moment of agony when it was

too late. Our hearts quiver so, and human life is such a mystery that,

even in the case of a civic murder, even in a murder for liberation, if

there be such a thing, the remorse for having struck a man surpasses

the joy of having served the human race.”

And, such are the windings of the exchange of speech, that, a moment

later, by a transition brought about through Jean Prouvaire’s verses,

Combeferre was comparing the translators of the Georgics, Raux with

Cournand, Cournand with Delille, pointing out the passages translated

by Malfilâtre, particularly the prodigies of Cæsar’s death; and at that

word, Cæsar, the conversation reverted to Brutus.

“Cæsar,” said Combeferre, “fell justly. Cicero was severe towards

Cæsar, and he was right. That severity is not diatribe. When Zoïlus

insults Homer, when Mævius insults Virgil, when Visé insults Molière,

when Pope insults Shakspeare, when Frederic insults Voltaire, it is an

old law of envy and hatred which is being carried out; genius attracts

insult, great men are always more or less barked at. But Zoïlus and

Cicero are two different persons. Cicero is an arbiter in thought, just

as Brutus is an arbiter by the sword. For my own part, I blame that

last justice, the blade; but, antiquity admitted it. Cæsar, the

violator of the Rubicon, conferring, as though they came from him, the

dignities which emanated from the people, not rising at the entrance of

the senate, committed the acts of a king and almost of a tyrant, \_regia

ac pene tyrannica\_. He was a great man; so much the worse, or so much

the better; the lesson is but the more exalted. His twenty-three wounds

touch me less than the spitting in the face of Jesus Christ. Cæsar is

stabbed by the senators; Christ is cuffed by lackeys. One feels the God

through the greater outrage.”

Bossuet, who towered above the interlocutors from the summit of a heap

of paving-stones, exclaimed, rifle in hand:—

“Oh Cydathenæum, Oh Myrrhinus, Oh Probalinthus, Oh graces of the

Æantides! Oh! Who will grant me to pronounce the verses of Homer like a

Greek of Laurium or of Edapteon?”

CHAPTER III—LIGHT AND SHADOW

Enjolras had been to make a reconnaissance. He had made his way out

through Mondétour lane, gliding along close to the houses.

The insurgents, we will remark, were full of hope. The manner in which

they had repulsed the attack of the preceding night had caused them to

almost disdain in advance the attack at dawn. They waited for it with a

smile. They had no more doubt as to their success than as to their

cause. Moreover, succor was, evidently, on the way to them. They

reckoned on it. With that facility of triumphant prophecy which is one

of the sources of strength in the French combatant, they divided the

day which was at hand into three distinct phases. At six o’clock in the

morning a regiment “which had been labored with,” would turn; at noon,

the insurrection of all Paris; at sunset, revolution.

They heard the alarm bell of Saint-Merry, which had not been silent for

an instant since the night before; a proof that the other barricade,

the great one, Jeanne’s, still held out.

All these hopes were exchanged between the different groups in a sort

of gay and formidable whisper which resembled the warlike hum of a hive

of bees.

Enjolras reappeared. He returned from his sombre eagle flight into

outer darkness. He listened for a moment to all this joy with folded

arms, and one hand on his mouth. Then, fresh and rosy in the growing

whiteness of the dawn, he said:

“The whole army of Paris is to strike. A third of the army is bearing

down upon the barricades in which you now are. There is the National

Guard in addition. I have picked out the shakos of the fifth of the

line, and the standard-bearers of the sixth legion. In one hour you

will be attacked. As for the populace, it was seething yesterday,

to-day it is not stirring. There is nothing to expect; nothing to hope

for. Neither from a faubourg nor from a regiment. You are abandoned.”

These words fell upon the buzzing of the groups, and produced on them

the effect caused on a swarm of bees by the first drops of a storm. A

moment of indescribable silence ensued, in which death might have been

heard flitting by.

This moment was brief.

A voice from the obscurest depths of the groups shouted to Enjolras:

“So be it. Let us raise the barricade to a height of twenty feet, and

let us all remain in it. Citizens, let us offer the protests of

corpses. Let us show that, if the people abandon the republicans, the

republicans do not abandon the people.”

These words freed the thought of all from the painful cloud of

individual anxieties. It was hailed with an enthusiastic acclamation.

No one ever has known the name of the man who spoke thus; he was some

unknown blouse-wearer, a stranger, a man forgotten, a passing hero,

that great anonymous, always mingled in human crises and in social

geneses who, at a given moment, utters in a supreme fashion the

decisive word, and who vanishes into the shadows after having

represented for a minute, in a lightning flash, the people and God.

This inexorable resolution so thoroughly impregnated the air of the 6th

of June, 1832, that, almost at the very same hour, on the barricade

Saint-Merry, the insurgents were raising that clamor which has become a

matter of history and which has been consigned to the documents in the

case:—“What matters it whether they come to our assistance or not? Let

us get ourselves killed here, to the very last man.”

As the reader sees, the two barricades, though materially isolated,

were in communication with each other.

CHAPTER IV—MINUS FIVE, PLUS ONE

After the man who decreed the “protest of corpses” had spoken, and had

given this formula of their common soul, there issued from all mouths a

strangely satisfied and terrible cry, funereal in sense and triumphant

in tone:

“Long live death! Let us all remain here!”

“Why all?” said Enjolras.

“All! All!”

Enjolras resumed:

“The position is good; the barricade is fine. Thirty men are enough.

Why sacrifice forty?”

They replied:

“Because not one will go away.”

“Citizens,” cried Enjolras, and there was an almost irritated vibration

in his voice, “this republic is not rich enough in men to indulge in

useless expenditure of them. Vain-glory is waste. If the duty of some

is to depart, that duty should be fulfilled like any other.”

Enjolras, the man-principle, had over his co-religionists that sort of

omnipotent power which emanates from the absolute. Still, great as was

this omnipotence, a murmur arose. A leader to the very finger-tips,

Enjolras, seeing that they murmured, insisted. He resumed haughtily:

“Let those who are afraid of not numbering more than thirty say so.”

The murmurs redoubled.

“Besides,” observed a voice in one group, “it is easy enough to talk

about leaving. The barricade is hemmed in.”

“Not on the side of the Halles,” said Enjolras. “The Rue Mondétour is

free, and through the Rue des Prêcheurs one can reach the Marché des

Innocents.”

“And there,” went on another voice, “you would be captured. You would

fall in with some grand guard of the line or the suburbs; they will spy

a man passing in blouse and cap. ‘Whence come you?’ ‘Don’t you belong

to the barricade?’ And they will look at your hands. You smell of

powder. Shot.”

Enjolras, without making any reply, touched Combeferre’s shoulder, and

the two entered the tap-room.

They emerged thence a moment later. Enjolras held in his outstretched

hands the four uniforms which he had laid aside. Combeferre followed,

carrying the shoulder-belts and the shakos.

“With this uniform,” said Enjolras, “you can mingle with the ranks and

escape; here is enough for four.” And he flung on the ground, deprived

of its pavement, the four uniforms.

No wavering took place in his stoical audience. Combeferre took the

word.

“Come,” said he, “you must have a little pity. Do you know what the

question is here? It is a question of women. See here. Are there women

or are there not? Are there children or are there not? Are there

mothers, yes or no, who rock cradles with their foot and who have a lot

of little ones around them? Let that man of you who has never beheld a

nurse’s breast raise his hand. Ah! you want to get yourselves killed,

so do I—I, who am speaking to you; but I do not want to feel the

phantoms of women wreathing their arms around me. Die, if you will, but

don’t make others die. Suicides like that which is on the brink of

accomplishment here are sublime; but suicide is narrow, and does not

admit of extension; and as soon as it touches your neighbors, suicide

is murder. Think of the little blond heads; think of the white locks.

Listen, Enjolras has just told me that he saw at the corner of the Rue

du Cygne a lighted casement, a candle in a poor window, on the fifth

floor, and on the pane the quivering shadow of the head of an old

woman, who had the air of having spent the night in watching. Perhaps

she is the mother of some one of you. Well, let that man go, and make

haste, to say to his mother: ‘Here I am, mother!’ Let him feel at ease,

the task here will be performed all the same. When one supports one’s

relatives by one’s toil, one has not the right to sacrifice one’s self.

That is deserting one’s family. And those who have daughters! what are

you thinking of? You get yourselves killed, you are dead, that is well.

And tomorrow? Young girls without bread—that is a terrible thing. Man

begs, woman sells. Ah! those charming and gracious beings, so gracious

and so sweet, who have bonnets of flowers, who fill the house with

purity, who sing and prattle, who are like a living perfume, who prove

the existence of angels in heaven by the purity of virgins on earth,

that Jeanne, that Lise, that Mimi, those adorable and honest creatures

who are your blessings and your pride, ah! good God, they will suffer

hunger! What do you want me to say to you? There is a market for human

flesh; and it is not with your shadowy hands, shuddering around them,

that you will prevent them from entering it! Think of the street, think

of the pavement covered with passers-by, think of the shops past which

women go and come with necks all bare, and through the mire. These

women, too, were pure once. Think of your sisters, those of you who

have them. Misery, prostitution, the police, Saint-Lazare—that is what

those beautiful, delicate girls, those fragile marvels of modesty,

gentleness and loveliness, fresher than lilacs in the month of May,

will come to. Ah! you have got yourselves killed! You are no longer on

hand! That is well; you have wished to release the people from Royalty,

and you deliver over your daughters to the police. Friends, have a

care, have mercy. Women, unhappy women, we are not in the habit of

bestowing much thought on them. We trust to the women not having

received a man’s education, we prevent their reading, we prevent their

thinking, we prevent their occupying themselves with politics; will you

prevent them from going to the dead-house this evening, and recognizing

your bodies? Let us see, those who have families must be tractable, and

shake hands with us and take themselves off, and leave us here alone to

attend to this affair. I know well that courage is required to leave,

that it is hard; but the harder it is, the more meritorious. You say:

‘I have a gun, I am at the barricade; so much the worse, I shall remain

there.’ So much the worse is easily said. My friends, there is a

morrow; you will not be here to-morrow, but your families will; and

what sufferings! See, here is a pretty, healthy child, with cheeks like

an apple, who babbles, prattles, chatters, who laughs, who smells sweet

beneath your kiss,—and do you know what becomes of him when he is

abandoned? I have seen one, a very small creature, no taller than that.

His father was dead. Poor people had taken him in out of charity, but

they had bread only for themselves. The child was always hungry. It was

winter. He did not cry. You could see him approach the stove, in which

there was never any fire, and whose pipe, you know, was of mastic and

yellow clay. His breathing was hoarse, his face livid, his limbs

flaccid, his belly prominent. He said nothing. If you spoke to him, he

did not answer. He is dead. He was taken to the Necker Hospital, where

I saw him. I was house-surgeon in that hospital. Now, if there are any

fathers among you, fathers whose happiness it is to stroll on Sundays

holding their child’s tiny hand in their robust hand, let each one of

those fathers imagine that this child is his own. That poor brat, I

remember, and I seem to see him now, when he lay nude on the dissecting

table, how his ribs stood out on his skin like the graves beneath the

grass in a cemetery. A sort of mud was found in his stomach. There were

ashes in his teeth. Come, let us examine ourselves conscientiously and

take counsel with our heart. Statistics show that the mortality among

abandoned children is fifty-five per cent. I repeat, it is a question

of women, it concerns mothers, it concerns young girls, it concerns

little children. Who is talking to you of yourselves? We know well what

you are; we know well that you are all brave, parbleu! we know well

that you all have in your souls the joy and the glory of giving your

life for the great cause; we know well that you feel yourselves elected

to die usefully and magnificently, and that each one of you clings to

his share in the triumph. Very well. But you are not alone in this

world. There are other beings of whom you must think. You must not be

egoists.”

All dropped their heads with a gloomy air.

Strange contradictions of the human heart at its most sublime moments.

Combeferre, who spoke thus, was not an orphan. He recalled the mothers

of other men, and forgot his own. He was about to get himself killed.

He was “an egoist.”

Marius, fasting, fevered, having emerged in succession from all hope,

and having been stranded in grief, the most sombre of shipwrecks, and

saturated with violent emotions and conscious that the end was near,

had plunged deeper and deeper into that visionary stupor which always

precedes the fatal hour voluntarily accepted.

A physiologist might have studied in him the growing symptoms of that

febrile absorption known to, and classified by, science, and which is

to suffering what voluptuousness is to pleasure. Despair, also, has its

ecstasy. Marius had reached this point. He looked on at everything as

from without; as we have said, things which passed before him seemed

far away; he made out the whole, but did not perceive the details. He

beheld men going and coming as through a flame. He heard voices

speaking as at the bottom of an abyss.

But this moved him. There was in this scene a point which pierced and

roused even him. He had but one idea now, to die; and he did not wish

to be turned aside from it, but he reflected, in his gloomy

somnambulism, that while destroying himself, he was not prohibited from

saving some one else.

He raised his voice.

“Enjolras and Combeferre are right,” said he; “no unnecessary

sacrifice. I join them, and you must make haste. Combeferre has said

convincing things to you. There are some among you who have families,

mothers, sisters, wives, children. Let such leave the ranks.”

No one stirred.

“Married men and the supporters of families, step out of the ranks!”

repeated Marius.

His authority was great. Enjolras was certainly the head of the

barricade, but Marius was its savior.

“I order it,” cried Enjolras.

“I entreat you,” said Marius.

Then, touched by Combeferre’s words, shaken by Enjolras’ order, touched

by Marius’ entreaty, these heroic men began to denounce each other.—“It

is true,” said one young man to a full grown man, “you are the father

of a family. Go.”—“It is your duty rather,” retorted the man, “you have

two sisters whom you maintain.”—And an unprecedented controversy broke

forth. Each struggled to determine which should not allow himself to be

placed at the door of the tomb.

“Make haste,” said Courfeyrac, “in another quarter of an hour it will

be too late.”

“Citizens,” pursued Enjolras, “this is the Republic, and universal

suffrage reigns. Do you yourselves designate those who are to go.”

They obeyed. After the expiration of a few minutes, five were

unanimously selected and stepped out of the ranks.

“There are five of them!” exclaimed Marius.

There were only four uniforms.

“Well,” began the five, “one must stay behind.”

And then a struggle arose as to who should remain, and who should find

reasons for the others not remaining. The generous quarrel began

afresh.

“You have a wife who loves you.”—“You have your aged mother.”—” You

have neither father nor mother, and what is to become of your three

little brothers?”—“You are the father of five children.”—“You have a

right to live, you are only seventeen, it is too early for you to die.”

These great revolutionary barricades were assembling points for

heroism. The improbable was simple there. These men did not astonish

each other.

“Be quick,” repeated Courfeyrac.

Men shouted to Marius from the groups:

“Do you designate who is to remain.”

“Yes,” said the five, “choose. We will obey you.”

Marius did not believe that he was capable of another emotion. Still,

at this idea, that of choosing a man for death, his blood rushed back

to his heart. He would have turned pale, had it been possible for him

to become any paler.

He advanced towards the five, who smiled upon him, and each, with his

eyes full of that grand flame which one beholds in the depths of

history hovering over Thermopylæ, cried to him:

“Me! me! me!”

And Marius stupidly counted them; there were still five of them! Then

his glance dropped to the four uniforms.

At that moment, a fifth uniform fell, as if from heaven, upon the other

four.

The fifth man was saved.

Marius raised his eyes and recognized M. Fauchelevent.

Jean Valjean had just entered the barricade.

He had arrived by way of Mondétour lane, whither by dint of inquiries

made, or by instinct, or chance. Thanks to his dress of a National

Guardsman, he had made his way without difficulty.

The sentinel stationed by the insurgents in the Rue Mondétour had no

occasion to give the alarm for a single National Guardsman, and he had

allowed the latter to entangle himself in the street, saying to

himself: “Probably it is a reinforcement, in any case it is a

prisoner.” The moment was too grave to admit of the sentinel abandoning

his duty and his post of observation.

At the moment when Jean Valjean entered the redoubt, no one had noticed

him, all eyes being fixed on the five chosen men and the four uniforms.

Jean Valjean also had seen and heard, and he had silently removed his

coat and flung it on the pile with the rest.

The emotion aroused was indescribable.

“Who is this man?” demanded Bossuet.

“He is a man who saves others,” replied Combeferre.

Marius added in a grave voice:

“I know him.”

This guarantee satisfied every one.

Enjolras turned to Jean Valjean.

“Welcome, citizen.”

And he added:

“You know that we are about to die.”

Jean Valjean, without replying, helped the insurgent whom he was saving

to don his uniform.

CHAPTER V—THE HORIZON WHICH ONE BEHOLDS FROM THE SUMMIT OF A BARRICADE

The situation of all in that fatal hour and that pitiless place, had as

result and culminating point Enjolras’ supreme melancholy.

Enjolras bore within him the plenitude of the revolution; he was

incomplete, however, so far as the absolute can be so; he had too much

of Saint-Just about him, and not enough of Anacharsis Cloots; still,

his mind, in the society of the Friends of the A B C, had ended by

undergoing a certain polarization from Combeferre’s ideas; for some

time past, he had been gradually emerging from the narrow form of

dogma, and had allowed himself to incline to the broadening influence

of progress, and he had come to accept, as a definitive and magnificent

evolution, the transformation of the great French Republic, into the

immense human republic. As far as the immediate means were concerned, a

violent situation being given, he wished to be violent; on that point,

he never varied; and he remained of that epic and redoubtable school

which is summed up in the words: “Eighty-three.” Enjolras was standing

erect on the staircase of paving-stones, one elbow resting on the stock

of his gun. He was engaged in thought; he quivered, as at the passage

of prophetic breaths; places where death is have these effects of

tripods. A sort of stifled fire darted from his eyes, which were filled

with an inward look. All at once he threw back his head, his blond

locks fell back like those of an angel on the sombre quadriga made of

stars, they were like the mane of a startled lion in the flaming of an

halo, and Enjolras cried:

“Citizens, do you picture the future to yourselves? The streets of

cities inundated with light, green branches on the thresholds, nations

sisters, men just, old men blessing children, the past loving the

present, thinkers entirely at liberty, believers on terms of full

equality, for religion heaven, God the direct priest, human conscience

become an altar, no more hatreds, the fraternity of the workshop and

the school, for sole penalty and recompense fame, work for all, right

for all, peace over all, no more bloodshed, no more wars, happy

mothers! To conquer matter is the first step; to realize the ideal is

the second. Reflect on what progress has already accomplished.

Formerly, the first human races beheld with terror the hydra pass

before their eyes, breathing on the waters, the dragon which vomited

flame, the griffin who was the monster of the air, and who flew with

the wings of an eagle and the talons of a tiger; fearful beasts which

were above man. Man, nevertheless, spread his snares, consecrated by

intelligence, and finally conquered these monsters. We have vanquished

the hydra, and it is called the locomotive; we are on the point of

vanquishing the griffin, we already grasp it, and it is called the

balloon. On the day when this Promethean task shall be accomplished,

and when man shall have definitely harnessed to his will the triple

Chimæra of antiquity, the hydra, the dragon and the griffin, he will be

the master of water, fire, and of air, and he will be for the rest of

animated creation that which the ancient gods formerly were to him.

Courage, and onward! Citizens, whither are we going? To science made

government, to the force of things become the sole public force, to the

natural law, having in itself its sanction and its penalty and

promulgating itself by evidence, to a dawn of truth corresponding to a

dawn of day. We are advancing to the union of peoples; we are advancing

to the unity of man. No more fictions; no more parasites. The real

governed by the true, that is the goal. Civilization will hold its

assizes at the summit of Europe, and, later on, at the centre of

continents, in a grand parliament of the intelligence. Something

similar has already been seen. The amphictyons had two sittings a year,

one at Delphos the seat of the gods, the other at Thermopylæ, the place

of heroes. Europe will have her amphictyons; the globe will have its

amphictyons. France bears this sublime future in her breast. This is

the gestation of the nineteenth century. That which Greece sketched out

is worthy of being finished by France. Listen to me, you, Feuilly,

valiant artisan, man of the people. I revere you. Yes, you clearly

behold the future, yes, you are right. You had neither father nor

mother, Feuilly; you adopted humanity for your mother and right for

your father. You are about to die, that is to say to triumph, here.

Citizens, whatever happens to-day, through our defeat as well as

through our victory, it is a revolution that we are about to create. As

conflagrations light up a whole city, so revolutions illuminate the

whole human race. And what is the revolution that we shall cause? I

have just told you, the Revolution of the True. From a political point

of view, there is but a single principle; the sovereignty of man over

himself. This sovereignty of myself over myself is called Liberty.

Where two or three of these sovereignties are combined, the state

begins. But in that association there is no abdication. Each

sovereignty concedes a certain quantity of itself, for the purpose of

forming the common right. This quantity is the same for all of us. This

identity of concession which each makes to all, is called Equality.

Common right is nothing else than the protection of all beaming on the

right of each. This protection of all over each is called Fraternity.

The point of intersection of all these assembled sovereignties is

called society. This intersection being a junction, this point is a

knot. Hence what is called the social bond. Some say social contract;

which is the same thing, the word contract being etymologically formed

with the idea of a bond. Let us come to an understanding about

equality; for, if liberty is the summit, equality is the base.

Equality, citizens, is not wholly a surface vegetation, a society of

great blades of grass and tiny oaks; a proximity of jealousies which

render each other null and void; legally speaking, it is all aptitudes

possessed of the same opportunity; politically, it is all votes

possessed of the same weight; religiously, it is all consciences

possessed of the same right. Equality has an organ: gratuitous and

obligatory instruction. The right to the alphabet, that is where the

beginning must be made. The primary school imposed on all, the

secondary school offered to all, that is the law. From an identical

school, an identical society will spring. Yes, instruction! light!

light! everything comes from light, and to it everything returns.

Citizens, the nineteenth century is great, but the twentieth century

will be happy. Then, there will be nothing more like the history of

old, we shall no longer, as to-day, have to fear a conquest, an

invasion, a usurpation, a rivalry of nations, arms in hand, an

interruption of civilization depending on a marriage of kings, on a

birth in hereditary tyrannies, a partition of peoples by a congress, a

dismemberment because of the failure of a dynasty, a combat of two

religions meeting face to face, like two bucks in the dark, on the

bridge of the infinite; we shall no longer have to fear famine, farming

out, prostitution arising from distress, misery from the failure of

work and the scaffold and the sword, and battles and the ruffianism of

chance in the forest of events. One might almost say: There will be no

more events. We shall be happy. The human race will accomplish its law,

as the terrestrial globe accomplishes its law; harmony will be

re-established between the soul and the star; the soul will gravitate

around the truth, as the planet around the light. Friends, the present

hour in which I am addressing you, is a gloomy hour; but these are

terrible purchases of the future. A revolution is a toll. Oh! the human

race will be delivered, raised up, consoled! We affirm it on this

barrier. Whence should proceed that cry of love, if not from the

heights of sacrifice? Oh my brothers, this is the point of junction, of

those who think and of those who suffer; this barricade is not made of

paving-stones, nor of joists, nor of bits of iron; it is made of two

heaps, a heap of ideas, and a heap of woes. Here misery meets the

ideal. The day embraces the night, and says to it: ‘I am about to die,

and thou shalt be born again with me.’ From the embrace of all

desolations faith leaps forth. Sufferings bring hither their agony and

ideas their immortality. This agony and this immortality are about to

join and constitute our death. Brothers, he who dies here dies in the

radiance of the future, and we are entering a tomb all flooded with the

dawn.”

Enjolras paused rather than became silent; his lips continued to move

silently, as though he were talking to himself, which caused them all

to gaze attentively at him, in the endeavor to hear more. There was no

applause; but they whispered together for a long time. Speech being a

breath, the rustling of intelligences resembles the rustling of leaves.

CHAPTER VI—MARIUS HAGGARD, JAVERT LACONIC

Let us narrate what was passing in Marius’ thoughts.

Let the reader recall the state of his soul. We have just recalled it,

everything was a vision to him now. His judgment was disturbed. Marius,

let us insist on this point, was under the shadow of the great, dark

wings which are spread over those in the death agony. He felt that he

had entered the tomb, it seemed to him that he was already on the other

side of the wall, and he no longer beheld the faces of the living

except with the eyes of one dead.

How did M. Fauchelevent come there? Why was he there? What had he come

there to do? Marius did not address all these questions to himself.

Besides, since our despair has this peculiarity, that it envelops

others as well as ourselves, it seemed logical to him that all the

world should come thither to die.

Only, he thought of Cosette with a pang at his heart.

However, M. Fauchelevent did not speak to him, did not look at him, and

had not even the air of hearing him, when Marius raised his voice to

say: “I know him.”

As far as Marius was concerned, this attitude of M. Fauchelevent was

comforting, and, if such a word can be used for such impressions, we

should say that it pleased him. He had always felt the absolute

impossibility of addressing that enigmatical man, who was, in his eyes,

both equivocal and imposing. Moreover, it had been a long time since he

had seen him; and this still further augmented the impossibility for

Marius’ timid and reserved nature.

The five chosen men left the barricade by way of Mondétour lane; they

bore a perfect resemblance to members of the National Guard. One of

them wept as he took his leave. Before setting out, they embraced those

who remained.

When the five men sent back to life had taken their departure, Enjolras

thought of the man who had been condemned to death.

He entered the tap-room. Javert, still bound to the post, was engaged

in meditation.

“Do you want anything?” Enjolras asked him.

Javert replied: “When are you going to kill me?”

“Wait. We need all our cartridges just at present.”

“Then give me a drink,” said Javert.

Enjolras himself offered him a glass of water, and, as Javert was

pinioned, he helped him to drink.

“Is that all?” inquired Enjolras.

“I am uncomfortable against this post,” replied Javert. “You are not

tender to have left me to pass the night here. Bind me as you please,

but you surely might lay me out on a table like that other man.”

And with a motion of the head, he indicated the body of M. Mabeuf.

There was, as the reader will remember, a long, broad table at the end

of the room, on which they had been running bullets and making

cartridges. All the cartridges having been made, and all the powder

used, this table was free.

At Enjolras’ command, four insurgents unbound Javert from the post.

While they were loosing him, a fifth held a bayonet against his breast.

Leaving his arms tied behind his back, they placed about his feet a

slender but stout whip-cord, as is done to men on the point of mounting

the scaffold, which allowed him to take steps about fifteen inches in

length, and made him walk to the table at the end of the room, where

they laid him down, closely bound about the middle of the body.

By way of further security, and by means of a rope fastened to his

neck, they added to the system of ligatures which rendered every

attempt at escape impossible, that sort of bond which is called in

prisons a martingale, which, starting at the neck, forks on the

stomach, and meets the hands, after passing between the legs.

While they were binding Javert, a man standing on the threshold was

surveying him with singular attention. The shadow cast by this man made

Javert turn his head. He raised his eyes, and recognized Jean Valjean.

He did not even start, but dropped his lids proudly and confined

himself to the remark: “It is perfectly simple.”

CHAPTER VII—THE SITUATION BECOMES AGGRAVATED

The daylight was increasing rapidly. Not a window was opened, not a

door stood ajar; it was the dawn but not the awaking. The end of the

Rue de la Chanvrerie, opposite the barricade, had been evacuated by the

troops, as we have stated, it seemed to be free, and presented itself

to passers-by with a sinister tranquillity. The Rue Saint-Denis was as

dumb as the avenue of Sphinxes at Thebes. Not a living being in the

crossroads, which gleamed white in the light of the sun. Nothing is so

mournful as this light in deserted streets. Nothing was to be seen, but

there was something to be heard. A mysterious movement was going on at

a certain distance. It was evident that the critical moment was

approaching. As on the previous evening, the sentinels had come in; but

this time all had come.

The barricade was stronger than on the occasion of the first attack.

Since the departure of the five, they had increased its height still

further.

On the advice of the sentinel who had examined the region of the

Halles, Enjolras, for fear of a surprise in the rear, came to a serious

decision. He had the small gut of the Mondétour lane, which had been

left open up to that time, barricaded. For this purpose, they tore up

the pavement for the length of several houses more. In this manner, the

barricade, walled on three streets, in front on the Rue de la

Chanvrerie, to the left on the Rues du Cygne and de la Petite

Truanderie, to the right on the Rue Mondétour, was really almost

impregnable; it is true that they were fatally hemmed in there. It had

three fronts, but no exit.—“A fortress but a rat hole too,” said

Courfeyrac with a laugh.

Enjolras had about thirty paving-stones “torn up in excess,” said

Bossuet, piled up near the door of the wine-shop.

The silence was now so profound in the quarter whence the attack must

needs come, that Enjolras had each man resume his post of battle.

An allowance of brandy was doled out to each.

Nothing is more curious than a barricade preparing for an assault. Each

man selects his place as though at the theatre. They jostle, and elbow

and crowd each other. There are some who make stalls of paving-stones.

Here is a corner of the wall which is in the way, it is removed; here

is a redan which may afford protection, they take shelter behind it.

Left-handed men are precious; they take the places that are

inconvenient to the rest. Many arrange to fight in a sitting posture.

They wish to be at ease to kill, and to die comfortably. In the sad war

of June, 1848, an insurgent who was a formidable marksman, and who was

firing from the top of a terrace upon a roof, had a reclining-chair

brought there for his use; a charge of grape-shot found him out there.

As soon as the leader has given the order to clear the decks for

action, all disorderly movements cease; there is no more pulling from

one another; there are no more coteries; no more asides, there is no

more holding aloof; everything in their spirits converges in, and

changes into, a waiting for the assailants. A barricade before the

arrival of danger is chaos; in danger, it is discipline itself. Peril

produces order.

As soon as Enjolras had seized his double-barrelled rifle, and had

placed himself in a sort of embrasure which he had reserved for

himself, all the rest held their peace. A series of faint, sharp noises

resounded confusedly along the wall of paving-stones. It was the men

cocking their guns.

Moreover, their attitudes were prouder, more confident than ever; the

excess of sacrifice strengthens; they no longer cherished any hope, but

they had despair, despair,—the last weapon, which sometimes gives

victory; Virgil has said so. Supreme resources spring from extreme

resolutions. To embark in death is sometimes the means of escaping a

shipwreck; and the lid of the coffin becomes a plank of safety.

As on the preceding evening, the attention of all was directed, we

might almost say leaned upon, the end of the street, now lighted up and

visible.

They had not long to wait. A stir began distinctly in the Saint-Leu

quarter, but it did not resemble the movement of the first attack. A

clashing of chains, the uneasy jolting of a mass, the click of brass

skipping along the pavement, a sort of solemn uproar, announced that

some sinister construction of iron was approaching. There arose a

tremor in the bosoms of these peaceful old streets, pierced and built

for the fertile circulation of interests and ideas, and which are not

made for the horrible rumble of the wheels of war.

The fixity of eye in all the combatants upon the extremity of the

street became ferocious.

A cannon made its appearance.

Artillery-men were pushing the piece; it was in firing trim; the

fore-carriage had been detached; two upheld the gun-carriage, four were

at the wheels; others followed with the caisson. They could see the

smoke of the burning lint-stock.

“Fire!” shouted Enjolras.

The whole barricade fired, the report was terrible; an avalanche of

smoke covered and effaced both cannon and men; after a few seconds, the

cloud dispersed, and the cannon and men reappeared; the gun-crew had

just finished rolling it slowly, correctly, without haste, into

position facing the barricade. Not one of them had been struck. Then

the captain of the piece, bearing down upon the breech in order to

raise the muzzle, began to point the cannon with the gravity of an

astronomer levelling a telescope.

“Bravo for the cannoneers!” cried Bossuet.

And the whole barricade clapped their hands.

A moment later, squarely planted in the very middle of the street,

astride of the gutter, the piece was ready for action. A formidable

pair of jaws yawned on the barricade.

“Come, merrily now!” ejaculated Courfeyrac. “That’s the brutal part of

it. After the fillip on the nose, the blow from the fist. The army is

reaching out its big paw to us. The barricade is going to be severely

shaken up. The fusillade tries, the cannon takes.”

“It is a piece of eight, new model, brass,” added Combeferre. “Those

pieces are liable to burst as soon as the proportion of ten parts of

tin to one hundred of brass is exceeded. The excess of tin renders them

too tender. Then it comes to pass that they have caves and chambers

when looked at from the vent hole. In order to obviate this danger, and

to render it possible to force the charge, it may become necessary to

return to the process of the fourteenth century, hooping, and to

encircle the piece on the outside with a series of unwelded steel

bands, from the breech to the trunnions. In the meantime, they remedy

this defect as best they may; they manage to discover where the holes

are located in the vent of a cannon, by means of a searcher. But there

is a better method, with Gribeauval’s movable star.”

“In the sixteenth century,” remarked Bossuet, “they used to rifle

cannon.”

“Yes,” replied Combeferre, “that augments the projectile force, but

diminishes the accuracy of the firing. In firing at short range, the

trajectory is not as rigid as could be desired, the parabola is

exaggerated, the line of the projectile is no longer sufficiently

rectilinear to allow of its striking intervening objects, which is,

nevertheless, a necessity of battle, the importance of which increases

with the proximity of the enemy and the precipitation of the discharge.

This defect of the tension of the curve of the projectile in the rifled

cannon of the sixteenth century arose from the smallness of the charge;

small charges for that sort of engine are imposed by the ballistic

necessities, such, for instance, as the preservation of the

gun-carriage. In short, that despot, the cannon, cannot do all that it

desires; force is a great weakness. A cannon-ball only travels six

hundred leagues an hour; light travels seventy thousand leagues a

second. Such is the superiority of Jesus Christ over Napoleon.”

“Reload your guns,” said Enjolras.

How was the casing of the barricade going to behave under the

cannon-balls? Would they effect a breach? That was the question. While

the insurgents were reloading their guns, the artillery-men were

loading the cannon.

The anxiety in the redoubt was profound.

The shot sped the report burst forth.

“Present!” shouted a joyous voice.

And Gavroche flung himself into the barricade just as the ball dashed

against it.

He came from the direction of the Rue du Cygne, and he had nimbly

climbed over the auxiliary barricade which fronted on the labyrinth of

the Rue de la Petite Truanderie.

Gavroche produced a greater sensation in the barricade than the

cannon-ball.

The ball buried itself in the mass of rubbish. At the most there was an

omnibus wheel broken, and the old Anceau cart was demolished. On seeing

this, the barricade burst into a laugh.

“Go on!” shouted Bossuet to the artillerists.

CHAPTER VIII—THE ARTILLERY-MEN COMPEL PEOPLE TO TAKE THEM SERIOUSLY

They flocked round Gavroche. But he had no time to tell anything.

Marius drew him aside with a shudder.

“What are you doing here?”

“Hullo!” said the child, “what are you doing here yourself?”

And he stared at Marius intently with his epic effrontery. His eyes

grew larger with the proud light within them.

It was with an accent of severity that Marius continued:

“Who told you to come back? Did you deliver my letter at the address?”

Gavroche was not without some compunctions in the matter of that

letter. In his haste to return to the barricade, he had got rid of it

rather than delivered it. He was forced to acknowledge to himself that

he had confided it rather lightly to that stranger whose face he had

not been able to make out. It is true that the man was bareheaded, but

that was not sufficient. In short, he had been administering to himself

little inward remonstrances and he feared Marius’ reproaches. In order

to extricate himself from the predicament, he took the simplest course;

he lied abominably.

“Citizen, I delivered the letter to the porter. The lady was asleep.

She will have the letter when she wakes up.”

Marius had had two objects in sending that letter: to bid farewell to

Cosette and to save Gavroche. He was obliged to content himself with

the half of his desire.

The despatch of his letter and the presence of M. Fauchelevent in the

barricade, was a coincidence which occurred to him. He pointed out M.

Fauchelevent to Gavroche.

“Do you know that man?”

“No,” said Gavroche.

Gavroche had, in fact, as we have just mentioned, seen Jean Valjean

only at night.

The troubled and unhealthy conjectures which had outlined themselves in

Marius’ mind were dissipated. Did he know M. Fauchelevent’s opinions?

Perhaps M. Fauchelevent was a republican. Hence his very natural

presence in this combat.

In the meanwhile, Gavroche was shouting, at the other end of the

barricade: “My gun!”

Courfeyrac had it returned to him.

Gavroche warned “his comrades” as he called them, that the barricade

was blocked. He had had great difficulty in reaching it. A battalion of

the line whose arms were piled in the Rue de la Petite Truanderie was

on the watch on the side of the Rue du Cygne; on the opposite side, the

municipal guard occupied the Rue des Prêcheurs. The bulk of the army

was facing them in front.

This information given, Gavroche added:

“I authorize you to hit ’em a tremendous whack.”

Meanwhile, Enjolras was straining his ears and watching at his

embrasure.

The assailants, dissatisfied, no doubt, with their shot, had not

repeated it.

A company of infantry of the line had come up and occupied the end of

the street behind the piece of ordnance. The soldiers were tearing up

the pavement and constructing with the stones a small, low wall, a sort

of side-work not more than eighteen inches high, and facing the

barricade. In the angle at the left of this epaulement, there was

visible the head of the column of a battalion from the suburbs massed

in the Rue Saint-Denis.

Enjolras, on the watch, thought he distinguished the peculiar sound

which is produced when the shells of grape-shot are drawn from the

caissons, and he saw the commander of the piece change the elevation

and incline the mouth of the cannon slightly to the left. Then the

cannoneers began to load the piece. The chief seized the lint-stock

himself and lowered it to the vent.

“Down with your heads, hug the wall!” shouted Enjolras, “and all on

your knees along the barricade!”

The insurgents who were straggling in front of the wine-shop, and who

had quitted their posts of combat on Gavroche’s arrival, rushed

pell-mell towards the barricade; but before Enjolras’ order could be

executed, the discharge took place with the terrifying rattle of a

round of grape-shot. This is what it was, in fact.

The charge had been aimed at the cut in the redoubt, and had there

rebounded from the wall; and this terrible rebound had produced two

dead and three wounded.

If this were continued, the barricade was no longer tenable. The

grape-shot made its way in.

A murmur of consternation arose.

“Let us prevent the second discharge,” said Enjolras.

And, lowering his rifle, he took aim at the captain of the gun, who, at

that moment, was bearing down on the breach of his gun and rectifying

and definitely fixing its pointing.

The captain of the piece was a handsome sergeant of artillery, very

young, blond, with a very gentle face, and the intelligent air peculiar

to that predestined and redoubtable weapon which, by dint of perfecting

itself in horror, must end in killing war.

Combeferre, who was standing beside Enjolras, scrutinized this young

man.

“What a pity!” said Combeferre. “What hideous things these butcheries

are! Come, when there are no more kings, there will be no more war.

Enjolras, you are taking aim at that sergeant, you are not looking at

him. Fancy, he is a charming young man; he is intrepid; it is evident

that he is thoughtful; those young artillery-men are very well

educated; he has a father, a mother, a family; he is probably in love;

he is not more than five and twenty at the most; he might be your

brother.”

“He is,” said Enjolras.

“Yes,” replied Combeferre, “he is mine too. Well, let us not kill him.”

“Let me alone. It must be done.”

And a tear trickled slowly down Enjolras’ marble cheek.

At the same moment, he pressed the trigger of his rifle. The flame

leaped forth. The artillery-man turned round twice, his arms extended

in front of him, his head uplifted, as though for breath, then he fell

with his side on the gun, and lay there motionless. They could see his

back, from the centre of which there flowed directly a stream of blood.

The ball had traversed his breast from side to side. He was dead.

He had to be carried away and replaced by another. Several minutes were

thus gained, in fact.

CHAPTER IX—EMPLOYMENT OF THE OLD TALENTS OF A POACHER AND THAT

INFALLIBLE MARKSMANSHIP WHICH INFLUENCED THE CONDEMNATION OF 1796

Opinions were exchanged in the barricade. The firing from the gun was

about to begin again. Against that grape-shot, they could not hold out

a quarter of an hour longer. It was absolutely necessary to deaden the

blows.

Enjolras issued this command:

“We must place a mattress there.”

“We have none,” said Combeferre, “the wounded are lying on them.”

Jean Valjean, who was seated apart on a stone post, at the corner of

the tavern, with his gun between his knees, had, up to that moment,

taken no part in anything that was going on. He did not appear to hear

the combatants saying around him: “Here is a gun that is doing

nothing.”

At the order issued by Enjolras, he rose.

It will be remembered that, on the arrival of the rabble in the Rue de

la Chanvrerie, an old woman, foreseeing the bullets, had placed her

mattress in front of her window. This window, an attic window, was on

the roof of a six-story house situated a little beyond the barricade.

The mattress, placed cross-wise, supported at the bottom on two poles

for drying linen, was upheld at the top by two ropes, which, at that

distance, looked like two threads, and which were attached to two nails

planted in the window frames. These ropes were distinctly visible, like

hairs, against the sky.

“Can some one lend me a double-barrelled rifle?” said Jean Valjean.

Enjolras, who had just re-loaded his, handed it to him.

Jean Valjean took aim at the attic window and fired.

One of the mattress ropes was cut.

The mattress now hung by one thread only.

Jean Valjean fired the second charge. The second rope lashed the panes

of the attic window. The mattress slipped between the two poles and

fell into the street.

The barricade applauded.

All voices cried:

“Here is a mattress!”

“Yes,” said Combeferre, “but who will go and fetch it?”

The mattress had, in fact, fallen outside the barricade, between

besiegers and besieged. Now, the death of the sergeant of artillery

having exasperated the troop, the soldiers had, for several minutes,

been lying flat on their stomachs behind the line of paving-stones

which they had erected, and, in order to supply the forced silence of

the piece, which was quiet while its service was in course of

reorganization, they had opened fire on the barricade. The insurgents

did not reply to this musketry, in order to spare their ammunition. The

fusillade broke against the barricade; but the street, which it filled,

was terrible.

Jean Valjean stepped out of the cut, entered the street, traversed the

storm of bullets, walked up to the mattress, hoisted it upon his back,

and returned to the barricade.

He placed the mattress in the cut with his own hands. He fixed it there

against the wall in such a manner that the artillery-men should not see

it.

That done, they awaited the next discharge of grape-shot.

It was not long in coming.

The cannon vomited forth its package of buckshot with a roar. But there

was no rebound. The effect which they had foreseen had been attained.

The barricade was saved.

“Citizen,” said Enjolras to Jean Valjean, “the Republic thanks you.”

Bossuet admired and laughed. He exclaimed:

“It is immoral that a mattress should have so much power. Triumph of

that which yields over that which strikes with lightning. But never

mind, glory to the mattress which annuls a cannon!”

CHAPTER X—DAWN

At that moment, Cosette awoke.

Her chamber was narrow, neat, unobtrusive, with a long sash-window,

facing the East on the back court-yard of the house.

Cosette knew nothing of what was going on in Paris. She had not been

there on the preceding evening, and she had already retired to her

chamber when Toussaint had said:

“It appears that there is a row.”

Cosette had slept only a few hours, but soundly. She had had sweet

dreams, which possibly arose from the fact that her little bed was very

white. Some one, who was Marius, had appeared to her in the light. She

awoke with the sun in her eyes, which, at first, produced on her the

effect of being a continuation of her dream. Her first thought on

emerging from this dream was a smiling one. Cosette felt herself

thoroughly reassured. Like Jean Valjean, she had, a few hours

previously, passed through that reaction of the soul which absolutely

will not hear of unhappiness. She began to cherish hope, with all her

might, without knowing why. Then she felt a pang at her heart. It was

three days since she had seen Marius. But she said to herself that he

must have received her letter, that he knew where she was, and that he

was so clever that he would find means of reaching her.—And that

certainly to-day, and perhaps that very morning.—It was broad daylight,

but the rays of light were very horizontal; she thought that it was

very early, but that she must rise, nevertheless, in order to receive

Marius.

She felt that she could not live without Marius, and that,

consequently, that was sufficient and that Marius would come. No

objection was valid. All this was certain. It was monstrous enough

already to have suffered for three days. Marius absent three days, this

was horrible on the part of the good God. Now, this cruel teasing from

on high had been gone through with. Marius was about to arrive, and he

would bring good news. Youth is made thus; it quickly dries its eyes;

it finds sorrow useless and does not accept it. Youth is the smile of

the future in the presence of an unknown quantity, which is itself. It

is natural to it to be happy. It seems as though its respiration were

made of hope.

Moreover, Cosette could not remember what Marius had said to her on the

subject of this absence which was to last only one day, and what

explanation of it he had given her. Every one has noticed with what

nimbleness a coin which one has dropped on the ground rolls away and

hides, and with what art it renders itself undiscoverable. There are

thoughts which play us the same trick; they nestle away in a corner of

our brain; that is the end of them; they are lost; it is impossible to

lay the memory on them. Cosette was somewhat vexed at the useless

little effort made by her memory. She told herself, that it was very

naughty and very wicked of her, to have forgotten the words uttered by

Marius.

She sprang out of bed and accomplished the two ablutions of soul and

body, her prayers and her toilet.

One may, in a case of exigency, introduce the reader into a nuptial

chamber, not into a virginal chamber. Verse would hardly venture it,

prose must not.

It is the interior of a flower that is not yet unfolded, it is

whiteness in the dark, it is the private cell of a closed lily, which

must not be gazed upon by man so long as the sun has not gazed upon it.

Woman in the bud is sacred. That innocent bud which opens, that

adorable half-nudity which is afraid of itself, that white foot which

takes refuge in a slipper, that throat which veils itself before a

mirror as though a mirror were an eye, that chemise which makes haste

to rise up and conceal the shoulder for a creaking bit of furniture or

a passing vehicle, those cords tied, those clasps fastened, those laces

drawn, those tremors, those shivers of cold and modesty, that exquisite

affright in every movement, that almost winged uneasiness where there

is no cause for alarm, the successive phases of dressing, as charming

as the clouds of dawn,—it is not fitting that all this should be

narrated, and it is too much to have even called attention to it.

The eye of man must be more religious in the presence of the rising of

a young girl than in the presence of the rising of a star. The

possibility of hurting should inspire an augmentation of respect. The

down on the peach, the bloom on the plum, the radiated crystal of the

snow, the wing of the butterfly powdered with feathers, are coarse

compared to that chastity which does not even know that it is chaste.

The young girl is only the flash of a dream, and is not yet a statue.

Her bed-chamber is hidden in the sombre part of the ideal. The

indiscreet touch of a glance brutalizes this vague penumbra. Here,

contemplation is profanation.

We shall, therefore, show nothing of that sweet little flutter of

Cosette’s rising.

An oriental tale relates how the rose was made white by God, but that

Adam looked upon her when she was unfolding, and she was ashamed and

turned crimson. We are of the number who fall speechless in the

presence of young girls and flowers, since we think them worthy of

veneration.

Cosette dressed herself very hastily, combed and dressed her hair,

which was a very simple matter in those days, when women did not swell

out their curls and bands with cushions and puffs, and did not put

crinoline in their locks. Then she opened the window and cast her eyes

around her in every direction, hoping to descry some bit of the street,

an angle of the house, an edge of pavement, so that she might be able

to watch for Marius there. But no view of the outside was to be had.

The back court was surrounded by tolerably high walls, and the outlook

was only on several gardens. Cosette pronounced these gardens hideous:

for the first time in her life, she found flowers ugly. The smallest

scrap of the gutter of the street would have met her wishes better. She

decided to gaze at the sky, as though she thought that Marius might

come from that quarter.

All at once, she burst into tears. Not that this was fickleness of

soul; but hopes cut in twain by dejection—that was her case. She had a

confused consciousness of something horrible. Thoughts were rife in the

air, in fact. She told herself that she was not sure of anything, that

to withdraw herself from sight was to be lost; and the idea that Marius

could return to her from heaven appeared to her no longer charming but

mournful.

Then, as is the nature of these clouds, calm returned to her, and hope

and a sort of unconscious smile, which yet indicated trust in God.

Every one in the house was still asleep. A country-like silence

reigned. Not a shutter had been opened. The porter’s lodge was closed.

Toussaint had not risen, and Cosette, naturally, thought that her

father was asleep. She must have suffered much, and she must have still

been suffering greatly, for she said to herself, that her father had

been unkind; but she counted on Marius. The eclipse of such a light was

decidedly impossible. Now and then, she heard sharp shocks in the

distance, and she said: “It is odd that people should be opening and

shutting their carriage gates so early.” They were the reports of the

cannon battering the barricade.

A few feet below Cosette’s window, in the ancient and perfectly black

cornice of the wall, there was a martin’s nest; the curve of this nest

formed a little projection beyond the cornice, so that from above it

was possible to look into this little paradise. The mother was there,

spreading her wings like a fan over her brood; the father fluttered

about, flew away, then came back, bearing in his beak food and kisses.

The dawning day gilded this happy thing, the great law, “Multiply,” lay

there smiling and august, and that sweet mystery unfolded in the glory

of the morning. Cosette, with her hair in the sunlight, her soul

absorbed in chimæras, illuminated by love within and by the dawn

without, bent over mechanically, and almost without daring to avow to

herself that she was thinking at the same time of Marius, began to gaze

at these birds, at this family, at that male and female, that mother

and her little ones, with the profound trouble which a nest produces on

a virgin.

CHAPTER XI—THE SHOT WHICH MISSES NOTHING AND KILLS NO ONE

The assailants’ fire continued. Musketry and grape-shot alternated, but

without committing great ravages, to tell the truth. The top alone of

the Corinthe façade suffered; the window on the first floor, and the

attic window in the roof, riddled with buckshot and biscaïens, were

slowly losing their shape. The combatants who had been posted there had

been obliged to withdraw. However, this is according to the tactics of

barricades; to fire for a long while, in order to exhaust the

insurgents’ ammunition, if they commit the mistake of replying. When it

is perceived, from the slackening of their fire, that they have no more

powder and ball, the assault is made. Enjolras had not fallen into this

trap; the barricade did not reply.

At every discharge by platoons, Gavroche puffed out his cheek with his

tongue, a sign of supreme disdain.

“Good for you,” said he, “rip up the cloth. We want some lint.”

Courfeyrac called the grape-shot to order for the little effect which

it produced, and said to the cannon:

“You are growing diffuse, my good fellow.”

One gets puzzled in battle, as at a ball. It is probable that this

silence on the part of the redoubt began to render the besiegers

uneasy, and to make them fear some unexpected incident, and that they

felt the necessity of getting a clear view behind that heap of

paving-stones, and of knowing what was going on behind that impassable

wall which received blows without retorting. The insurgents suddenly

perceived a helmet glittering in the sun on a neighboring roof. A

fireman had placed his back against a tall chimney, and seemed to be

acting as sentinel. His glance fell directly down into the barricade.

“There’s an embarrassing watcher,” said Enjolras.

Jean Valjean had returned Enjolras’ rifle, but he had his own gun.

Without saying a word, he took aim at the fireman, and, a second later,

the helmet, smashed by a bullet, rattled noisily into the street. The

terrified soldier made haste to disappear. A second observer took his

place. This one was an officer. Jean Valjean, who had re-loaded his

gun, took aim at the newcomer and sent the officer’s casque to join the

soldier’s. The officer did not persist, and retired speedily. This time

the warning was understood. No one made his appearance thereafter on

that roof; and the idea of spying on the barricade was abandoned.

“Why did you not kill the man?” Bossuet asked Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean made no reply.

CHAPTER XII—DISORDER A PARTISAN OF ORDER

Bossuet muttered in Combeferre’s ear:

“He did not answer my question.”

“He is a man who does good by gun-shots,” said Combeferre.

Those who have preserved some memory of this already distant epoch know

that the National Guard from the suburbs was valiant against

insurrections. It was particularly zealous and intrepid in the days of

June, 1832. A certain good dram-shop keeper of Pantin des Vertus or la

Cunette, whose “establishment” had been closed by the riots, became

leonine at the sight of his deserted dance-hall, and got himself killed

to preserve the order represented by a tea-garden. In that bourgeois

and heroic time, in the presence of ideas which had their knights,

interests had their paladins. The prosiness of the originators

detracted nothing from the bravery of the movement. The diminution of a

pile of crowns made bankers sing the Marseillaise. They shed their

blood lyrically for the counting-house; and they defended the shop,

that immense diminutive of the fatherland, with Lacedæmonian

enthusiasm.

At bottom, we will observe, there was nothing in all this that was not

extremely serious. It was social elements entering into strife, while

awaiting the day when they should enter into equilibrium.

Another sign of the times was the anarchy mingled with governmentalism

[the barbarous name of the correct party]. People were for order in

combination with lack of discipline.

The drum suddenly beat capricious calls, at the command of such or such

a Colonel of the National Guard; such and such a captain went into

action through inspiration; such and such National Guardsmen fought,

“for an idea,” and on their own account. At critical moments, on “days”

they took counsel less of their leaders than of their instincts. There

existed in the army of order, veritable guerilleros, some of the sword,

like Fannicot, others of the pen, like Henri Fonfrède.

Civilization, unfortunately, represented at this epoch rather by an

aggregation of interests than by a group of principles, was or thought

itself, in peril; it set up the cry of alarm; each, constituting

himself a centre, defended it, succored it, and protected it with his

own head; and the first comer took it upon himself to save society.

Zeal sometimes proceeded to extermination. A platoon of the National

Guard would constitute itself on its own authority a private council of

war, and judge and execute a captured insurgent in five minutes. It was

an improvisation of this sort that had slain Jean Prouvaire. Fierce

Lynch law, with which no one party had any right to reproach the rest,

for it has been applied by the Republic in America, as well as by the

monarchy in Europe. This Lynch law was complicated with mistakes. On

one day of rioting, a young poet, named Paul Aimé Garnier, was pursued

in the Place Royale, with a bayonet at his loins, and only escaped by

taking refuge under the porte-cochère of No. 6. They shouted:—“There’s

another of those Saint-Simonians!” and they wanted to kill him. Now, he

had under his arm a volume of the memoirs of the Duc de Saint-Simon. A

National Guard had read the words \_Saint-Simon\_ on the book, and had

shouted: “Death!”

On the 6th of June, 1832, a company of the National Guards from the

suburbs, commanded by the Captain Fannicot, above mentioned, had itself

decimated in the Rue de la Chanvrerie out of caprice and its own good

pleasure. This fact, singular though it may seem, was proved at the

judicial investigation opened in consequence of the insurrection of

1832. Captain Fannicot, a bold and impatient bourgeois, a sort of

condottiere of the order of those whom we have just characterized, a

fanatical and intractable governmentalist, could not resist the

temptation to fire prematurely, and the ambition of capturing the

barricade alone and unaided, that is to say, with his company.

Exasperated by the successive apparition of the red flag and the old

coat which he took for the black flag, he loudly blamed the generals

and chiefs of the corps, who were holding council and did not think

that the moment for the decisive assault had arrived, and who were

allowing “the insurrection to fry in its own fat,” to use the

celebrated expression of one of them. For his part, he thought the

barricade ripe, and as that which is ripe ought to fall, he made the

attempt.

He commanded men as resolute as himself, “raging fellows,” as a witness

said. His company, the same which had shot Jean Prouvaire the poet, was

the first of the battalion posted at the angle of the street. At the

moment when they were least expecting it, the captain launched his men

against the barricade. This movement, executed with more good will than

strategy, cost the Fannicot company dear. Before it had traversed two

thirds of the street it was received by a general discharge from the

barricade. Four, the most audacious, who were running on in front, were

mown down point-blank at the very foot of the redoubt, and this

courageous throng of National Guards, very brave men but lacking in

military tenacity, were forced to fall back, after some hesitation,

leaving fifteen corpses on the pavement. This momentary hesitation gave

the insurgents time to re-load their weapons, and a second and very

destructive discharge struck the company before it could regain the

corner of the street, its shelter. A moment more, and it was caught

between two fires, and it received the volley from the battery piece

which, not having received the order, had not discontinued its firing.

The intrepid and imprudent Fannicot was one of the dead from this

grape-shot. He was killed by the cannon, that is to say, by order.

This attack, which was more furious than serious, irritated

Enjolras.—“The fools!” said he. “They are getting their own men killed

and they are using up our ammunition for nothing.”

Enjolras spoke like the real general of insurrection which he was.

Insurrection and repression do not fight with equal weapons.

Insurrection, which is speedily exhausted, has only a certain number of

shots to fire and a certain number of combatants to expend. An empty

cartridge-box, a man killed, cannot be replaced. As repression has the

army, it does not count its men, and, as it has Vincennes, it does not

count its shots. Repression has as many regiments as the barricade has

men, and as many arsenals as the barricade has cartridge-boxes. Thus

they are struggles of one against a hundred, which always end in

crushing the barricade; unless the revolution, uprising suddenly,

flings into the balance its flaming archangel’s sword. This does happen

sometimes. Then everything rises, the pavements begin to seethe,

popular redoubts abound. Paris quivers supremely, the \_quid divinum\_ is

given forth, a 10th of August is in the air, a 29th of July is in the

air, a wonderful light appears, the yawning maw of force draws back,

and the army, that lion, sees before it, erect and tranquil, that

prophet, France.

CHAPTER XIII—PASSING GLEAMS

In the chaos of sentiments and passions which defend a barricade, there

is a little of everything; there is bravery, there is youth, honor,

enthusiasm, the ideal, conviction, the rage of the gambler, and, above

all, intermittences of hope.

One of these intermittences, one of these vague quivers of hope

suddenly traversed the barricade of the Rue de la Chanvrerie at the

moment when it was least expected.

“Listen,” suddenly cried Enjolras, who was still on the watch, “it

seems to me that Paris is waking up.”

It is certain that, on the morning of the 6th of June, the insurrection

broke out afresh for an hour or two, to a certain extent. The obstinacy

of the alarm peal of Saint-Merry reanimated some fancies. Barricades

were begun in the Rue du Poirier and the Rue des Gravilliers. In front

of the Porte Saint-Martin, a young man, armed with a rifle, attacked

alone a squadron of cavalry. In plain sight, on the open boulevard, he

placed one knee on the ground, shouldered his weapon, fired, killed the

commander of the squadron, and turned away, saying: “There’s another

who will do us no more harm.”

He was put to the sword. In the Rue Saint-Denis, a woman fired on the

National Guard from behind a lowered blind. The slats of the blind

could be seen to tremble at every shot. A child fourteen years of age

was arrested in the Rue de la Cossonerie, with his pockets full of

cartridges. Many posts were attacked. At the entrance to the Rue

Bertin-Poirée, a very lively and utterly unexpected fusillade welcomed

a regiment of cuirrassiers, at whose head marched Marshal General

Cavaignac de Barague. In the Rue Planche-Mibray, they threw old pieces

of pottery and household utensils down on the soldiers from the roofs;

a bad sign; and when this matter was reported to Marshal Soult,

Napoleon’s old lieutenant grew thoughtful, as he recalled Suchet’s

saying at Saragossa: “We are lost when the old women empty their pots

de chambre on our heads.”

These general symptoms which presented themselves at the moment when it

was thought that the uprising had been rendered local, this fever of

wrath, these sparks which flew hither and thither above those deep

masses of combustibles which are called the faubourgs of Paris,—all

this, taken together, disturbed the military chiefs. They made haste to

stamp out these beginnings of conflagration.

They delayed the attack on the barricades Maubuée, de la Chanvrerie and

Saint-Merry until these sparks had been extinguished, in order that

they might have to deal with the barricades only and be able to finish

them at one blow. Columns were thrown into the streets where there was

fermentation, sweeping the large, sounding the small, right and left,

now slowly and cautiously, now at full charge. The troops broke in the

doors of houses whence shots had been fired; at the same time,

manœuvres by the cavalry dispersed the groups on the boulevards. This

repression was not effected without some commotion, and without that

tumultuous uproar peculiar to collisions between the army and the

people. This was what Enjolras had caught in the intervals of the

cannonade and the musketry. Moreover, he had seen wounded men passing

the end of the street in litters, and he said to Courfeyrac:—“Those

wounded do not come from us.”

Their hope did not last long; the gleam was quickly eclipsed. In less

than half an hour, what was in the air vanished, it was a flash of

lightning unaccompanied by thunder, and the insurgents felt that sort

of leaden cope, which the indifference of the people casts over

obstinate and deserted men, fall over them once more.

The general movement, which seemed to have assumed a vague outline, had

miscarried; and the attention of the minister of war and the strategy

of the generals could now be concentrated on the three or four

barricades which still remained standing.

The sun was mounting above the horizon.

An insurgent hailed Enjolras.

“We are hungry here. Are we really going to die like this, without

anything to eat?”

Enjolras, who was still leaning on his elbows at his embrasure, made an

affirmative sign with his head, but without taking his eyes from the

end of the street.

CHAPTER XIV—WHEREIN WILL APPEAR THE NAME OF ENJOLRAS’ MISTRESS

Courfeyrac, seated on a paving-stone beside Enjolras, continued to

insult the cannon, and each time that that gloomy cloud of projectiles

which is called grape-shot passed overhead with its terrible sound he

assailed it with a burst of irony.

“You are wearing out your lungs, poor, brutal, old fellow, you pain me,

you are wasting your row. That’s not thunder, it’s a cough.”

And the bystanders laughed.

Courfeyrac and Bossuet, whose brave good humor increased with the

peril, like Madame Scarron, replaced nourishment with pleasantry, and,

as wine was lacking, they poured out gayety to all.

“I admire Enjolras,” said Bossuet. “His impassive temerity astounds me.

He lives alone, which renders him a little sad, perhaps; Enjolras

complains of his greatness, which binds him to widowhood. The rest of

us have mistresses, more or less, who make us crazy, that is to say,

brave. When a man is as much in love as a tiger, the least that he can

do is to fight like a lion. That is one way of taking our revenge for

the capers that mesdames our grisettes play on us. Roland gets himself

killed for Angélique; all our heroism comes from our women. A man

without a woman is a pistol without a trigger; it is the woman that

sets the man off. Well, Enjolras has no woman. He is not in love, and

yet he manages to be intrepid. It is a thing unheard of that a man

should be as cold as ice and as bold as fire.”

Enjolras did not appear to be listening, but had any one been near him,

that person would have heard him mutter in a low voice: “Patria.”

Bossuet was still laughing when Courfeyrac exclaimed:

“News!”

And assuming the tone of an usher making an announcement, he added:

“My name is Eight-Pounder.”

In fact, a new personage had entered on the scene. This was a second

piece of ordnance.

The artillery-men rapidly performed their manœuvres in force and placed

this second piece in line with the first.

This outlined the catastrophe.

A few minutes later, the two pieces, rapidly served, were firing

point-blank at the redoubt; the platoon firing of the line and of the

soldiers from the suburbs sustained the artillery.

Another cannonade was audible at some distance. At the same time that

the two guns were furiously attacking the redoubt from the Rue de la

Chanvrerie, two other cannons, trained one from the Rue Saint-Denis,

the other from the Rue Aubry-le-Boucher, were riddling the Saint-Merry

barricade. The four cannons echoed each other mournfully.

The barking of these sombre dogs of war replied to each other.

One of the two pieces which was now battering the barricade on the Rue

de la Chanvrerie was firing grape-shot, the other balls.

The piece which was firing balls was pointed a little high, and the aim

was calculated so that the ball struck the extreme edge of the upper

crest of the barricade, and crumbled the stone down upon the

insurgents, mingled with bursts of grape-shot.

The object of this mode of firing was to drive the insurgents from the

summit of the redoubt, and to compel them to gather close in the

interior, that is to say, this announced the assault.

The combatants once driven from the crest of the barricade by balls,

and from the windows of the cabaret by grape-shot, the attacking

columns could venture into the street without being picked off,

perhaps, even, without being seen, could briskly and suddenly scale the

redoubt, as on the preceding evening, and, who knows? take it by

surprise.

“It is absolutely necessary that the inconvenience of those guns should

be diminished,” said Enjolras, and he shouted: “Fire on the

artillery-men!”

All were ready. The barricade, which had long been silent, poured forth

a desperate fire; seven or eight discharges followed, with a sort of

rage and joy; the street was filled with blinding smoke, and, at the

end of a few minutes, athwart this mist all streaked with flame, two

thirds of the gunners could be distinguished lying beneath the wheels

of the cannons. Those who were left standing continued to serve the

pieces with severe tranquillity, but the fire had slackened.

“Things are going well now,” said Bossuet to Enjolras. “Success.”

Enjolras shook his head and replied:

“Another quarter of an hour of this success, and there will not be any

cartridges left in the barricade.”

It appears that Gavroche overheard this remark.

CHAPTER XV—GAVROCHE OUTSIDE

Courfeyrac suddenly caught sight of some one at the base of the

barricade, outside in the street, amid the bullets.

Gavroche had taken a bottle basket from the wine-shop, had made his way

out through the cut, and was quietly engaged in emptying the full

cartridge-boxes of the National Guardsmen who had been killed on the

slope of the redoubt, into his basket.

“What are you doing there?” asked Courfeyrac.

Gavroche raised his face:—

“I’m filling my basket, citizen.”

“Don’t you see the grape-shot?”

Gavroche replied:

“Well, it is raining. What then?”

Courfeyrac shouted:—“Come in!”

“Instanter,” said Gavroche.

And with a single bound he plunged into the street.

It will be remembered that Fannicot’s company had left behind it a

trail of bodies. Twenty corpses lay scattered here and there on the

pavement, through the whole length of the street. Twenty cartouches for

Gavroche meant a provision of cartridges for the barricade.

The smoke in the street was like a fog. Whoever has beheld a cloud

which has fallen into a mountain gorge between two peaked escarpments

can imagine this smoke rendered denser and thicker by two gloomy rows

of lofty houses. It rose gradually and was incessantly renewed; hence a

twilight which made even the broad daylight turn pale. The combatants

could hardly see each other from one end of the street to the other,

short as it was.

This obscurity, which had probably been desired and calculated on by

the commanders who were to direct the assault on the barricade, was

useful to Gavroche.

Beneath the folds of this veil of smoke, and thanks to his small size,

he could advance tolerably far into the street without being seen. He

rifled the first seven or eight cartridge-boxes without much danger.

He crawled flat on his belly, galloped on all fours, took his basket in

his teeth, twisted, glided, undulated, wound from one dead body to

another, and emptied the cartridge-box or cartouche as a monkey opens a

nut.

They did not dare to shout to him to return from the barricade, which

was quite near, for fear of attracting attention to him.

On one body, that of a corporal, he found a powder-flask.

“For thirst,” said he, putting it in his pocket.

By dint of advancing, he reached a point where the fog of the fusillade

became transparent. So that the sharpshooters of the line ranged on the

outlook behind their paving-stone dike and the sharpshooters of the

banlieue massed at the corner of the street suddenly pointed out to

each other something moving through the smoke.

At the moment when Gavroche was relieving a sergeant, who was lying

near a stone door-post, of his cartridges, a bullet struck the body.

“Fichtre!” ejaculated Gavroche. “They are killing my dead men for me.”

A second bullet struck a spark from the pavement beside him.—A third

overturned his basket.

Gavroche looked and saw that this came from the men of the banlieue.

He sprang to his feet, stood erect, with his hair flying in the wind,

his hands on his hips, his eyes fixed on the National Guardsmen who

were firing, and sang:

“On est laid à Nanterre,

C’est la faute à Voltaire;

Et bête à Palaiseau,

C’est la faute à Rousseau.”

“Men are ugly at Nanterre,

’Tis the fault of Voltaire;

And dull at Palaiseau,

’Tis the fault of Rousseau.”

Then he picked up his basket, replaced the cartridges which had fallen

from it, without missing a single one, and, advancing towards the

fusillade, set about plundering another cartridge-box. There a fourth

bullet missed him, again. Gavroche sang:

“Je ne suis pas notaire,

C’est la faute à Voltaire;

Je suis un petit oiseau,

C’est la faute à Rousseau.”

“I am not a notary,

’Tis the fault of Voltaire;

I’m a little bird,

’Tis the fault of Rousseau.”

A fifth bullet only succeeded in drawing from him a third couplet.

“Joie est mon caractère,

C’est la faute à Voltaire;

Misère est mon trousseau,

C’est la faute à Rousseau.”

“Joy is my character,

’Tis the fault of Voltaire;

Misery is my trousseau,

’Tis the fault of Rousseau.”

Thus it went on for some time.

It was a charming and terrible sight. Gavroche, though shot at, was

teasing the fusillade. He had the air of being greatly diverted. It was

the sparrow pecking at the sportsmen. To each discharge he retorted

with a couplet. They aimed at him constantly, and always missed him.

The National Guardsmen and the soldiers laughed as they took aim at

him. He lay down, sprang to his feet, hid in the corner of a doorway,

then made a bound, disappeared, reappeared, scampered away, returned,

replied to the grape-shot with his thumb at his nose, and, all the

while, went on pillaging the cartouches, emptying the cartridge-boxes,

and filling his basket. The insurgents, panting with anxiety, followed

him with their eyes. The barricade trembled; he sang. He was not a

child, he was not a man; he was a strange gamin-fairy. He might have

been called the invulnerable dwarf of the fray. The bullets flew after

him, he was more nimble than they. He played a fearful game of hide and

seek with death; every time that the flat-nosed face of the spectre

approached, the urchin administered to it a fillip.

One bullet, however, better aimed or more treacherous than the rest,

finally struck the will-o’-the-wisp of a child. Gavroche was seen to

stagger, then he sank to the earth. The whole barricade gave vent to a

cry; but there was something of Antæus in that pygmy; for the gamin to

touch the pavement is the same as for the giant to touch the earth;

Gavroche had fallen only to rise again; he remained in a sitting

posture, a long thread of blood streaked his face, he raised both arms

in the air, glanced in the direction whence the shot had come, and

began to sing:

“Je suis tombé par terre,

C’est la faute à Voltaire;

Le nez dans le ruisseau,

C’est la faute à . . . “

“I have fallen to the earth,

’Tis the fault of Voltaire;

With my nose in the gutter,

’Tis the fault of . . . ”

He did not finish. A second bullet from the same marksman stopped him

short. This time he fell face downward on the pavement, and moved no

more. This grand little soul had taken its flight.

CHAPTER XVI—HOW FROM A BROTHER ONE BECOMES A FATHER

At that same moment, in the garden of the Luxembourg,—for the gaze of

the drama must be everywhere present,—two children were holding each

other by the hand. One might have been seven years old, the other five.

The rain having soaked them, they were walking along the paths on the

sunny side; the elder was leading the younger; they were pale and

ragged; they had the air of wild birds. The smaller of them said: “I am

very hungry.”

The elder, who was already somewhat of a protector, was leading his

brother with his left hand and in his right he carried a small stick.

They were alone in the garden. The garden was deserted, the gates had

been closed by order of the police, on account of the insurrection. The

troops who had been bivouacking there had departed for the exigencies

of combat.

How did those children come there? Perhaps they had escaped from some

guard-house which stood ajar; perhaps there was in the vicinity, at the

Barrière d’Enfer; or on the Esplanade de l’Observatoire, or in the

neighboring carrefour, dominated by the pediment on which could be

read: \_Invenerunt parvulum pannis involutum\_, some mountebank’s booth

from which they had fled; perhaps they had, on the preceding evening,

escaped the eye of the inspectors of the garden at the hour of closing,

and had passed the night in some one of those sentry-boxes where people

read the papers? The fact is, they were stray lambs and they seemed

free. To be astray and to seem free is to be lost. These poor little

creatures were, in fact, lost.

These two children were the same over whom Gavroche had been put to

some trouble, as the reader will recollect. Children of the

Thénardiers, leased out to Magnon, attributed to M. Gillenormand, and

now leaves fallen from all these rootless branches, and swept over the

ground by the wind. Their clothing, which had been clean in Magnon’s

day, and which had served her as a prospectus with M. Gillenormand, had

been converted into rags.

Henceforth these beings belonged to the statistics as “Abandoned

children,” whom the police take note of, collect, mislay and find again

on the pavements of Paris.

It required the disturbance of a day like that to account for these

miserable little creatures being in that garden. If the superintendents

had caught sight of them, they would have driven such rags forth. Poor

little things do not enter public gardens; still, people should reflect

that, as children, they have a right to flowers.

These children were there, thanks to the locked gates. They were there

contrary to the regulations. They had slipped into the garden and there

they remained. Closed gates do not dismiss the inspectors, oversight is

supposed to continue, but it grows slack and reposes; and the

inspectors, moved by the public anxiety and more occupied with the

outside than the inside, no longer glanced into the garden, and had not

seen the two delinquents.

It had rained the night before, and even a little in the morning. But

in June, showers do not count for much. An hour after a storm, it can

hardly be seen that the beautiful blonde day has wept. The earth, in

summer, is as quickly dried as the cheek of a child. At that period of

the solstice, the light of full noonday is, so to speak, poignant. It

takes everything. It applies itself to the earth, and superposes itself

with a sort of suction. One would say that the sun was thirsty. A

shower is but a glass of water; a rainstorm is instantly drunk up. In

the morning everything was dripping, in the afternoon everything is

powdered over.

Nothing is so worthy of admiration as foliage washed by the rain and

wiped by the rays of sunlight; it is warm freshness. The gardens and

meadows, having water at their roots, and sun in their flowers, become

perfuming-pans of incense, and smoke with all their odors at once.

Everything smiles, sings and offers itself. One feels gently

intoxicated. The springtime is a provisional paradise, the sun helps

man to have patience.

There are beings who demand nothing further; mortals, who, having the

azure of heaven, say: “It is enough!” dreamers absorbed in the

wonderful, dipping into the idolatry of nature, indifferent to good and

evil, contemplators of cosmos and radiantly forgetful of man, who do

not understand how people can occupy themselves with the hunger of

these, and the thirst of those, with the nudity of the poor in winter,

with the lymphatic curvature of the little spinal column, with the

pallet, the attic, the dungeon, and the rags of shivering young girls,

when they can dream beneath the trees; peaceful and terrible spirits

they, and pitilessly satisfied. Strange to say, the infinite suffices

them. That great need of man, the finite, which admits of embrace, they

ignore. The finite which admits of progress and sublime toil, they do

not think about. The indefinite, which is born from the human and

divine combination of the infinite and the finite, escapes them.

Provided that they are face to face with immensity, they smile. Joy

never, ecstasy forever. Their life lies in surrendering their

personality in contemplation. The history of humanity is for them only

a detailed plan. All is not there; the true All remains without; what

is the use of busying oneself over that detail, man? Man suffers, that

is quite possible; but look at Aldebaran rising! The mother has no more

milk, the new-born babe is dying. I know nothing about that, but just

look at this wonderful rosette which a slice of wood-cells of the pine

presents under the microscope! Compare the most beautiful Mechlin lace

to that if you can! These thinkers forget to love. The zodiac thrives

with them to such a point that it prevents their seeing the weeping

child. God eclipses their souls. This is a family of minds which are,

at once, great and petty. Horace was one of them; so was Goethe. La

Fontaine perhaps; magnificent egoists of the infinite, tranquil

spectators of sorrow, who do not behold Nero if the weather be fair,

for whom the sun conceals the funeral pile, who would look on at an

execution by the guillotine in the search for an effect of light, who

hear neither the cry nor the sob, nor the death rattle, nor the alarm

peal, for whom everything is well, since there is a month of May, who,

so long as there are clouds of purple and gold above their heads,

declare themselves content, and who are determined to be happy until

the radiance of the stars and the songs of the birds are exhausted.

These are dark radiances. They have no suspicion that they are to be

pitied. Certainly they are so. He who does not weep does not see. They

are to be admired and pitied, as one would both pity and admire a being

at once night and day, without eyes beneath his lashes but with a star

on his brow.

The indifference of these thinkers, is, according to some, a superior

philosophy. That may be; but in this superiority there is some

infirmity. One may be immortal and yet limp: witness Vulcan. One may be

more than man and less than man. There is incomplete immensity in

nature. Who knows whether the sun is not a blind man?

But then, what? In whom can we trust? \_Solem quis dicere falsum

audeat?\_ Who shall dare to say that the sun is false? Thus certain

geniuses, themselves, certain Very-Lofty mortals, man-stars, may be

mistaken? That which is on high at the summit, at the crest, at the

zenith, that which sends down so much light on the earth, sees but

little, sees badly, sees not at all? Is not this a desperate state of

things? No. But what is there, then, above the sun? The god.

On the 6th of June, 1832, about eleven o’clock in the morning, the

Luxembourg, solitary and depopulated, was charming. The quincunxes and

flower-beds shed forth balm and dazzling beauty into the sunlight. The

branches, wild with the brilliant glow of midday, seemed endeavoring to

embrace. In the sycamores there was an uproar of linnets, sparrows

triumphed, woodpeckers climbed along the chestnut trees, administering

little pecks on the bark. The flower-beds accepted the legitimate

royalty of the lilies; the most august of perfumes is that which

emanates from whiteness. The peppery odor of the carnations was

perceptible. The old crows of Marie de Medici were amorous in the tall

trees. The sun gilded, empurpled, set fire to and lighted up the

tulips, which are nothing but all the varieties of flame made into

flowers. All around the banks of tulips the bees, the sparks of these

flame-flowers, hummed. All was grace and gayety, even the impending

rain; this relapse, by which the lilies of the valley and the

honeysuckles were destined to profit, had nothing disturbing about it;

the swallows indulged in the charming threat of flying low. He who was

there aspired to happiness; life smelled good; all nature exhaled

candor, help, assistance, paternity, caress, dawn. The thoughts which

fell from heaven were as sweet as the tiny hand of a baby when one

kisses it.

The statues under the trees, white and nude, had robes of shadow

pierced with light; these goddesses were all tattered with sunlight;

rays hung from them on all sides. Around the great fountain, the earth

was already dried up to the point of being burnt. There was sufficient

breeze to raise little insurrections of dust here and there. A few

yellow leaves, left over from the autumn, chased each other merrily,

and seemed to be playing tricks on each other.

This abundance of light had something indescribably reassuring about

it. Life, sap, heat, odors overflowed; one was conscious, beneath

creation, of the enormous size of the source; in all these breaths

permeated with love, in this interchange of reverberations and

reflections, in this marvellous expenditure of rays, in this infinite

outpouring of liquid gold, one felt the prodigality of the

inexhaustible; and, behind this splendor as behind a curtain of flame,

one caught a glimpse of God, that millionaire of stars.

Thanks to the sand, there was not a speck of mud; thanks to the rain,

there was not a grain of ashes. The clumps of blossoms had just been

bathed; every sort of velvet, satin, gold and varnish, which springs

from the earth in the form of flowers, was irreproachable. This

magnificence was cleanly. The grand silence of happy nature filled the

garden. A celestial silence that is compatible with a thousand sorts of

music, the cooing of nests, the buzzing of swarms, the flutterings of

the breeze. All the harmony of the season was complete in one gracious

whole; the entrances and exits of spring took place in proper order;

the lilacs ended; the jasmines began; some flowers were tardy, some

insects in advance of their time; the van-guard of the red June

butterflies fraternized with the rear-guard of the white butterflies of

May. The plantain trees were getting their new skins. The breeze

hollowed out undulations in the magnificent enormity of the

chestnut-trees. It was splendid. A veteran from the neighboring

barracks, who was gazing through the fence, said: “Here is the Spring

presenting arms and in full uniform.”

All nature was breakfasting; creation was at table; this was its hour;

the great blue cloth was spread in the sky, and the great green cloth

on earth; the sun lighted it all up brilliantly. God was serving the

universal repast. Each creature had his pasture or his mess. The

ring-dove found his hemp-seed, the chaffinch found his millet, the

goldfinch found chickweed, the red-breast found worms, the green finch

found flies, the fly found infusoriæ, the bee found flowers. They ate

each other somewhat, it is true, which is the misery of evil mixed with

good; but not a beast of them all had an empty stomach.

The two little abandoned creatures had arrived in the vicinity of the

grand fountain, and, rather bewildered by all this light, they tried to

hide themselves, the instinct of the poor and the weak in the presence

of even impersonal magnificence; and they kept behind the swans’ hutch.

Here and there, at intervals, when the wind blew, shouts, clamor, a

sort of tumultuous death rattle, which was the firing, and dull blows,

which were discharges of cannon, struck the ear confusedly. Smoke hung

over the roofs in the direction of the Halles. A bell, which had the

air of an appeal, was ringing in the distance.

These children did not appear to notice these noises. The little one

repeated from time to time: “I am hungry.”

Almost at the same instant with the children, another couple approached

the great basin. They consisted of a goodman, about fifty years of age,

who was leading by the hand a little fellow of six. No doubt, a father

and his son. The little man of six had a big brioche.

At that epoch, certain houses abutting on the river, in the Rues Madame

and d’Enfer, had keys to the Luxembourg garden, of which the lodgers

enjoyed the use when the gates were shut, a privilege which was

suppressed later on. This father and son came from one of these houses,

no doubt.

The two poor little creatures watched “that gentleman” approaching, and

hid themselves a little more thoroughly.

He was a bourgeois. The same person, perhaps, whom Marius had one day

heard, through his love fever, near the same grand basin, counselling

his son “to avoid excesses.” He had an affable and haughty air, and a

mouth which was always smiling, since it did not shut. This mechanical

smile, produced by too much jaw and too little skin, shows the teeth

rather than the soul. The child, with his brioche, which he had bitten

into but had not finished eating, seemed satiated. The child was

dressed as a National Guardsman, owing to the insurrection, and the

father had remained clad as a bourgeois out of prudence.

Father and son halted near the fountain where two swans were sporting.

This bourgeois appeared to cherish a special admiration for the swans.

He resembled them in this sense, that he walked like them.

For the moment, the swans were swimming, which is their principal

talent, and they were superb.

If the two poor little beings had listened and if they had been of an

age to understand, they might have gathered the words of this grave

man. The father was saying to his son:

“The sage lives content with little. Look at me, my son. I do not love

pomp. I am never seen in clothes decked with gold lace and stones; I

leave that false splendor to badly organized souls.”

Here the deep shouts which proceeded from the direction of the Halles

burst out with fresh force of bell and uproar.

“What is that?” inquired the child.

The father replied:

“It is the Saturnalia.”

All at once, he caught sight of the two little ragged boys behind the

green swan-hutch.

“There is the beginning,” said he.

And, after a pause, he added:

“Anarchy is entering this garden.”

In the meanwhile, his son took a bite of his brioche, spit it out, and,

suddenly burst out crying.

“What are you crying about?” demanded his father.

“I am not hungry any more,” said the child.

The father’s smile became more accentuated.

“One does not need to be hungry in order to eat a cake.”

“My cake tires me. It is stale.”

“Don’t you want any more of it?”

“No.”

The father pointed to the swans.

“Throw it to those palmipeds.”

The child hesitated. A person may not want any more of his cake; but

that is no reason for giving it away.

The father went on:

“Be humane. You must have compassion on animals.”

And, taking the cake from his son, he flung it into the basin.

The cake fell very near the edge.

The swans were far away, in the centre of the basin, and busy with some

prey. They had seen neither the bourgeois nor the brioche.

The bourgeois, feeling that the cake was in danger of being wasted, and

moved by this useless shipwreck, entered upon a telegraphic agitation,

which finally attracted the attention of the swans.

They perceived something floating, steered for the edge like ships, as

they are, and slowly directed their course toward the brioche, with the

stupid majesty which befits white creatures.

“The swans [\_cygnes\_] understand signs [\_signes\_],” said the bourgeois,

delighted to make a jest.

At that moment, the distant tumult of the city underwent another sudden

increase. This time it was sinister. There are some gusts of wind which

speak more distinctly than others. The one which was blowing at that

moment brought clearly defined drum-beats, clamors, platoon firing, and

the dismal replies of the tocsin and the cannon. This coincided with a

black cloud which suddenly veiled the sun.

The swans had not yet reached the brioche.

“Let us return home,” said the father, “they are attacking the

Tuileries.”

He grasped his son’s hand again. Then he continued:

“From the Tuileries to the Luxembourg, there is but the distance which

separates Royalty from the peerage; that is not far. Shots will soon

rain down.”

He glanced at the cloud.

“Perhaps it is rain itself that is about to shower down; the sky is

joining in; the younger branch is condemned. Let us return home

quickly.”

“I should like to see the swans eat the brioche,” said the child.

The father replied:

“That would be imprudent.”

And he led his little bourgeois away.

The son, regretting the swans, turned his head back toward the basin

until a corner of the quincunxes concealed it from him.

In the meanwhile, the two little waifs had approached the brioche at

the same time as the swans. It was floating on the water. The smaller

of them stared at the cake, the elder gazed after the retreating

bourgeois.

Father and son entered the labyrinth of walks which leads to the grand

flight of steps near the clump of trees on the side of the Rue Madame.

As soon as they had disappeared from view, the elder child hastily

flung himself flat on his stomach on the rounding curb of the basin,

and clinging to it with his left hand, and leaning over the water, on

the verge of falling in, he stretched out his right hand with his stick

towards the cake. The swans, perceiving the enemy, made haste, and in

so doing, they produced an effect of their breasts which was of service

to the little fisher; the water flowed back before the swans, and one

of these gentle concentric undulations softly floated the brioche

towards the child’s wand. Just as the swans came up, the stick touched

the cake. The child gave it a brisk rap, drew in the brioche,

frightened away the swans, seized the cake, and sprang to his feet. The

cake was wet; but they were hungry and thirsty. The elder broke the

cake into two portions, a large one and a small one, took the small one

for himself, gave the large one to his brother, and said to him:

“Ram that into your muzzle.”

CHAPTER XVII—MORTUUS PATER FILIUM MORITURUM EXPECTAT

Marius dashed out of the barricade, Combeferre followed him. But he was

too late. Gavroche was dead. Combeferre brought back the basket of

cartridges; Marius bore the child.

“Alas!” he thought, “that which the father had done for his father, he

was requiting to the son; only, Thénardier had brought back his father

alive; he was bringing back the child dead.”

When Marius re-entered the redoubt with Gavroche in his arms, his face,

like the child, was inundated with blood.

At the moment when he had stooped to lift Gavroche, a bullet had grazed

his head; he had not noticed it.

Courfeyrac untied his cravat and with it bandaged Marius’ brow.

They laid Gavroche on the same table with Mabeuf, and spread over the

two corpses the black shawl. There was enough of it for both the old

man and the child.

Combeferre distributed the cartridges from the basket which he had

brought in.

This gave each man fifteen rounds to fire.

Jean Valjean was still in the same place, motionless on his stone post.

When Combeferre offered him his fifteen cartridges, he shook his head.

“Here’s a rare eccentric,” said Combeferre in a low voice to Enjolras.

“He finds a way of not fighting in this barricade.”

“Which does not prevent him from defending it,” responded Enjolras.

“Heroism has its originals,” resumed Combeferre.

And Courfeyrac, who had overheard, added:

“He is another sort from Father Mabeuf.”

One thing which must be noted is, that the fire which was battering the

barricade hardly disturbed the interior. Those who have never traversed

the whirlwind of this sort of war can form no idea of the singular

moments of tranquillity mingled with these convulsions. Men go and

come, they talk, they jest, they lounge. Some one whom we know heard a

combatant say to him in the midst of the grape-shot: “We are here as at

a bachelor breakfast.” The redoubt of the Rue de la Chanvrerie, we

repeat, seemed very calm within. All mutations and all phases had been,

or were about to be, exhausted. The position, from critical, had become

menacing, and, from menacing, was probably about to become desperate.

In proportion as the situation grew gloomy, the glow of heroism

empurpled the barricade more and more. Enjolras, who was grave,

dominated it, in the attitude of a young Spartan sacrificing his naked

sword to the sombre genius, Epidotas.

Combeferre, wearing an apron, was dressing the wounds: Bossuet and

Feuilly were making cartridges with the powder-flask picked up by

Gavroche on the dead corporal, and Bossuet said to Feuilly: “We are

soon to take the diligence for another planet”; Courfeyrac was

disposing and arranging on some paving-stones which he had reserved for

himself near Enjolras, a complete arsenal, his sword-cane, his gun, two

holster pistols, and a cudgel, with the care of a young girl setting a

small dunkerque in order. Jean Valjean stared silently at the wall

opposite him. An artisan was fastening Mother Hucheloup’s big straw hat

on his head with a string, “for fear of sun-stroke,” as he said. The

young men from the Cougourde d’Aix were chatting merrily among

themselves, as though eager to speak patois for the last time. Joly,

who had taken Widow Hucheloup’s mirror from the wall, was examining his

tongue in it. Some combatants, having discovered a few crusts of rather

mouldy bread, in a drawer, were eagerly devouring them. Marius was

disturbed with regard to what his father was about to say to him.

CHAPTER XVIII—THE VULTURE BECOME PREY

We must insist upon one psychological fact peculiar to barricades.

Nothing which is characteristic of that surprising war of the streets

should be omitted.

Whatever may have been the singular inward tranquillity which we have

just mentioned, the barricade, for those who are inside it, remains,

nonetheless, a vision.

There is something of the apocalypse in civil war, all the mists of the

unknown are commingled with fierce flashes, revolutions are sphinxes,

and any one who has passed through a barricade thinks he has traversed

a dream.

The feelings to which one is subject in these places we have pointed

out in the case of Marius, and we shall see the consequences; they are

both more and less than life. On emerging from a barricade, one no

longer knows what one has seen there. One has been terrible, but one

knows it not. One has been surrounded with conflicting ideas which had

human faces; one’s head has been in the light of the future. There were

corpses lying prone there, and phantoms standing erect. The hours were

colossal and seemed hours of eternity. One has lived in death. Shadows

have passed by. What were they?

One has beheld hands on which there was blood; there was a deafening

horror; there was also a frightful silence; there were open mouths

which shouted, and other open mouths which held their peace; one was in

the midst of smoke, of night, perhaps. One fancied that one had touched

the sinister ooze of unknown depths; one stares at something red on

one’s finger nails. One no longer remembers anything.

Let us return to the Rue de la Chanvrerie.

All at once, between two discharges, the distant sound of a clock

striking the hour became audible.

“It is midday,” said Combeferre.

The twelve strokes had not finished striking when Enjolras sprang to

his feet, and from the summit of the barricade hurled this thundering

shout:

“Carry stones up into the houses; line the windowsills and the roofs

with them. Half the men to their guns, the other half to the

paving-stones. There is not a minute to be lost.”

A squad of sappers and miners, axe on shoulder, had just made their

appearance in battle array at the end of the street.

This could only be the head of a column; and of what column? The

attacking column, evidently; the sappers charged with the demolition of

the barricade must always precede the soldiers who are to scale it.

They were, evidently, on the brink of that moment which M.

Clermont-Tonnerre, in 1822, called “the tug of war.”

Enjolras’ order was executed with the correct haste which is peculiar

to ships and barricades, the only two scenes of combat where escape is

impossible. In less than a minute, two thirds of the stones which

Enjolras had had piled up at the door of Corinthe had been carried up

to the first floor and the attic, and before a second minute had

elapsed, these stones, artistically set one upon the other, walled up

the sash-window on the first floor and the windows in the roof to half

their height. A few loop-holes carefully planned by Feuilly, the

principal architect, allowed of the passage of the gun-barrels. This

armament of the windows could be effected all the more easily since the

firing of grape-shot had ceased. The two cannons were now discharging

ball against the centre of the barrier in order to make a hole there,

and, if possible, a breach for the assault.

When the stones destined to the final defence were in place, Enjolras

had the bottles which he had set under the table where Mabeuf lay,

carried to the first floor.

“Who is to drink that?” Bossuet asked him.

“They,” replied Enjolras.

Then they barricaded the window below, and held in readiness the iron

cross-bars which served to secure the door of the wine-shop at night.

The fortress was complete. The barricade was the rampart, the wine-shop

was the dungeon. With the stones which remained they stopped up the

outlet.

As the defenders of a barricade are always obliged to be sparing of

their ammunition, and as the assailants know this, the assailants

combine their arrangements with a sort of irritating leisure, expose

themselves to fire prematurely, though in appearance more than in

reality, and take their ease. The preparations for attack are always

made with a certain methodical deliberation; after which, the lightning

strikes.

This deliberation permitted Enjolras to take a review of everything and

to perfect everything. He felt that, since such men were to die, their

death ought to be a masterpiece.

He said to Marius: “We are the two leaders. I will give the last orders

inside. Do you remain outside and observe.”

Marius posted himself on the lookout upon the crest of the barricade.

Enjolras had the door of the kitchen, which was the ambulance, as the

reader will remember, nailed up.

“No splashing of the wounded,” he said.

He issued his final orders in the tap-room in a curt, but profoundly

tranquil tone; Feuilly listened and replied in the name of all.

“On the first floor, hold your axes in readiness to cut the staircase.

Have you them?”

“Yes,” said Feuilly.

“How many?”

“Two axes and a pole-axe.”

“That is good. There are now twenty-six combatants of us on foot. How

many guns are there?”

“Thirty-four.”

“Eight too many. Keep those eight guns loaded like the rest and at

hand. Swords and pistols in your belts. Twenty men to the barricade.

Six ambushed in the attic windows, and at the window on the first floor

to fire on the assailants through the loop-holes in the stones. Let not

a single worker remain inactive here. Presently, when the drum beats

the assault, let the twenty below stairs rush to the barricade. The

first to arrive will have the best places.”

These arrangements made, he turned to Javert and said:

“I am not forgetting you.”

And, laying a pistol on the table, he added:

“The last man to leave this room will smash the skull of this spy.”

“Here?” inquired a voice.

“No, let us not mix their corpses with our own. The little barricade of

the Mondétour lane can be scaled. It is only four feet high. The man is

well pinioned. He shall be taken thither and put to death.”

There was some one who was more impassive at that moment than Enjolras,

it was Javert. Here Jean Valjean made his appearance.

He had been lost among the group of insurgents. He stepped forth and

said to Enjolras:

“You are the commander?”

“Yes.”

“You thanked me a while ago.”

“In the name of the Republic. The barricade has two saviors, Marius

Pontmercy and yourself.”

“Do you think that I deserve a recompense?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, I request one.”

“What is it?”

“That I may blow that man’s brains out.”

Javert raised his head, saw Jean Valjean, made an almost imperceptible

movement, and said:

“That is just.”

As for Enjolras, he had begun to re-load his rifle; he cut his eyes

about him:

“No objections.”

And he turned to Jean Valjean:

“Take the spy.”

Jean Valjean did, in fact, take possession of Javert, by seating

himself on the end of the table. He seized the pistol, and a faint

click announced that he had cocked it.

Almost at the same moment, a blast of trumpets became audible.

“Take care!” shouted Marius from the top of the barricade.

Javert began to laugh with that noiseless laugh which was peculiar to

him, and gazing intently at the insurgents, he said to them:

“You are in no better case than I am.”

“All out!” shouted Enjolras.

The insurgents poured out tumultuously, and, as they went, received in

the back,—may we be permitted the expression,—this sally of Javert’s:

“We shall meet again shortly!”

CHAPTER XIX—JEAN VALJEAN TAKES HIS REVENGE

When Jean Valjean was left alone with Javert, he untied the rope which

fastened the prisoner across the middle of the body, and the knot of

which was under the table. After this he made him a sign to rise.

Javert obeyed with that indefinable smile in which the supremacy of

enchained authority is condensed.

Jean Valjean took Javert by the martingale, as one would take a beast

of burden by the breast-band, and, dragging the latter after him,

emerged from the wine-shop slowly, because Javert, with his impeded

limbs, could take only very short steps.

Jean Valjean had the pistol in his hand.

In this manner they crossed the inner trapezium of the barricade. The

insurgents, all intent on the attack, which was imminent, had their

backs turned to these two.

Marius alone, stationed on one side, at the extreme left of the

barricade, saw them pass. This group of victim and executioner was

illuminated by the sepulchral light which he bore in his own soul.

Jean Valjean with some difficulty, but without relaxing his hold for a

single instant, made Javert, pinioned as he was, scale the little

entrenchment in the Mondétour lane.

When they had crossed this barrier, they found themselves alone in the

lane. No one saw them. Among the heap they could distinguish a livid

face, streaming hair, a pierced hand and the half nude breast of a

woman. It was Éponine. The corner of the houses hid them from the

insurgents. The corpses carried away from the barricade formed a

terrible pile a few paces distant.

Javert gazed askance at this body, and, profoundly calm, said in a low

tone:

“It strikes me that I know that girl.”

Then he turned to Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean thrust the pistol under his arm and fixed on Javert a look

which it required no words to interpret: “Javert, it is I.”

Javert replied:

“Take your revenge.”

Jean Valjean drew from his pocket a knife, and opened it.

“A clasp-knife!” exclaimed Javert, “you are right. That suits you

better.”

Jean Valjean cut the martingale which Javert had about his neck, then

he cut the cords on his wrists, then, stooping down, he cut the cord on

his feet; and, straightening himself up, he said to him:

“You are free.”

Javert was not easily astonished. Still, master of himself though he

was, he could not repress a start. He remained open-mouthed and

motionless.

Jean Valjean continued:

“I do not think that I shall escape from this place. But if, by chance,

I do, I live, under the name of Fauchelevent, in the Rue de l’Homme

Armé, No. 7.”

Javert snarled like a tiger, which made him half open one corner of his

mouth, and he muttered between his teeth:

“Have a care.”

“Go,” said Jean Valjean.

Javert began again:

“Thou saidst Fauchelevent, Rue de l’Homme Armé?”

“Number 7.”

Javert repeated in a low voice:—“Number 7.”

He buttoned up his coat once more, resumed the military stiffness

between his shoulders, made a half turn, folded his arms and,

supporting his chin on one of his hands, he set out in the direction of

the Halles. Jean Valjean followed him with his eyes:

A few minutes later, Javert turned round and shouted to Jean Valjean:

“You annoy me. Kill me, rather.”

Javert himself did not notice that he no longer addressed Jean Valjean

as “thou.”

“Be off with you,” said Jean Valjean.

Javert retreated slowly. A moment later he turned the corner of the Rue

des Prêcheurs.

When Javert had disappeared, Jean Valjean fired his pistol in the air.

Then he returned to the barricade and said:

“It is done.”

In the meanwhile, this is what had taken place.

Marius, more intent on the outside than on the interior, had not, up to

that time, taken a good look at the pinioned spy in the dark background

of the tap-room.

When he beheld him in broad daylight, striding over the barricade in

order to proceed to his death, he recognized him. Something suddenly

recurred to his mind. He recalled the inspector of the Rue de Pontoise,

and the two pistols which the latter had handed to him and which he,

Marius, had used in this very barricade, and not only did he recall his

face, but his name as well.

This recollection was misty and troubled, however, like all his ideas.

It was not an affirmation that he made, but a question which he put to

himself:

“Is not that the inspector of police who told me that his name was

Javert?”

Perhaps there was still time to intervene in behalf of that man. But,

in the first place, he must know whether this was Javert.

Marius called to Enjolras, who had just stationed himself at the other

extremity of the barricade:

“Enjolras!”

“What?”

“What is the name of yonder man?”

“What man?”

“The police agent. Do you know his name?”

“Of course. He told us.”

“What is it?”

“Javert.”

Marius sprang to his feet.

At that moment, they heard the report of the pistol.

Jean Valjean reappeared and cried: “It is done.”

A gloomy chill traversed Marius’ heart.

CHAPTER XX—THE DEAD ARE IN THE RIGHT AND THE LIVING ARE NOT IN THE

WRONG

The death agony of the barricade was about to begin.

Everything contributed to its tragic majesty at that supreme moment; a

thousand mysterious crashes in the air, the breath of armed masses set

in movement in the streets which were not visible, the intermittent

gallop of cavalry, the heavy shock of artillery on the march, the

firing by squads, and the cannonades crossing each other in the

labyrinth of Paris, the smokes of battle mounting all gilded above the

roofs, indescribable and vaguely terrible cries, lightnings of menace

everywhere, the tocsin of Saint-Merry, which now had the accents of a

sob, the mildness of the weather, the splendor of the sky filled with

sun and clouds, the beauty of the day, and the alarming silence of the

houses.

For, since the preceding evening, the two rows of houses in the Rue de

la Chanvrerie had become two walls; ferocious walls, doors closed,

windows closed, shutters closed.

In those days, so different from those in which we live, when the hour

was come, when the people wished to put an end to a situation, which

had lasted too long, with a charter granted or with a legal country,

when universal wrath was diffused in the atmosphere, when the city

consented to the tearing up of the pavements, when insurrection made

the bourgeoisie smile by whispering its password in its ear, then the

inhabitant, thoroughly penetrated with the revolt, so to speak, was the

auxiliary of the combatant, and the house fraternized with the

improvised fortress which rested on it. When the situation was not

ripe, when the insurrection was not decidedly admitted, when the masses

disowned the movement, all was over with the combatants, the city was

changed into a desert around the revolt, souls grew chilled, refuges

were nailed up, and the street turned into a defile to help the army to

take the barricade.

A people cannot be forced, through surprise, to walk more quickly than

it chooses. Woe to whomsoever tries to force its hand! A people does

not let itself go at random. Then it abandons the insurrection to

itself. The insurgents become noxious, infected with the plague. A

house is an escarpment, a door is a refusal, a façade is a wall. This

wall hears, sees and will not. It might open and save you. No. This

wall is a judge. It gazes at you and condemns you. What dismal things

are closed houses. They seem dead, they are living. Life which is, as

it were, suspended there, persists there. No one has gone out of them

for four and twenty hours, but no one is missing from them. In the

interior of that rock, people go and come, go to bed and rise again;

they are a family party there; there they eat and drink; they are

afraid, a terrible thing! Fear excuses this fearful lack of

hospitality; terror is mixed with it, an extenuating circumstance.

Sometimes, even, and this has been actually seen, fear turns to

passion; fright may change into fury, as prudence does into rage; hence

this wise saying: “The enraged moderates.” There are outbursts of

supreme terror, whence springs wrath like a mournful smoke.—“What do

these people want? What have they come there to do? Let them get out of

the scrape. So much the worse for them. It is their fault. They are

only getting what they deserve. It does not concern us. Here is our

poor street all riddled with balls. They are a pack of rascals. Above

all things, don’t open the door.”—And the house assumes the air of a

tomb. The insurgent is in the death-throes in front of that house; he

sees the grape-shot and naked swords drawing near; if he cries, he

knows that they are listening to him, and that no one will come; there

stand walls which might protect him, there are men who might save him;

and these walls have ears of flesh, and these men have bowels of stone.

Whom shall he reproach?

No one and every one.

The incomplete times in which we live.

It is always at its own risk and peril that Utopia is converted into

revolution, and from philosophical protest becomes an armed protest,

and from Minerva turns to Pallas.

The Utopia which grows impatient and becomes revolt knows what awaits

it; it almost always comes too soon. Then it becomes resigned, and

stoically accepts catastrophe in lieu of triumph. It serves those who

deny it without complaint, even excusing them, and even disculpates

them, and its magnanimity consists in consenting to abandonment. It is

indomitable in the face of obstacles and gentle towards ingratitude.

Is this ingratitude, however?

Yes, from the point of view of the human race.

No, from the point of view of the individual.

Progress is man’s mode of existence. The general life of the human race

is called Progress, the collective stride of the human race is called

Progress. Progress advances; it makes the great human and terrestrial

journey towards the celestial and the divine; it has its halting places

where it rallies the laggard troop, it has its stations where it

meditates, in the presence of some splendid Canaan suddenly unveiled on

its horizon, it has its nights when it sleeps; and it is one of the

poignant anxieties of the thinker that he sees the shadow resting on

the human soul, and that he gropes in darkness without being able to

awaken that slumbering Progress.

“God is dead, perhaps,” said Gerard de Nerval one day to the writer of

these lines, confounding progress with God, and taking the interruption

of movement for the death of Being.

He who despairs is in the wrong. Progress infallibly awakes, and, in

short, we may say that it marches on, even when it is asleep, for it

has increased in size. When we behold it erect once more, we find it

taller. To be always peaceful does not depend on progress any more than

it does on the stream; erect no barriers, cast in no boulders;

obstacles make water froth and humanity boil. Hence arise troubles; but

after these troubles, we recognize the fact that ground has been

gained. Until order, which is nothing else than universal peace, has

been established, until harmony and unity reign, progress will have

revolutions as its halting-places.

What, then, is progress? We have just enunciated it; the permanent life

of the peoples.

Now, it sometimes happens, that the momentary life of individuals

offers resistance to the eternal life of the human race.

Let us admit without bitterness, that the individual has his distinct

interests, and can, without forfeiture, stipulate for his interest, and

defend it; the present has its pardonable dose of egotism; momentary

life has its rights, and is not bound to sacrifice itself constantly to

the future. The generation which is passing in its turn over the earth,

is not forced to abridge it for the sake of the generations, its equal,

after all, who will have their turn later on.—“I exist,” murmurs that

some one whose name is All. “I am young and in love, I am old and I

wish to repose, I am the father of a family, I toil, I prosper, I am

successful in business, I have houses to lease, I have money in the

government funds, I am happy, I have a wife and children, I have all

this, I desire to live, leave me in peace.”—Hence, at certain hours, a

profound cold broods over the magnanimous vanguard of the human race.

Utopia, moreover, we must admit, quits its radiant sphere when it makes

war. It, the truth of to-morrow, borrows its mode of procedure, battle,

from the lie of yesterday. It, the future, behaves like the past. It,

pure idea, becomes a deed of violence. It complicates its heroism with

a violence for which it is just that it should be held to answer; a

violence of occasion and expedient, contrary to principle, and for

which it is fatally punished. The Utopia, insurrection, fights with the

old military code in its fist; it shoots spies, it executes traitors;

it suppresses living beings and flings them into unknown darkness. It

makes use of death, a serious matter. It seems as though Utopia had no

longer any faith in radiance, its irresistible and incorruptible force.

It strikes with the sword. Now, no sword is simple. Every blade has two

edges; he who wounds with the one is wounded with the other.

Having made this reservation, and made it with all severity, it is

impossible for us not to admire, whether they succeed or not, those the

glorious combatants of the future, the confessors of Utopia. Even when

they miscarry, they are worthy of veneration; and it is, perhaps, in

failure, that they possess the most majesty. Victory, when it is in

accord with progress, merits the applause of the people; but a heroic

defeat merits their tender compassion. The one is magnificent, the

other sublime. For our own part, we prefer martyrdom to success. John

Brown is greater than Washington, and Pisacane is greater than

Garibaldi.

It certainly is necessary that some one should take the part of the

vanquished.

We are unjust towards these great men who attempt the future, when they

fail.

Revolutionists are accused of sowing fear abroad. Every barricade seems

a crime. Their theories are incriminated, their aim suspected, their

ulterior motive is feared, their conscience denounced. They are

reproached with raising, erecting, and heaping up, against the reigning

social state, a mass of miseries, of griefs, of iniquities, of wrongs,

of despairs, and of tearing from the lowest depths blocks of shadow in

order therein to embattle themselves and to combat. People shout to

them: “You are tearing up the pavements of hell!” They might reply:

“That is because our barricade is made of good intentions.”

The best thing, assuredly, is the pacific solution. In short, let us

agree that when we behold the pavement, we think of the bear, and it is

a good will which renders society uneasy. But it depends on society to

save itself, it is to its own good will that we make our appeal. No

violent remedy is necessary. To study evil amiably, to prove its

existence, then to cure it. It is to this that we invite it.

However that may be, even when fallen, above all when fallen, these

men, who at every point of the universe, with their eyes fixed on

France, are striving for the grand work with the inflexible logic of

the ideal, are august; they give their life a free offering to

progress; they accomplish the will of Providence; they perform a

religious act. At the appointed hour, with as much disinterestedness as

an actor who answers to his cue, in obedience to the divine

stage-manager, they enter the tomb. And this hopeless combat, this

stoical disappearance they accept in order to bring about the supreme

and universal consequences, the magnificent and irresistibly human

movement begun on the 14th of July, 1789; these soldiers are priests.

The French revolution is an act of God.

Moreover, there are, and it is proper to add this distinction to the

distinctions already pointed out in another chapter,—there are accepted

revolutions, revolutions which are called revolutions; there are

refused revolutions, which are called riots.

An insurrection which breaks out, is an idea which is passing its

examination before the people. If the people lets fall a black ball,

the idea is dried fruit; the insurrection is a mere skirmish.

Waging war at every summons and every time that Utopia desires it, is

not the thing for the peoples. Nations have not always and at every

hour the temperament of heroes and martyrs.

They are positive. \_A priori\_, insurrection is repugnant to them, in

the first place, because it often results in a catastrophe, in the

second place, because it always has an abstraction as its point of

departure.

Because, and this is a noble thing, it is always for the ideal, and for

the ideal alone, that those who sacrifice themselves do thus sacrifice

themselves. An insurrection is an enthusiasm. Enthusiasm may wax wroth;

hence the appeal to arms. But every insurrection, which aims at a

government or a régime, aims higher. Thus, for instance, and we insist

upon it, what the chiefs of the insurrection of 1832, and, in

particular, the young enthusiasts of the Rue de la Chanvrerie were

combating, was not precisely Louis Philippe. The majority of them, when

talking freely, did justice to this king who stood midway between

monarchy and revolution; no one hated him. But they attacked the

younger branch of the divine right in Louis Philippe as they had

attacked its elder branch in Charles X.; and that which they wished to

overturn in overturning royalty in France, was, as we have explained,

the usurpation of man over man, and of privilege over right in the

entire universe. Paris without a king has as result the world without

despots. This is the manner in which they reasoned. Their aim was

distant no doubt, vague perhaps, and it retreated in the face of their

efforts; but it was great.

Thus it is. And we sacrifice ourselves for these visions, which are

almost always illusions for the sacrificed, but illusions with which,

after all, the whole of human certainty is mingled. We throw ourselves

into these tragic affairs and become intoxicated with that which we are

about to do. Who knows? We may succeed. We are few in number, we have a

whole army arrayed against us; but we are defending right, the natural

law, the sovereignty of each one over himself from which no abdication

is possible, justice and truth, and in case of need, we die like the

three hundred Spartans. We do not think of Don Quixote but of Leonidas.

And we march straight before us, and once pledged, we do not draw back,

and we rush onwards with head held low, cherishing as our hope an

unprecedented victory, revolution completed, progress set free again,

the aggrandizement of the human race, universal deliverance; and in the

event of the worst, Thermopylæ.

These passages of arms for the sake of progress often suffer shipwreck,

and we have just explained why. The crowd is restive in the presence of

the impulses of paladins. Heavy masses, the multitudes which are

fragile because of their very weight, fear adventures; and there is a

touch of adventure in the ideal.

Moreover, and we must not forget this, interests which are not very

friendly to the ideal and the sentimental are in the way. Sometimes the

stomach paralyzes the heart.

The grandeur and beauty of France lies in this, that she takes less

from the stomach than other nations: she more easily knots the rope

about her loins. She is the first awake, the last asleep. She marches

forwards. She is a seeker.

This arises from the fact that she is an artist.

The ideal is nothing but the culminating point of logic, the same as

the beautiful is nothing but the summit of the true. Artistic peoples

are also consistent peoples. To love beauty is to see the light. That

is why the torch of Europe, that is to say of civilization, was first

borne by Greece, who passed it on to Italy, who handed it on to France.

Divine, illuminating nations of scouts! \_Vitælampada tradunt\_.

It is an admirable thing that the poetry of a people is the element of

its progress. The amount of civilization is measured by the quantity of

imagination. Only, a civilizing people should remain a manly people.

Corinth, yes; Sybaris, no. Whoever becomes effeminate makes himself a

bastard. He must be neither a dilettante nor a virtuoso: but he must be

artistic. In the matter of civilization, he must not refine, but he

must sublime. On this condition, one gives to the human race the

pattern of the ideal.

The modern ideal has its type in art, and its means is science. It is

through science that it will realize that august vision of the poets,

the socially beautiful. Eden will be reconstructed by A+B. At the point

which civilization has now reached, the exact is a necessary element of

the splendid, and the artistic sentiment is not only served, but

completed by the scientific organ; dreams must be calculated. Art,

which is the conqueror, should have for support science, which is the

walker; the solidity of the creature which is ridden is of importance.

The modern spirit is the genius of Greece with the genius of India as

its vehicle; Alexander on the elephant.

Races which are petrified in dogma or demoralized by lucre are unfit to

guide civilization. Genuflection before the idol or before money wastes

away the muscles which walk and the will which advances. Hieratic or

mercantile absorption lessens a people’s power of radiance, lowers its

horizon by lowering its level, and deprives it of that intelligence, at

once both human and divine of the universal goal, which makes

missionaries of nations. Babylon has no ideal; Carthage has no ideal.

Athens and Rome have and keep, throughout all the nocturnal darkness of

the centuries, halos of civilization.

France is in the same quality of race as Greece and Italy. She is

Athenian in the matter of beauty, and Roman in her greatness. Moreover,

she is good. She gives herself. Oftener than is the case with other

races, is she in the humor for self-devotion and sacrifice. Only, this

humor seizes upon her, and again abandons her. And therein lies the

great peril for those who run when she desires only to walk, or who

walk on when she desires to halt. France has her relapses into

materialism, and, at certain instants, the ideas which obstruct that

sublime brain have no longer anything which recalls French greatness

and are of the dimensions of a Missouri or a South Carolina. What is to

be done in such a case? The giantess plays at being a dwarf; immense

France has her freaks of pettiness. That is all.

To this there is nothing to say. Peoples, like planets, possess the

right to an eclipse. And all is well, provided that the light returns

and that the eclipse does not degenerate into night. Dawn and

resurrection are synonymous. The reappearance of the light is identical

with the persistence of the \_I\_.

Let us state these facts calmly. Death on the barricade or the tomb in

exile, is an acceptable occasion for devotion. The real name of

devotion is disinterestedness. Let the abandoned allow themselves to be

abandoned, let the exiled allow themselves to be exiled, and let us

confine ourselves to entreating great nations not to retreat too far,

when they do retreat. One must not push too far in descent under

pretext of a return to reason.

Matter exists, the minute exists, interest exists, the stomach exists;

but the stomach must not be the sole wisdom. The life of the moment has

its rights, we admit, but permanent life has its rights also. Alas! the

fact that one is mounted does not preclude a fall. This can be seen in

history more frequently than is desirable: A nation is great, it tastes

the ideal, then it bites the mire, and finds it good; and if it be

asked how it happens that it has abandoned Socrates for Falstaff, it

replies: “Because I love statesmen.”

One word more before returning to our subject, the conflict.

A battle like the one which we are engaged in describing is nothing

else than a convulsion towards the ideal. Progress trammelled is

sickly, and is subject to these tragic epilepsies. With that malady of

progress, civil war, we have been obliged to come in contact in our

passage. This is one of the fatal phases, at once act and entr’acte of

that drama whose pivot is a social condemnation, and whose veritable

title is \_Progress\_.

Progress!

The cry to which we frequently give utterance is our whole thought;

and, at the point of this drama which we have now reached, the idea

which it contains having still more than one trial to undergo, it is,

perhaps, permitted to us, if not to lift the veil from it, to at least

allow its light to shine through.

The book which the reader has under his eye at this moment is, from one

end to the other, as a whole and in detail, whatever may be its

intermittences, exceptions and faults, the march from evil to good,

from the unjust to the just, from night to day, from appetite to

conscience, from rottenness to life, from hell to heaven, from

nothingness to God. Point of departure: matter; point of arrival: the

soul. The hydra at the beginning, the angel at the end.

CHAPTER XXI—THE HEROES

All at once, the drum beat the charge.

The attack was a hurricane. On the evening before, in the darkness, the

barricade had been approached silently, as by a boa. Now, in broad

daylight, in that widening street, surprise was decidedly impossible,

rude force had, moreover, been unmasked, the cannon had begun the roar,

the army hurled itself on the barricade. Fury now became skill. A

powerful detachment of infantry of the line, broken at regular

intervals, by the National Guard and the Municipal Guard on foot, and

supported by serried masses which could be heard though not seen,

debauched into the street at a run, with drums beating, trumpets

braying, bayonets levelled, the sappers at their head, and,

imperturbable under the projectiles, charged straight for the barricade

with the weight of a brazen beam against a wall.

The wall held firm.

The insurgents fired impetuously. The barricade once scaled had a mane

of lightning flashes. The assault was so furious, that for one moment,

it was inundated with assailants; but it shook off the soldiers as the

lion shakes off the dogs, and it was only covered with besiegers as the

cliff is covered with foam, to reappear, a moment later, beetling,

black and formidable.

The column, forced to retreat, remained massed in the street,

unprotected but terrible, and replied to the redoubt with a terrible

discharge of musketry. Any one who has seen fireworks will recall the

sheaf formed of interlacing lightnings which is called a bouquet. Let

the reader picture to himself this bouquet, no longer vertical but

horizontal, bearing a bullet, buckshot or a biscaïen at the tip of each

one of its jets of flame, and picking off dead men one after another

from its clusters of lightning. The barricade was underneath it.

On both sides, the resolution was equal. The bravery exhibited there

was almost barbarous and was complicated with a sort of heroic ferocity

which began by the sacrifice of self.

This was the epoch when a National Guardsman fought like a Zouave. The

troop wished to make an end of it, insurrection was desirous of

fighting. The acceptance of the death agony in the flower of youth and

in the flush of health turns intrepidity into frenzy. In this fray,

each one underwent the broadening growth of the death hour. The street

was strewn with corpses.

The barricade had Enjolras at one of its extremities and Marius at the

other. Enjolras, who carried the whole barricade in his head, reserved

and sheltered himself; three soldiers fell, one after the other, under

his embrasure, without having even seen him; Marius fought unprotected.

He made himself a target. He stood with more than half his body above

the breastworks. There is no more violent prodigal than the avaricious

man who takes the bit in his teeth; there is no man more terrible in

action than a dreamer. Marius was formidable and pensive. In battle he

was as in a dream. One would have pronounced him a phantom engaged in

firing a gun.

The insurgents’ cartridges were giving out; but not their sarcasms. In

this whirlwind of the sepulchre in which they stood, they laughed.

Courfeyrac was bareheaded.

“What have you done with your hat?” Bossuet asked him.

Courfeyrac replied:

“They have finally taken it away from me with cannon-balls.”

Or they uttered haughty comments.

“Can any one understand,” exclaimed Feuilly bitterly, “those men,—[and

he cited names, well-known names, even celebrated names, some belonging

to the old army]—who had promised to join us, and taken an oath to aid

us, and who had pledged their honor to it, and who are our generals,

and who abandon us!”

And Combeferre restricted himself to replying with a grave smile.

“There are people who observe the rules of honor as one observes the

stars, from a great distance.”

The interior of the barricade was so strewn with torn cartridges that

one would have said that there had been a snowstorm.

The assailants had numbers in their favor; the insurgents had position.

They were at the top of a wall, and they thundered point-blank upon the

soldiers tripping over the dead and wounded and entangled in the

escarpment. This barricade, constructed as it was and admirably

buttressed, was really one of those situations where a handful of men

hold a legion in check. Nevertheless, the attacking column, constantly

recruited and enlarged under the shower of bullets, drew inexorably

nearer, and now, little by little, step by step, but surely, the army

closed in around the barricade as the vice grasps the wine-press.

One assault followed another. The horror of the situation kept

increasing.

Then there burst forth on that heap of paving-stones, in that Rue de la

Chanvrerie, a battle worthy of a wall of Troy. These haggard, ragged,

exhausted men, who had had nothing to eat for four and twenty hours,

who had not slept, who had but a few more rounds to fire, who were

fumbling in their pockets which had been emptied of cartridges, nearly

all of whom were wounded, with head or arm bandaged with black and

blood-stained linen, with holes in their clothes from which the blood

trickled, and who were hardly armed with poor guns and notched swords,

became Titans. The barricade was ten times attacked, approached,

assailed, scaled, and never captured.

In order to form an idea of this struggle, it is necessary to imagine

fire set to a throng of terrible courages, and then to gaze at the

conflagration. It was not a combat, it was the interior of a furnace;

there mouths breathed the flame; there countenances were extraordinary.

The human form seemed impossible there, the combatants flamed forth

there, and it was formidable to behold the going and coming in that red

glow of those salamanders of the fray.

The successive and simultaneous scenes of this grand slaughter we

renounce all attempts at depicting. The epic alone has the right to

fill twelve thousand verses with a battle.

One would have pronounced this that hell of Brahmanism, the most

redoubtable of the seventeen abysses, which the Veda calls the Forest

of Swords.

They fought hand to hand, foot to foot, with pistol shots, with blows

of the sword, with their fists, at a distance, close at hand, from

above, from below, from everywhere, from the roofs of the houses, from

the windows of the wine-shop, from the cellar windows, whither some had

crawled. They were one against sixty.

The façade of Corinthe, half demolished, was hideous. The window,

tattooed with grape-shot, had lost glass and frame and was nothing now

but a shapeless hole, tumultuously blocked with paving-stones.

Bossuet was killed; Feuilly was killed; Courfeyrac was killed;

Combeferre, transfixed by three blows from a bayonet in the breast at

the moment when he was lifting up a wounded soldier, had only time to

cast a glance to heaven when he expired.

Marius, still fighting, was so riddled with wounds, particularly in the

head, that his countenance disappeared beneath the blood, and one would

have said that his face was covered with a red kerchief.

Enjolras alone was not struck. When he had no longer any weapon, he

reached out his hands to right and left and an insurgent thrust some

arm or other into his fist. All he had left was the stumps of four

swords; one more than François I. at Marignan. Homer says: “Diomedes

cuts the throat of Axylus, son of Teuthranis, who dwelt in happy

Arisba; Euryalus, son of Mecistæus, exterminates Dresos and Opheltios,

Esepius, and that Pedasus whom the naiad Abarbarea bore to the

blameless Bucolion; Ulysses overthrows Pidytes of Percosius;

Antilochus, Ablerus; Polypætes, Astyalus; Polydamas, Otos, of Cyllene;

and Teucer, Aretaon. Meganthios dies under the blows of Euripylus’

pike. Agamemnon, king of the heroes, flings to earth Elatos, born in

the rocky city which is laved by the sounding river Satnoïs.” In our

old poems of exploits, Esplandian attacks the giant marquis Swantibore

with a cobbler’s shoulder-stick of fire, and the latter defends himself

by stoning the hero with towers which he plucks up by the roots. Our

ancient mural frescoes show us the two Dukes of Bretagne and Bourbon,

armed, emblazoned and crested in war-like guise, on horseback and

approaching each other, their battle-axes in hand, masked with iron,

gloved with iron, booted with iron, the one caparisoned in ermine, the

other draped in azure: Bretagne with his lion between the two horns of

his crown, Bourbon helmeted with a monster fleur de lys on his visor.

But, in order to be superb, it is not necessary to wear, like Yvon, the

ducal morion, to have in the fist, like Esplandian, a living flame, or,

like Phyles, father of Polydamas, to have brought back from Ephyra a

good suit of mail, a present from the king of men, Euphetes; it

suffices to give one’s life for a conviction or a loyalty. This

ingenuous little soldier, yesterday a peasant of Bauce or Limousin, who

prowls with his clasp-knife by his side, around the children’s nurses

in the Luxembourg garden, this pale young student bent over a piece of

anatomy or a book, a blond youth who shaves his beard with

scissors,—take both of them, breathe upon them with a breath of duty,

place them face to face in the Carrefour Boucherat or in the blind

alley Planche-Mibray, and let the one fight for his flag, and the other

for his ideal, and let both of them imagine that they are fighting for

their country; the struggle will be colossal; and the shadow which this

raw recruit and this sawbones in conflict will produce in that grand

epic field where humanity is striving, will equal the shadow cast by

Megaryon, King of Lycia, tiger-filled, crushing in his embrace the

immense body of Ajax, equal to the gods.

CHAPTER XXII—FOOT TO FOOT

When there were no longer any of the leaders left alive, except

Enjolras and Marius at the two extremities of the barricade, the

centre, which had so long sustained Courfeyrac, Joly, Bossuet, Feuilly

and Combeferre, gave way. The cannon, though it had not effected a

practicable breach, had made a rather large hollow in the middle of the

redoubt; there, the summit of the wall had disappeared before the

balls, and had crumbled away; and the rubbish which had fallen, now

inside, now outside, had, as it accumulated, formed two piles in the

nature of slopes on the two sides of the barrier, one on the inside,

the other on the outside. The exterior slope presented an inclined

plane to the attack.

A final assault was there attempted, and this assault succeeded. The

mass bristling with bayonets and hurled forward at a run, came up with

irresistible force, and the serried front of battle of the attacking

column made its appearance through the smoke on the crest of the

battlements. This time, it was decisive. The group of insurgents who

were defending the centre retreated in confusion.

Then the gloomy love of life awoke once more in some of them. Many,

finding themselves under the muzzles of this forest of guns, did not

wish to die. This is a moment when the instinct of self-preservation

emits howls, when the beast reappears in men. They were hemmed in by

the lofty, six-story house which formed the background of their

redoubt. This house might prove their salvation. The building was

barricaded, and walled, as it were, from top to bottom. Before the

troops of the line had reached the interior of the redoubt, there was

time for a door to open and shut, the space of a flash of lightning was

sufficient for that, and the door of that house, suddenly opened a

crack and closed again instantly, was life for these despairing men.

Behind this house, there were streets, possible flight, space. They set

to knocking at that door with the butts of their guns, and with kicks,

shouting, calling, entreating, wringing their hands. No one opened.

From the little window on the third floor, the head of the dead man

gazed down upon them.

But Enjolras and Marius, and the seven or eight rallied about them,

sprang forward and protected them. Enjolras had shouted to the

soldiers: “Don’t advance!” and as an officer had not obeyed, Enjolras

had killed the officer. He was now in the little inner court of the

redoubt, with his back planted against the Corinthe building, a sword

in one hand, a rifle in the other, holding open the door of the

wine-shop which he barred against assailants. He shouted to the

desperate men:—“There is but one door open; this one.”—And shielding

them with his body, and facing an entire battalion alone, he made them

pass in behind him. All precipitated themselves thither. Enjolras,

executing with his rifle, which he now used like a cane, what

single-stick players call a “covered rose” round his head, levelled the

bayonets around and in front of him, and was the last to enter; and

then ensued a horrible moment, when the soldiers tried to make their

way in, and the insurgents strove to bar them out. The door was slammed

with such violence, that, as it fell back into its frame, it showed the

five fingers of a soldier who had been clinging to it, cut off and

glued to the post.

Marius remained outside. A shot had just broken his collar bone, he

felt that he was fainting and falling. At that moment, with eyes

already shut, he felt the shock of a vigorous hand seizing him, and the

swoon in which his senses vanished, hardly allowed him time for the

thought, mingled with a last memory of Cosette:—“I am taken prisoner. I

shall be shot.”

Enjolras, not seeing Marius among those who had taken refuge in the

wine-shop, had the same idea. But they had reached a moment when each

man has not the time to meditate on his own death. Enjolras fixed the

bar across the door, and bolted it, and double-locked it with key and

chain, while those outside were battering furiously at it, the soldiers

with the butts of their muskets, the sappers with their axes. The

assailants were grouped about that door. The siege of the wine-shop was

now beginning.

The soldiers, we will observe, were full of wrath.

The death of the artillery-sergeant had enraged them, and then, a still

more melancholy circumstance. During the few hours which had preceded

the attack, it had been reported among them that the insurgents were

mutilating their prisoners, and that there was the headless body of a

soldier in the wine-shop. This sort of fatal rumor is the usual

accompaniment of civil wars, and it was a false report of this kind

which, later on, produced the catastrophe of the Rue Transnonain.

When the door was barricaded, Enjolras said to the others:

“Let us sell our lives dearly.”

Then he approached the table on which lay Mabeuf and Gavroche. Beneath

the black cloth two straight and rigid forms were visible, one large,

the other small, and the two faces were vaguely outlined beneath the

cold folds of the shroud. A hand projected from beneath the winding

sheet and hung near the floor. It was that of the old man.

Enjolras bent down and kissed that venerable hand, just as he had

kissed his brow on the preceding evening.

These were the only two kisses which he had bestowed in the course of

his life.

Let us abridge the tale. The barricade had fought like a gate of

Thebes; the wine-shop fought like a house of Saragossa. These

resistances are dogged. No quarter. No flag of truce possible. Men are

willing to die, provided their opponent will kill them.

When Suchet says:—“Capitulate,”—Palafox replies: “After the war with

cannon, the war with knives.” Nothing was lacking in the capture by

assault of the Hucheloup wine-shop; neither paving-stones raining from

the windows and the roof on the besiegers and exasperating the soldiers

by crushing them horribly, nor shots fired from the attic-windows and

the cellar, nor the fury of attack, nor, finally, when the door

yielded, the frenzied madness of extermination. The assailants, rushing

into the wine-shop, their feet entangled in the panels of the door

which had been beaten in and flung on the ground, found not a single

combatant there. The spiral staircase, hewn asunder with the axe, lay

in the middle of the tap-room, a few wounded men were just breathing

their last, every one who was not killed was on the first floor, and

from there, through the hole in the ceiling, which had formed the

entrance of the stairs, a terrific fire burst forth. It was the last of

their cartridges. When they were exhausted, when these formidable men

on the point of death had no longer either powder or ball, each grasped

in his hands two of the bottles which Enjolras had reserved, and of

which we have spoken, and held the scaling party in check with these

frightfully fragile clubs. They were bottles of aquafortis.

We relate these gloomy incidents of carnage as they occurred. The

besieged man, alas! converts everything into a weapon. Greek fire did

not disgrace Archimedes, boiling pitch did not disgrace Bayard. All war

is a thing of terror, and there is no choice in it. The musketry of the

besiegers, though confined and embarrassed by being directed from below

upwards, was deadly. The rim of the hole in the ceiling was speedily

surrounded by heads of the slain, whence dripped long, red and smoking

streams, the uproar was indescribable; a close and burning smoke almost

produced night over this combat. Words are lacking to express horror

when it has reached this pitch. There were no longer men in this

conflict, which was now infernal. They were no longer giants matched

with colossi. It resembled Milton and Dante rather than Homer. Demons

attacked, spectres resisted.

It was heroism become monstrous.

CHAPTER XXIII—ORESTES FASTING AND PYLADES DRUNK

At length, by dint of mounting on each other’s backs, aiding themselves

with the skeleton of the staircase, climbing up the walls, clinging to

the ceiling, slashing away at the very brink of the trap-door, the last

one who offered resistance, a score of assailants, soldiers, National

Guardsmen, municipal guardsmen, in utter confusion, the majority

disfigured by wounds in the face during that redoubtable ascent,

blinded by blood, furious, rendered savage, made an irruption into the

apartment on the first floor. There they found only one man still on

his feet, Enjolras. Without cartridges, without sword, he had nothing

in his hand now but the barrel of his gun whose stock he had broken

over the head of those who were entering. He had placed the billiard

table between his assailants and himself; he had retreated into the

corner of the room, and there, with haughty eye, and head borne high,

with this stump of a weapon in his hand, he was still so alarming as to

speedily create an empty space around him. A cry arose:

“He is the leader! It was he who slew the artillery-man. It is well

that he has placed himself there. Let him remain there. Let us shoot

him down on the spot.”

“Shoot me,” said Enjolras.

And flinging away his bit of gun-barrel, and folding his arms, he

offered his breast.

The audacity of a fine death always affects men. As soon as Enjolras

folded his arms and accepted his end, the din of strife ceased in the

room, and this chaos suddenly stilled into a sort of sepulchral

solemnity. The menacing majesty of Enjolras disarmed and motionless,

appeared to oppress this tumult, and this young man, haughty, bloody,

and charming, who alone had not a wound, who was as indifferent as an

invulnerable being, seemed, by the authority of his tranquil glance, to

constrain this sinister rabble to kill him respectfully. His beauty, at

that moment augmented by his pride, was resplendent, and he was fresh

and rosy after the fearful four and twenty hours which had just

elapsed, as though he could no more be fatigued than wounded. It was of

him, possibly, that a witness spoke afterwards, before the council of

war: “There was an insurgent whom I heard called Apollo.” A National

Guardsman who had taken aim at Enjolras, lowered his gun, saying: “It

seems to me that I am about to shoot a flower.”

Twelve men formed into a squad in the corner opposite Enjolras, and

silently made ready their guns.

Then a sergeant shouted:

“Take aim!”

An officer intervened.

“Wait.”

And addressing Enjolras:

“Do you wish to have your eyes bandaged?”

“No.”

“Was it you who killed the artillery sergeant?”

“Yes.”

Grantaire had waked up a few moments before.

Grantaire, it will be remembered, had been asleep ever since the

preceding evening in the upper room of the wine-shop, seated on a chair

and leaning on the table.

He realized in its fullest sense the old metaphor of “dead drunk.” The

hideous potion of absinthe-porter and alcohol had thrown him into a

lethargy. His table being small, and not suitable for the barricade, he

had been left in possession of it. He was still in the same posture,

with his breast bent over the table, his head lying flat on his arms,

surrounded by glasses, beer-jugs and bottles. His was the overwhelming

slumber of the torpid bear and the satiated leech. Nothing had had any

effect upon it, neither the fusillade, nor the cannon-balls, nor the

grape-shot which had made its way through the window into the room

where he was. Nor the tremendous uproar of the assault. He merely

replied to the cannonade, now and then, by a snore. He seemed to be

waiting there for a bullet which should spare him the trouble of

waking. Many corpses were strewn around him; and, at the first glance,

there was nothing to distinguish him from those profound sleepers of

death.

Noise does not rouse a drunken man; silence awakens him. The fall of

everything around him only augmented Grantaire’s prostration; the

crumbling of all things was his lullaby. The sort of halt which the

tumult underwent in the presence of Enjolras was a shock to this heavy

slumber. It had the effect of a carriage going at full speed, which

suddenly comes to a dead stop. The persons dozing within it wake up.

Grantaire rose to his feet with a start, stretched out his arms, rubbed

his eyes, stared, yawned, and understood.

A fit of drunkenness reaching its end resembles a curtain which is torn

away. One beholds, at a single glance and as a whole, all that it has

concealed. All suddenly presents itself to the memory; and the drunkard

who has known nothing of what has been taking place during the last

twenty-four hours, has no sooner opened his eyes than he is perfectly

informed. Ideas recur to him with abrupt lucidity; the obliteration of

intoxication, a sort of steam which has obscured the brain, is

dissipated, and makes way for the clear and sharply outlined

importunity of realities.

Relegated, as he was, to one corner, and sheltered behind the

billiard-table, the soldiers whose eyes were fixed on Enjolras, had not

even noticed Grantaire, and the sergeant was preparing to repeat his

order: “Take aim!” when all at once, they heard a strong voice shout

beside them:

“Long live the Republic! I’m one of them.”

Grantaire had risen. The immense gleam of the whole combat which he had

missed, and in which he had had no part, appeared in the brilliant

glance of the transfigured drunken man.

He repeated: “Long live the Republic!” crossed the room with a firm

stride and placed himself in front of the guns beside Enjolras.

“Finish both of us at one blow,” said he.

And turning gently to Enjolras, he said to him:

“Do you permit it?”

Enjolras pressed his hand with a smile.

This smile was not ended when the report resounded.

Enjolras, pierced by eight bullets, remained leaning against the wall,

as though the balls had nailed him there. Only, his head was bowed.

Grantaire fell at his feet, as though struck by a thunderbolt.

A few moments later, the soldiers dislodged the last remaining

insurgents, who had taken refuge at the top of the house. They fired

into the attic through a wooden lattice. They fought under the very

roof. They flung bodies, some of them still alive, out through the

windows. Two light-infantrymen, who tried to lift the shattered

omnibus, were slain by two shots fired from the attic. A man in a

blouse was flung down from it, with a bayonet wound in the abdomen, and

breathed his last on the ground. A soldier and an insurgent slipped

together on the sloping slates of the roof, and, as they would not

release each other, they fell, clasped in a ferocious embrace. A

similar conflict went on in the cellar. Shouts, shots, a fierce

trampling. Then silence. The barricade was captured.

The soldiers began to search the houses round about, and to pursue the

fugitives.

CHAPTER XXIV—PRISONER

Marius was, in fact, a prisoner.

The hand which had seized him from behind and whose grasp he had felt

at the moment of his fall and his loss of consciousness was that of

Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean had taken no other part in the combat than to expose

himself in it. Had it not been for him, no one, in that supreme phase

of agony, would have thought of the wounded. Thanks to him, everywhere

present in the carnage, like a providence, those who fell were picked

up, transported to the tap-room, and cared for. In the intervals, he

reappeared on the barricade. But nothing which could resemble a blow,

an attack or even personal defence proceeded from his hands. He held

his peace and lent succor. Moreover, he had received only a few

scratches. The bullets would have none of him. If suicide formed part

of what he had meditated on coming to this sepulchre, to that spot, he

had not succeeded. But we doubt whether he had thought of suicide, an

irreligious act.

Jean Valjean, in the thick cloud of the combat, did not appear to see

Marius; the truth is, that he never took his eyes from the latter. When

a shot laid Marius low, Jean Valjean leaped forward with the agility of

a tiger, fell upon him as on his prey, and bore him off.

The whirlwind of the attack was, at that moment, so violently

concentrated upon Enjolras and upon the door of the wine-shop, that no

one saw Jean Valjean sustaining the fainting Marius in his arms,

traverse the unpaved field of the barricade and disappear behind the

angle of the Corinthe building.

The reader will recall this angle which formed a sort of cape on the

street; it afforded shelter from the bullets, the grape-shot, and all

eyes, and a few square feet of space. There is sometimes a chamber

which does not burn in the midst of a conflagration, and in the midst

of raging seas, beyond a promontory or at the extremity of a blind

alley of shoals, a tranquil nook. It was in this sort of fold in the

interior trapezium of the barricade, that Éponine had breathed her

last.

There Jean Valjean halted, let Marius slide to the ground, placed his

back against the wall, and cast his eyes about him.

The situation was alarming.

For an instant, for two or three perhaps, this bit of wall was a

shelter, but how was he to escape from this massacre? He recalled the

anguish which he had suffered in the Rue Polonceau eight years before,

and in what manner he had contrived to make his escape; it was

difficult then, to-day it was impossible. He had before him that deaf

and implacable house, six stories in height, which appeared to be

inhabited only by a dead man leaning out of his window; he had on his

right the rather low barricade, which shut off the Rue de la Petite

Truanderie; to pass this obstacle seemed easy, but beyond the crest of

the barrier a line of bayonets was visible. The troops of the line were

posted on the watch behind that barricade. It was evident, that to pass

the barricade was to go in quest of the fire of the platoon, and that

any head which should run the risk of lifting itself above the top of

that wall of stones would serve as a target for sixty shots. On his

left he had the field of battle. Death lurked round the corner of that

wall.

What was to be done?

Only a bird could have extricated itself from this predicament.

And it was necessary to decide on the instant, to devise some

expedient, to come to some decision. Fighting was going on a few paces

away; fortunately, all were raging around a single point, the door of

the wine-shop; but if it should occur to one soldier, to one single

soldier, to turn the corner of the house, or to attack him on the

flank, all was over.

Jean Valjean gazed at the house facing him, he gazed at the barricade

at one side of him, then he looked at the ground, with the violence of

the last extremity, bewildered, and as though he would have liked to

pierce a hole there with his eyes.

By dint of staring, something vaguely striking in such an agony began

to assume form and outline at his feet, as though it had been a power

of glance which made the thing desired unfold. A few paces distant he

perceived, at the base of the small barrier so pitilessly guarded and

watched on the exterior, beneath a disordered mass of paving-stones

which partly concealed it, an iron grating, placed flat and on a level

with the soil. This grating, made of stout, transverse bars, was about

two feet square. The frame of paving-stones which supported it had been

torn up, and it was, as it were, unfastened.

Through the bars a view could be had of a dark aperture, something like

the flue of a chimney, or the pipe of a cistern. Jean Valjean darted

forward. His old art of escape rose to his brain like an illumination.

To thrust aside the stones, to raise the grating, to lift Marius, who

was as inert as a dead body, upon his shoulders, to descend, with this

burden on his loins, and with the aid of his elbows and knees into that

sort of well, fortunately not very deep, to let the heavy trap, upon

which the loosened stones rolled down afresh, fall into its place

behind him, to gain his footing on a flagged surface three metres below

the surface,—all this was executed like that which one does in dreams,

with the strength of a giant and the rapidity of an eagle; this took

only a few minutes.

Jean Valjean found himself with Marius, who was still unconscious, in a

sort of long, subterranean corridor.

There reigned profound peace, absolute silence, night.

The impression which he had formerly experienced when falling from the

wall into the convent recurred to him. Only, what he was carrying

to-day was not Cosette; it was Marius. He could barely hear the

formidable tumult in the wine-shop, taken by assault, like a vague

murmur overhead.

BOOK SECOND—THE INTESTINE OF THE LEVIATHAN

CHAPTER I—THE LAND IMPOVERISHED BY THE SEA

Paris casts twenty-five millions yearly into the water. And this

without metaphor. How, and in what manner? Day and night. With what

object? With no object. With what intention? With no intention. Why?

For no reason. By means of what organ? By means of its intestine. What

is its intestine? The sewer.

Twenty-five millions is the most moderate approximative figure which

the valuations of special science have set upon it.

Science, after having long groped about, now knows that the most

fecundating and the most efficacious of fertilizers is human manure.

The Chinese, let us confess it to our shame, knew it before us. Not a

Chinese peasant—it is Eckberg who says this,—goes to town without

bringing back with him, at the two extremities of his bamboo pole, two

full buckets of what we designate as filth. Thanks to human dung, the

earth in China is still as young as in the days of Abraham. Chinese

wheat yields a hundred fold of the seed. There is no guano comparable

in fertility with the detritus of a capital. A great city is the most

mighty of dung-makers. Certain success would attend the experiment of

employing the city to manure the plain. If our gold is manure, our

manure, on the other hand, is gold.

What is done with this golden manure? It is swept into the abyss.

Fleets of vessels are despatched, at great expense, to collect the dung

of petrels and penguins at the South Pole, and the incalculable element

of opulence which we have on hand, we send to the sea. All the human

and animal manure which the world wastes, restored to the land instead

of being cast into the water, would suffice to nourish the world.

Those heaps of filth at the gate-posts, those tumbrils of mud which

jolt through the street by night, those terrible casks of the street

department, those fetid drippings of subterranean mire, which the

pavements hide from you,—do you know what they are? They are the meadow

in flower, the green grass, wild thyme, thyme and sage, they are game,

they are cattle, they are the satisfied bellows of great oxen in the

evening, they are perfumed hay, they are golden wheat, they are the

bread on your table, they are the warm blood in your veins, they are

health, they are joy, they are life. This is the will of that

mysterious creation which is transformation on earth and

transfiguration in heaven.

Restore this to the great crucible; your abundance will flow forth from

it. The nutrition of the plains furnishes the nourishment of men.

You have it in your power to lose this wealth, and to consider me

ridiculous to boot. This will form the master-piece of your ignorance.

Statisticians have calculated that France alone makes a deposit of half

a milliard every year, in the Atlantic, through the mouths of her

rivers. Note this: with five hundred millions we could pay one quarter

of the expenses of our budget. The cleverness of man is such that he

prefers to get rid of these five hundred millions in the gutter. It is

the very substance of the people that is carried off, here drop by

drop, there wave after wave, the wretched outpour of our sewers into

the rivers, and the gigantic collection of our rivers into the ocean.

Every hiccough of our sewers costs us a thousand francs. From this

spring two results, the land impoverished, and the water tainted.

Hunger arising from the furrow, and disease from the stream.

It is notorious, for example, that at the present hour, the Thames is

poisoning London.

So far as Paris is concerned, it has become indispensable of late, to

transport the mouths of the sewers downstream, below the last bridge.

A double tubular apparatus, provided with valves and sluices, sucking

up and driving back, a system of elementary drainage, simple as the

lungs of a man, and which is already in full working order in many

communities in England, would suffice to conduct the pure water of the

fields into our cities, and to send back to the fields the rich water

of the cities, and this easy exchange, the simplest in the world, would

retain among us the five hundred millions now thrown away. People are

thinking of other things.

The process actually in use does evil, with the intention of doing

good. The intention is good, the result is melancholy. Thinking to

purge the city, the population is blanched like plants raised in

cellars. A sewer is a mistake. When drainage, everywhere, with its

double function, restoring what it takes, shall have replaced the

sewer, which is a simple impoverishing washing, then, this being

combined with the data of a now social economy, the product of the

earth will be increased tenfold, and the problem of misery will be

singularly lightened. Add the suppression of parasitism, and it will be

solved.

In the meanwhile, the public wealth flows away to the river, and

leakage takes place. Leakage is the word. Europe is being ruined in

this manner by exhaustion.

As for France, we have just cited its figures. Now, Paris contains one

twenty-fifth of the total population of France, and Parisian guano

being the richest of all, we understate the truth when we value the

loss on the part of Paris at twenty-five millions in the half milliard

which France annually rejects. These twenty-five millions, employed in

assistance and enjoyment, would double the splendor of Paris. The city

spends them in sewers. So that we may say that Paris’s great

prodigality, its wonderful festival, its Beaujon folly, its orgy, its

stream of gold from full hands, its pomp, its luxury, its magnificence,

is its sewer system.

It is in this manner that, in the blindness of a poor political

economy, we drown and allow to float downstream and to be lost in the

gulfs the well-being of all. There should be nets at Saint-Cloud for

the public fortune.

Economically considered, the matter can be summed up thus: Paris is a

spendthrift. Paris, that model city, that patron of well-arranged

capitals, of which every nation strives to possess a copy, that

metropolis of the ideal, that august country of the initiative, of

impulse and of effort, that centre and that dwelling of minds, that

nation-city, that hive of the future, that marvellous combination of

Babylon and Corinth, would make a peasant of the Fo-Kian shrug his

shoulders, from the point of view which we have just indicated.

Imitate Paris and you will ruin yourselves.

Moreover, and particularly in this immemorial and senseless waste,

Paris is itself an imitator.

These surprising exhibitions of stupidity are not novel; this is no

young folly. The ancients did like the moderns. “The sewers of Rome,”

says Liebig, “have absorbed all the well-being of the Roman peasant.”

When the Campagna of Rome was ruined by the Roman sewer, Rome exhausted

Italy, and when she had put Italy in her sewer, she poured in Sicily,

then Sardinia, then Africa. The sewer of Rome has engulfed the world.

This cesspool offered its engulfment to the city and the universe.

\_Urbi et orbi\_. Eternal city, unfathomable sewer.

Rome sets the example for these things as well as for others.

Paris follows this example with all the stupidity peculiar to

intelligent towns.

For the requirements of the operation upon the subject of which we have

just explained our views, Paris has beneath it another Paris; a Paris

of sewers; which has its streets, its crossroads, its squares, its

blind-alleys, its arteries, and its circulation, which is of mire and

minus the human form.

For nothing must be flattered, not even a great people; where there is

everything there is also ignominy by the side of sublimity; and, if

Paris contains Athens, the city of light, Tyre, the city of might,

Sparta, the city of virtue, Nineveh, the city of marvels, it also

contains Lutetia, the city of mud.

However, the stamp of its power is there also, and the Titanic sink of

Paris realizes, among monuments, that strange ideal realized in

humanity by some men like Macchiavelli, Bacon and Mirabeau, grandiose

vileness.

The sub-soil of Paris, if the eye could penetrate its surface, would

present the aspect of a colossal madrepore. A sponge has no more

partitions and ducts than the mound of earth for a circuit of six

leagues round about, on which rests the great and ancient city. Not to

mention its catacombs, which are a separate cellar, not to mention the

inextricable trellis-work of gas pipes, without reckoning the vast

tubular system for the distribution of fresh water which ends in the

pillar fountains, the sewers alone form a tremendous, shadowy network

under the two banks; a labyrinth which has its slope for its guiding

thread.

There appears, in the humid mist, the rat which seems the product to

which Paris has given birth.

CHAPTER II—ANCIENT HISTORY OF THE SEWER

Let the reader imagine Paris lifted off like a cover, the subterranean

network of sewers, from a bird’s-eye view, will outline on the banks a

species of large branch grafted on the river. On the right bank, the

belt sewer will form the trunk of this branch, the secondary ducts will

form the branches, and those without exit the twigs.

This figure is but a summary one and half exact, the right angle, which

is the customary angle of this species of subterranean ramifications,

being very rare in vegetation.

A more accurate image of this strange geometrical plan can be formed by

supposing that one is viewing some eccentric oriental alphabet, as

intricate as a thicket, against a background of shadows, and the

misshapen letters should be welded one to another in apparent

confusion, and as at haphazard, now by their angles, again by their

extremities.

Sinks and sewers played a great part in the Middle Ages, in the Lower

Empire and in the Orient of old. The masses regarded these beds of

decomposition, these monstrous cradles of death, with a fear that was

almost religious. The vermin ditch of Benares is no less conducive to

giddiness than the lions’ ditch of Babylon. Teglath-Phalasar, according

to the rabbinical books, swore by the sink of Nineveh. It was from the

sewer of Münster that John of Leyden produced his false moon, and it

was from the cesspool of Kekscheb that oriental menalchme, Mokanna, the

veiled prophet of Khorassan, caused his false sun to emerge.

The history of men is reflected in the history of sewers. The

Germoniæ58 narrated Rome. The sewer of Paris has been an ancient and

formidable thing. It has been a sepulchre, it has served as an asylum.

Crime, intelligence, social protest, liberty of conscience, thought,

theft, all that human laws persecute or have persecuted, is hidden in

that hole; the \_maillotins\_ in the fourteenth century, the \_tire-laine\_

of the fifteenth, the Huguenots in the sixteenth, Morin’s \_illuminated\_

in the seventeenth, the \_chauffeurs\_ [brigands] in the eighteenth. A

hundred years ago, the nocturnal blow of the dagger emerged thence, the

pickpocket in danger slipped thither; the forest had its cave, Paris

had its sewer. Vagrancy, that Gallic \_picareria\_, accepted the sewer as

the adjunct of the Cour des Miracles, and at evening, it returned

thither, fierce and sly, through the Maubuée outlet, as into a

bed-chamber.

It was quite natural, that those who had the blind-alley Vide-Gousset,

[Empty-Pocket] or the Rue Coupe-Gorge [Cut-Throat], for the scene of

their daily labor, should have for their domicile by night the culvert

of the Chemin-Vert, or the catch basin of Hurepoix. Hence a throng of

souvenirs. All sorts of phantoms haunt these long, solitary corridors;

everywhere is putrescence and miasma; here and there are

breathing-holes, where Villon within converses with Rabelais without.

The sewer in ancient Paris is the rendezvous of all exhaustions and of

all attempts. Political economy therein spies a detritus, social

philosophy there beholds a residuum.

The sewer is the conscience of the city. Everything there converges and

confronts everything else. In that livid spot there are shades, but

there are no longer any secrets. Each thing bears its true form, or at

least, its definitive form. The mass of filth has this in its favor,

that it is not a liar. Ingenuousness has taken refuge there. The mask

of Basil is to be found there, but one beholds its cardboard and its

strings and the inside as well as the outside, and it is accentuated by

honest mud. Scapin’s false nose is its next-door neighbor. All the

uncleannesses of civilization, once past their use, fall into this

trench of truth, where the immense social sliding ends. They are there

engulfed, but they display themselves there. This mixture is a

confession. There, no more false appearances, no plastering over is

possible, filth removes its shirt, absolute denudation puts to the rout

all illusions and mirages, there is nothing more except what really

exists, presenting the sinister form of that which is coming to an end.

There, the bottom of a bottle indicates drunkenness, a basket-handle

tells a tale of domesticity; there the core of an apple which has

entertained literary opinions becomes an apple-core once more; the

effigy on the big sou becomes frankly covered with verdigris, Caiphas’

spittle meets Falstaff’s puking, the louis-d’or which comes from the

gaming-house jostles the nail whence hangs the rope’s end of the

suicide. A livid fœtus rolls along, enveloped in the spangles which

danced at the Opera last Shrove-Tuesday, a cap which has pronounced

judgment on men wallows beside a mass of rottenness which was formerly

Margoton’s petticoat; it is more than fraternization, it is equivalent

to addressing each other as \_thou\_. All which was formerly rouged, is

washed free. The last veil is torn away. A sewer is a cynic. It tells

everything.

The sincerity of foulness pleases us, and rests the soul. When one has

passed one’s time in enduring upon earth the spectacle of the great

airs which reasons of state, the oath, political sagacity, human

justice, professional probity, the austerities of situation,

incorruptible robes all assume, it solaces one to enter a sewer and to

behold the mire which befits it.

This is instructive at the same time. We have just said that history

passes through the sewer. The Saint-Barthélemys filter through there,

drop by drop, between the paving-stones. Great public assassinations,

political and religious butcheries, traverse this underground passage

of civilization, and thrust their corpses there. For the eye of the

thinker, all historic murderers are to be found there, in that hideous

penumbra, on their knees, with a scrap of their winding-sheet for an

apron, dismally sponging out their work. Louis XI. is there with

Tristan, François I. with Duprat, Charles IX. is there with his mother,

Richelieu is there with Louis XIII., Louvois is there, Letellier is

there, Hébert and Maillard are there, scratching the stones, and trying

to make the traces of their actions disappear. Beneath these vaults one

hears the brooms of spectres. One there breathes the enormous fetidness

of social catastrophes. One beholds reddish reflections in the corners.

There flows a terrible stream, in which bloody hands have been washed.

The social observer should enter these shadows. They form a part of his

laboratory. Philosophy is the microscope of the thought. Everything

desires to flee from it, but nothing escapes it. Tergiversation is

useless. What side of oneself does one display in evasions? the

shameful side. Philosophy pursues with its glance, probes the evil, and

does not permit it to escape into nothingness. In the obliteration of

things which disappear, in the watching of things which vanish, it

recognizes all. It reconstructs the purple from the rag, and the woman

from the scrap of her dress. From the cesspool, it reconstitutes the

city; from mud, it reconstructs manners; from the potsherd it infers

the amphora or the jug. By the imprint of a finger-nail on a piece of

parchment, it recognizes the difference which separates the Jewry of

the Judengasse from the Jewry of the Ghetto. It re-discovers in what

remains that which has been, good, evil, the true, the blood-stain of

the palace, the ink-blot of the cavern, the drop of sweat from the

brothel, trials undergone, temptations welcomed, orgies cast forth, the

turn which characters have taken as they became abased, the trace of

prostitution in souls of which their grossness rendered them capable,

and on the vesture of the porters of Rome the mark of Messalina’s

elbowing.

CHAPTER III—BRUNESEAU

The sewer of Paris in the Middle Ages was legendary. In the sixteenth

century, Henri II. attempted a bore, which failed. Not a hundred years

ago, the cesspool, Mercier attests the fact, was abandoned to itself,

and fared as best it might.

Such was this ancient Paris, delivered over to quarrels, to indecision,

and to gropings. It was tolerably stupid for a long time. Later on, ’89

showed how understanding comes to cities. But in the good, old times,

the capital had not much head. It did not know how to manage its own

affairs either morally or materially, and could not sweep out filth any

better than it could abuses. Everything presented an obstacle,

everything raised a question. The sewer, for example, was refractory to

every itinerary. One could no more find one’s bearings in the sewer

than one could understand one’s position in the city; above the

unintelligible, below the inextricable; beneath the confusion of

tongues there reigned the confusion of caverns; Dædalus backed up

Babel.

Sometimes the Paris sewer took a notion to overflow, as though this

misunderstood Nile were suddenly seized with a fit of rage. There

occurred, infamous to relate, inundations of the sewer. At times, that

stomach of civilization digested badly, the cesspool flowed back into

the throat of the city, and Paris got an after-taste of her own filth.

These resemblances of the sewer to remorse had their good points; they

were warnings; very badly accepted, however; the city waxed indignant

at the audacity of its mire, and did not admit that the filth should

return. Drive it out better.

The inundation of 1802 is one of the actual memories of Parisians of

the age of eighty. The mud spread in cross-form over the Place des

Victoires, where stands the statue of Louis XIV.; it entered the Rue

Saint-Honoré by the two mouths to the sewer in the Champs-Élysées, the

Rue Saint-Florentin through the Saint-Florentin sewer, the Rue

Pierre-à-Poisson through the sewer de la Sonnerie, the Rue Popincourt,

through the sewer of the Chemin-Vert, the Rue de la Roquette, through

the sewer of the Rue de Lappe; it covered the drain of the Rue des

Champs-Élysées to the height of thirty-five centimetres; and, to the

South, through the vent of the Seine, performing its functions in

inverse sense, it penetrated the Rue Mazarine, the Rue de l’Échaudé,

and the Rue des Marais, where it stopped at a distance of one hundred

and nine metres, a few paces distant from the house in which Racine had

lived, respecting, in the seventeenth century, the poet more than the

King. It attained its maximum depth in the Rue Saint-Pierre, where it

rose to the height of three feet above the flag-stones of the

water-spout, and its maximum length in the Rue Saint-Sabin, where it

spread out over a stretch two hundred and thirty-eight metres in

length.

At the beginning of this century, the sewer of Paris was still a

mysterious place. Mud can never enjoy a good fame; but in this case its

evil renown reached the verge of the terrible. Paris knew, in a

confused way, that she had under her a terrible cavern. People talked

of it as of that monstrous bed of Thebes in which swarmed centipedes

fifteen long feet in length, and which might have served Behemoth for a

bathtub. The great boots of the sewermen never ventured further than

certain well-known points. We were then very near the epoch when the

scavenger’s carts, from the summit of which Sainte-Foix fraternized

with the Marquis de Créqui, discharged their loads directly into the

sewer. As for cleaning out,—that function was entrusted to the pouring

rains which encumbered rather than swept away. Rome left some poetry to

her sewer, and called it the Gemoniæ; Paris insulted hers, and entitled

it the Polypus-Hole. Science and superstition were in accord, in

horror. The Polypus hole was no less repugnant to hygiene than to

legend. The goblin was developed under the fetid covering of the

Mouffetard sewer; the corpses of the Marmousets had been cast into the

sewer de la Barillerie; Fagon attributed the redoubtable malignant

fever of 1685 to the great hiatus of the sewer of the Marais, which

remained yawning until 1833 in the Rue Saint-Louis, almost opposite the

sign of the \_Gallant Messenger\_. The mouth of the sewer of the Rue de

la Mortellerie was celebrated for the pestilences which had their

source there; with its grating of iron, with points simulating a row of

teeth, it was like a dragon’s maw in that fatal street, breathing forth

hell upon men. The popular imagination seasoned the sombre Parisian

sink with some indescribably hideous intermixture of the infinite. The

sewer had no bottom. The sewer was the lower world. The idea of

exploring these leprous regions did not even occur to the police. To

try that unknown thing, to cast the plummet into that shadow, to set

out on a voyage of discovery in that abyss—who would have dared? It was

alarming. Nevertheless, some one did present himself. The cesspool had

its Christopher Columbus.

One day, in 1805, during one of the rare apparitions which the Emperor

made in Paris, the Minister of the Interior, some Decrès or Crétet or

other, came to the master’s intimate levee. In the Carrousel there was

audible the clanking of swords of all those extraordinary soldiers of

the great Republic, and of the great Empire; then Napoleon’s door was

blocked with heroes; men from the Rhine, from the Escaut, from the

Adige, and from the Nile; companions of Joubert, of Desaix, of Marceau,

of Hoche, of Kléber; the aérostiers of Fleurus, the grenadiers of

Mayence, the pontoon-builders of Genoa, hussars whom the Pyramids had

looked down upon, artillerists whom Junot’s cannon-ball had spattered

with mud, cuirassiers who had taken by assault the fleet lying at

anchor in the Zuyderzee; some had followed Bonaparte upon the bridge of

Lodi, others had accompanied Murat in the trenches of Mantua, others

had preceded Lannes in the hollow road of Montebello. The whole army of

that day was present there, in the court-yard of the Tuileries,

represented by a squadron or a platoon, and guarding Napoleon in

repose; and that was the splendid epoch when the grand army had Marengo

behind it and Austerlitz before it.—“Sire,” said the Minister of the

Interior to Napoleon, “yesterday I saw the most intrepid man in your

Empire.”—“What man is that?” said the Emperor brusquely, “and what has

he done?”—“He wants to do something, Sire.”—“What is it?”—“To visit the

sewers of Paris.”

This man existed and his name was Bruneseau.

CHAPTER IV

The visit took place. It was a formidable campaign; a nocturnal battle

against pestilence and suffocation. It was, at the same time, a voyage

of discovery. One of the survivors of this expedition, an intelligent

workingman, who was very young at the time, related curious details

with regard to it, several years ago, which Bruneseau thought himself

obliged to omit in his report to the prefect of police, as unworthy of

official style. The processes of disinfection were, at that epoch,

extremely rudimentary. Hardly had Bruneseau crossed the first

articulations of that subterranean network, when eight laborers out of

the twenty refused to go any further. The operation was complicated;

the visit entailed the necessity of cleaning; hence it was necessary to

cleanse and at the same time, to proceed; to note the entrances of

water, to count the gratings and the vents, to lay out in detail the

branches, to indicate the currents at the point where they parted, to

define the respective bounds of the divers basins, to sound the small

sewers grafted on the principal sewer, to measure the height under the

key-stone of each drain, and the width, at the spring of the vaults as

well as at the bottom, in order to determine the arrangements with

regard to the level of each water-entrance, either of the bottom of the

arch, or on the soil of the street. They advanced with toil. The

lanterns pined away in the foul atmosphere. From time to time, a

fainting sewerman was carried out. At certain points, there were

precipices. The soil had given away, the pavement had crumbled, the

sewer had changed into a bottomless well; they found nothing solid; a

man disappeared suddenly; they had great difficulty in getting him out

again. On the advice of Fourcroy, they lighted large cages filled with

tow steeped in resin, from time to time, in spots which had been

sufficiently disinfected. In some places, the wall was covered with

misshapen fungi,—one would have said tumors; the very stone seemed

diseased within this unbreathable atmosphere.

Bruneseau, in his exploration, proceeded down hill. At the point of

separation of the two water-conduits of the Grand-Hurleur, he

deciphered upon a projecting stone the date of 1550; this stone

indicated the limits where Philibert Delorme, charged by Henri II. with

visiting the subterranean drains of Paris, had halted. This stone was

the mark of the sixteenth century on the sewer; Bruneseau found the

handiwork of the seventeenth century once more in the Ponceau drain of

the old Rue Vieille-du-Temple, vaulted between 1600 and 1650; and the

handiwork of the eighteenth in the western section of the collecting

canal, walled and vaulted in 1740. These two vaults, especially the

less ancient, that of 1740, were more cracked and decrepit than the

masonry of the belt sewer, which dated from 1412, an epoch when the

brook of fresh water of Ménilmontant was elevated to the dignity of the

Grand Sewer of Paris, an advancement analogous to that of a peasant who

should become first \_valet de chambre\_ to the King; something like

Gros-Jean transformed into Lebel.

Here and there, particularly beneath the Court-House, they thought they

recognized the hollows of ancient dungeons, excavated in the very sewer

itself. Hideous \_in-pace\_. An iron neck-collar was hanging in one of

these cells. They walled them all up. Some of their finds were

singular; among others, the skeleton of an ourang-outan, who had

disappeared from the Jardin des Plantes in 1800, a disappearance

probably connected with the famous and indisputable apparition of the

devil in the Rue des Bernardins, in the last year of the eighteenth

century. The poor devil had ended by drowning himself in the sewer.

Beneath this long, arched drain which terminated at the Arche-Marion, a

perfectly preserved rag-picker’s basket excited the admiration of all

connoisseurs. Everywhere, the mire, which the sewermen came to handle

with intrepidity, abounded in precious objects, jewels of gold and

silver, precious stones, coins. If a giant had filtered this cesspool,

he would have had the riches of centuries in his lair. At the point

where the two branches of the Rue du Temple and of the Rue Sainte-Avoye

separate, they picked up a singular Huguenot medal in copper, bearing

on one side the pig hooded with a cardinal’s hat, and on the other, a

wolf with a tiara on his head.

The most surprising rencounter was at the entrance to the Grand Sewer.

This entrance had formerly been closed by a grating of which nothing

but the hinges remained. From one of these hinges hung a dirty and

shapeless rag which, arrested there in its passage, no doubt, had

floated there in the darkness and finished its process of being torn

apart. Bruneseau held his lantern close to this rag and examined it. It

was of very fine batiste, and in one of the corners, less frayed than

the rest, they made out a heraldic coronet and embroidered above these

seven letters: LAVBESP. The crown was the coronet of a Marquis, and the

seven letters signified \_Laubespine\_. They recognized the fact, that

what they had before their eyes was a morsel of the shroud of Marat.

Marat in his youth had had amorous intrigues. This was when he was a

member of the household of the Comte d’Artois, in the capacity of

physician to the Stables. From these love affairs, historically proved,

with a great lady, he had retained this sheet. As a waif or a souvenir.

At his death, as this was the only linen of any fineness which he had

in his house, they buried him in it. Some old women had shrouded him

for the tomb in that swaddling-band in which the tragic Friend of the

people had enjoyed voluptuousness. Bruneseau passed on. They left that

rag where it hung; they did not put the finishing touch to it. Did this

arise from scorn or from respect? Marat deserved both. And then,

destiny was there sufficiently stamped to make them hesitate to touch

it. Besides, the things of the sepulchre must be left in the spot which

they select. In short, the relic was a strange one. A Marquise had

slept in it; Marat had rotted in it; it had traversed the Pantheon to

end with the rats of the sewer. This chamber rag, of which Watteau

would formerly have joyfully sketched every fold, had ended in becoming

worthy of the fixed gaze of Dante.

The whole visit to the subterranean stream of filth of Paris lasted

seven years, from 1805 to 1812. As he proceeded, Bruneseau drew,

directed, and completed considerable works; in 1808 he lowered the arch

of the Ponceau, and, everywhere creating new lines, he pushed the

sewer, in 1809, under the Rue Saint-Denis as far as the fountain of the

Innocents; in 1810, under the Rue Froidmanteau and under the

Salpêtrière; in 1811 under the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Pères, under the

Rue du Mail, under the Rue de l’Écharpe, under the Place Royale; in

1812, under the Rue de la Paix, and under the Chaussée d’Antin. At the

same time, he had the whole network disinfected and rendered healthful.

In the second year of his work, Bruneseau engaged the assistance of his

son-in-law Nargaud.

It was thus that, at the beginning of the century, ancient society

cleansed its double bottom, and performed the toilet of its sewer.

There was that much clean, at all events.

Tortuous, cracked, unpaved, full of fissures, intersected by gullies,

jolted by eccentric elbows, mounting and descending illogically, fetid,

wild, fierce, submerged in obscurity, with cicatrices on its pavements

and scars on its walls, terrible,—such was, retrospectively viewed, the

antique sewer of Paris. Ramifications in every direction, crossings, of

trenches, branches, goose-feet, stars, as in military mines, cœcum,

blind alleys, vaults lined with saltpetre, pestiferous pools, scabby

sweats, on the walls, drops dripping from the ceilings, darkness;

nothing could equal the horror of this old, waste crypt, the digestive

apparatus of Babylon, a cavern, ditch, gulf pierced with streets, a

titanic mole-burrow, where the mind seems to behold that enormous blind

mole, the past, prowling through the shadows, in the filth which has

been splendor.

This, we repeat, was the sewer of the past.

CHAPTER V—PRESENT PROGRESS

To-day the sewer is clean, cold, straight, correct. It almost realizes

the ideal of what is understood in England by the word “respectable.”

It is proper and grayish; laid out by rule and line; one might almost

say as though it came out of a bandbox. It resembles a tradesman who

has become a councillor of state. One can almost see distinctly there.

The mire there comports itself with decency. At first, one might

readily mistake it for one of those subterranean corridors, which were

so common in former days, and so useful in flights of monarchs and

princes, in those good old times, “when the people loved their kings.”

The present sewer is a beautiful sewer; the pure style reigns there;

the classical rectilinear alexandrine which, driven out of poetry,

appears to have taken refuge in architecture, seems mingled with all

the stones of that long, dark and whitish vault; each outlet is an

arcade; the Rue de Rivoli serves as pattern even in the sewer. However,

if the geometrical line is in place anywhere, it is certainly in the

drainage trench of a great city. There, everything should be

subordinated to the shortest road. The sewer has, nowadays, assumed a

certain official aspect. The very police reports, of which it sometimes

forms the subject, no longer are wanting in respect towards it. The

words which characterize it in administrative language are sonorous and

dignified. What used to be called a gut is now called a gallery; what

used to be called a hole is now called a surveying orifice. Villon

would no longer meet with his ancient temporary provisional lodging.

This network of cellars has its immemorial population of prowlers,

rodents, swarming in greater numbers than ever; from time to time, an

aged and veteran rat risks his head at the window of the sewer and

surveys the Parisians; but even these vermin grow tame, so satisfied

are they with their subterranean palace. The cesspool no longer retains

anything of its primitive ferocity. The rain, which in former days

soiled the sewer, now washes it. Nevertheless, do not trust yourself

too much to it. Miasmas still inhabit it. It is more hypocritical than

irreproachable. The prefecture of police and the commission of health

have done their best. But, in spite of all the processes of

disinfection, it exhales, a vague, suspicious odor like Tartuffe after

confession.

Let us confess, that, taking it all in all, this sweeping is a homage

which the sewer pays to civilization, and as, from this point of view,

Tartuffe’s conscience is a progress over the Augean stables, it is

certain that the sewers of Paris have been improved.

It is more than progress; it is transmutation. Between the ancient and

the present sewer there is a revolution. What has effected this

revolution?

The man whom all the world forgets, and whom we have mentioned,

Bruneseau.

CHAPTER VI—FUTURE PROGRESS

The excavation of the sewer of Paris has been no slight task. The last

ten centuries have toiled at it without being able to bring it to a

termination, any more than they have been able to finish Paris. The

sewer, in fact, receives all the counter-shocks of the growth of Paris.

Within the bosom of the earth, it is a sort of mysterious polyp with a

thousand antennæ, which expands below as the city expands above. Every

time that the city cuts a street, the sewer stretches out an arm. The

old monarchy had constructed only twenty-three thousand three hundred

metres of sewers; that was where Paris stood in this respect on the

first of January, 1806. Beginning with this epoch, of which we shall

shortly speak, the work was usefully and energetically resumed and

prosecuted; Napoleon built—the figures are curious—four thousand eight

hundred and four metres; Louis XVIII., five thousand seven hundred and

nine; Charles X., ten thousand eight hundred and thirty-six;

Louis-Philippe, eighty-nine thousand and twenty; the Republic of 1848,

twenty-three thousand three hundred and eighty-one; the present

government, seventy thousand five hundred; in all, at the present time,

two hundred and twenty-six thousand six hundred and ten metres; sixty

leagues of sewers; the enormous entrails of Paris. An obscure

ramification ever at work; a construction which is immense and ignored.

As the reader sees, the subterranean labyrinth of Paris is to-day more

than ten times what it was at the beginning of the century. It is

difficult to form any idea of all the perseverance and the efforts

which have been required to bring this cesspool to the point of

relative perfection in which it now is. It was with great difficulty

that the ancient monarchical provostship and, during the last ten years

of the eighteenth century, the revolutionary mayoralty, had succeeded

in perforating the five leagues of sewer which existed previous to

1806. All sorts of obstacles hindered this operation, some peculiar to

the soil, others inherent in the very prejudices of the laborious

population of Paris. Paris is built upon a soil which is singularly

rebellious to the pick, the hoe, the bore, and to human manipulation.

There is nothing more difficult to pierce and to penetrate than the

geological formation upon which is superposed the marvellous historical

formation called Paris; as soon as work in any form whatsoever is begun

and adventures upon this stretch of alluvium, subterranean resistances

abound. There are liquid clays, springs, hard rocks, and those soft and

deep quagmires which special science calls \_moutardes\_.59 The pick

advances laboriously through the calcareous layers alternating with

very slender threads of clay, and schistose beds in plates incrusted

with oyster-shells, the contemporaries of the pre-Adamite oceans.

Sometimes a rivulet suddenly bursts through a vault that has been

begun, and inundates the laborers; or a layer of marl is laid bare, and

rolls down with the fury of a cataract, breaking the stoutest

supporting beams like glass. Quite recently, at Villette, when it

became necessary to pass the collecting sewer under the Saint-Martin

canal without interrupting navigation or emptying the canal, a fissure

appeared in the basin of the canal, water suddenly became abundant in

the subterranean tunnel, which was beyond the power of the pumping

engines; it was necessary to send a diver to explore the fissure which

had been made in the narrow entrance of the grand basin, and it was not

without great difficulty that it was stopped up. Elsewhere near the

Seine, and even at a considerable distance from the river, as for

instance, at Belleville, Grand-Rue and Lumière Passage, quicksands are

encountered in which one sticks fast, and in which a man sinks visibly.

Add suffocation by miasmas, burial by slides, and sudden crumbling of

the earth. Add the typhus, with which the workmen become slowly

impregnated. In our own day, after having excavated the gallery of

Clichy, with a banquette to receive the principal water-conduit of

Ourcq, a piece of work which was executed in a trench ten metres deep;

after having, in the midst of land-slides, and with the aid of

excavations often putrid, and of shoring up, vaulted the Bièvre from

the Boulevard de l’Hôpital, as far as the Seine; after having, in order

to deliver Paris from the floods of Montmartre and in order to provide

an outlet for that river-like pool nine hectares in extent, which

crouched near the Barrière des Martyrs, after having, let us state,

constructed the line of sewers from the Barrière Blanche to the road of

Aubervilliers, in four months, working day and night, at a depth of

eleven metres; after having—a thing heretofore unseen—made a

subterranean sewer in the Rue Barre-du-Bec, without a trench, six

metres below the surface, the superintendent, Monnot, died. After

having vaulted three thousand metres of sewer in all quarters of the

city, from the Rue Traversière-Saint-Antoine to the Rue de l’Ourcine,

after having freed the Carrefour Censier-Mouffetard from inundations of

rain by means of the branch of the Arbalète, after having built the

Saint-Georges sewer, on rock and concrete in the fluid sands, after

having directed the formidable lowering of the flooring of the vault

timber in the Notre-Dame-de-Nazareth branch, Duleau the engineer died.

There are no bulletins for such acts of bravery as these, which are

more useful, nevertheless, than the brutal slaughter of the field of

battle.

The sewers of Paris in 1832 were far from being what they are to-day.

Bruneseau had given the impulse, but the cholera was required to bring

about the vast reconstruction which took place later on. It is

surprising to say, for example, that in 1821, a part of the belt sewer,

called the Grand Canal, as in Venice, still stood stagnating uncovered

to the sky, in the Rue des Gourdes. It was only in 1821 that the city

of Paris found in its pocket the two hundred and sixty-thousand eighty

francs and six centimes required for covering this mass of filth. The

three absorbing wells, of the Combat, the Cunette, and Saint-Mandé,

with their discharging mouths, their apparatus, their cesspools, and

their depuratory branches, only date from 1836. The intestinal sewer of

Paris has been made over anew, and, as we have said, it has been

extended more than tenfold within the last quarter of a century.

Thirty years ago, at the epoch of the insurrection of the 5th and 6th

of June, it was still, in many localities, nearly the same ancient

sewer. A very great number of streets which are now convex were then

sunken causeways. At the end of a slope, where the tributaries of a

street or crossroads ended, there were often to be seen large, square

gratings with heavy bars, whose iron, polished by the footsteps of the

throng, gleamed dangerous and slippery for vehicles, and caused horses

to fall. The official language of the Roads and Bridges gave to these

gratings the expressive name of \_Cassis\_.60

In 1832, in a number of streets, in the Rue de l’Étoile, the Rue

Saint-Louis, the Rue du Temple, the Rue Vieille-du-Temple, the Rue

Notre-Dame de Nazareth, the Rue Folie-Méricourt, the Quai aux Fleurs,

the Rue du Petit-Musc, the Rue du Normandie, the Rue Pont-Aux-Biches,

the Rue des Marais, the Faubourg Saint-Martin, the Rue Notre Dame

des-Victoires, the Faubourg Montmartre, the Rue Grange-Batelière, in

the Champs-Élysées, the Rue Jacob, the Rue de Tournon, the ancient

gothic sewer still cynically displayed its maw. It consisted of

enormous voids of stone catch-basins sometimes surrounded by stone

posts, with monumental effrontery.

Paris in 1806 still had nearly the same sewers numerically as stated in

1663; five thousand three hundred fathoms. After Bruneseau, on the 1st

of January, 1832, it had forty thousand three hundred metres. Between

1806 and 1831, there had been built, on an average, seven hundred and

fifty metres annually, afterwards eight and even ten thousand metres of

galleries were constructed every year, in masonry, of small stones,

with hydraulic mortar which hardens under water, on a cement

foundation. At two hundred francs the metre, the sixty leagues of

Paris’ sewers of the present day represent forty-eight millions.

In addition to the economic progress which we have indicated at the

beginning, grave problems of public hygiene are connected with that

immense question: the sewers of Paris.

Paris is the centre of two sheets, a sheet of water and a sheet of air.

The sheet of water, lying at a tolerably great depth underground, but

already sounded by two bores, is furnished by the layer of green clay

situated between the chalk and the Jurassic lime-stone; this layer may

be represented by a disk five and twenty leagues in circumference; a

multitude of rivers and brooks ooze there; one drinks the Seine, the

Marne, the Yonne, the Oise, the Aisne, the Cher, the Vienne and the

Loire in a glass of water from the well of Grenelle. The sheet of water

is healthy, it comes from heaven in the first place and next from the

earth; the sheet of air is unhealthy, it comes from the sewer. All the

miasms of the cesspool are mingled with the breath of the city; hence

this bad breath. The air taken from above a dung-heap, as has been

scientifically proved, is purer than the air taken from above Paris. In

a given time, with the aid of progress, mechanisms become perfected,

and as light increases, the sheet of water will be employed to purify

the sheet of air; that is to say, to wash the sewer. The reader knows,

that by “washing the sewer” we mean: the restitution of the filth to

the earth; the return to the soil of dung and of manure to the fields.

Through this simple act, the entire social community will experience a

diminution of misery and an augmentation of health. At the present

hour, the radiation of diseases from Paris extends to fifty leagues

around the Louvre, taken as the hub of this pestilential wheel.

We might say that, for ten centuries, the cesspool has been the disease

of Paris. The sewer is the blemish which Paris has in her blood. The

popular instinct has never been deceived in it. The occupation of

sewermen was formerly almost as perilous, and almost as repugnant to

the people, as the occupation of knacker, which was so long held in

horror and handed over to the executioner. High wages were necessary to

induce a mason to disappear in that fetid mine; the ladder of the

cesspool cleaner hesitated to plunge into it; it was said, in

proverbial form: “to descend into the sewer is to enter the grave;” and

all sorts of hideous legends, as we have said, covered this colossal

sink with terror; a dread sink-hole which bears the traces of the

revolutions of the globe as of the revolutions of man, and where are to

be found vestiges of all cataclysms from the shells of the Deluge to

the rag of Marat.

BOOK THIRD—MUD BUT THE SOUL

CHAPTER I—THE SEWER AND ITS SURPRISES

It was in the sewers of Paris that Jean Valjean found himself.

Still another resemblance between Paris and the sea. As in the ocean,

the diver may disappear there.

The transition was an unheard-of one. In the very heart of the city,

Jean Valjean had escaped from the city, and, in the twinkling of an

eye, in the time required to lift the cover and to replace it, he had

passed from broad daylight to complete obscurity, from midday to

midnight, from tumult to silence, from the whirlwind of thunders to the

stagnation of the tomb, and, by a vicissitude far more tremendous even

than that of the Rue Polonceau, from the most extreme peril to the most

absolute obscurity.

An abrupt fall into a cavern; a disappearance into the secret trap-door

of Paris; to quit that street where death was on every side, for that

sort of sepulchre where there was life, was a strange instant. He

remained for several seconds as though bewildered; listening,

stupefied. The waste-trap of safety had suddenly yawned beneath him.

Celestial goodness had, in a manner, captured him by treachery.

Adorable ambuscades of providence!

Only, the wounded man did not stir, and Jean Valjean did not know

whether that which he was carrying in that grave was a living being or

a dead corpse.

His first sensation was one of blindness. All of a sudden, he could see

nothing. It seemed to him too, that, in one instant, he had become

deaf. He no longer heard anything. The frantic storm of murder which

had been let loose a few feet above his head did not reach him, thanks

to the thickness of the earth which separated him from it, as we have

said, otherwise than faintly and indistinctly, and like a rumbling, in

the depths. He felt that the ground was solid under his feet; that was

all; but that was enough. He extended one arm and then the other,

touched the walls on both sides, and perceived that the passage was

narrow; he slipped, and thus perceived that the pavement was wet. He

cautiously put forward one foot, fearing a hole, a sink, some gulf; he

discovered that the paving continued. A gust of fetidness informed him

of the place in which he stood.

After the lapse of a few minutes, he was no longer blind. A little

light fell through the man-hole through which he had descended, and his

eyes became accustomed to this cavern. He began to distinguish

something. The passage in which he had burrowed—no other word can

better express the situation—was walled in behind him. It was one of

those blind alleys, which the special jargon terms branches. In front

of him there was another wall, a wall like night. The light of the

air-hole died out ten or twelve paces from the point where Jean Valjean

stood, and barely cast a wan pallor on a few metres of the damp walls

of the sewer. Beyond, the opaqueness was massive; to penetrate thither

seemed horrible, an entrance into it appeared like an engulfment. A man

could, however, plunge into that wall of fog and it was necessary so to

do. Haste was even requisite. It occurred to Jean Valjean that the

grating which he had caught sight of under the flag-stones might also

catch the eye of the soldiery, and that everything hung upon this

chance. They also might descend into that well and search it. There was

not a minute to be lost. He had deposited Marius on the ground, he

picked him up again,—that is the real word for it,—placed him on his

shoulders once more, and set out. He plunged resolutely into the gloom.

The truth is, that they were less safe than Jean Valjean fancied.

Perils of another sort and no less serious were awaiting them,

perchance. After the lightning-charged whirlwind of the combat, the

cavern of miasmas and traps; after chaos, the sewer. Jean Valjean had

fallen from one circle of hell into another.

When he had advanced fifty paces, he was obliged to halt. A problem

presented itself. The passage terminated in another gut which he

encountered across his path. There two ways presented themselves. Which

should he take? Ought he to turn to the left or to the right? How was

he to find his bearings in that black labyrinth? This labyrinth, to

which we have already called the reader’s attention, has a clue, which

is its slope. To follow to the slope is to arrive at the river.

This Jean Valjean instantly comprehended.

He said to himself that he was probably in the sewer des Halles; that

if he were to choose the path to the left and follow the slope, he

would arrive, in less than a quarter of an hour, at some mouth on the

Seine between the Pont au Change and the Pont-Neuf, that is to say, he

would make his appearance in broad daylight on the most densely peopled

spot in Paris. Perhaps he would come out on some man-hole at the

intersection of streets. Amazement of the passers-by at beholding two

bleeding men emerge from the earth at their feet. Arrival of the

police, a call to arms of the neighboring post of guards. Thus they

would be seized before they had even got out. It would be better to

plunge into that labyrinth, to confide themselves to that black gloom,

and to trust to Providence for the outcome.

He ascended the incline, and turned to the right.

When he had turned the angle of the gallery, the distant glimmer of an

air-hole disappeared, the curtain of obscurity fell upon him once more,

and he became blind again. Nevertheless, he advanced as rapidly as

possible. Marius’ two arms were passed round his neck, and the former’s

feet dragged behind him. He held both these arms with one hand, and

groped along the wall with the other. Marius’ cheek touched his, and

clung there, bleeding. He felt a warm stream which came from Marius

trickling down upon him and making its way under his clothes. But a

humid warmth near his ear, which the mouth of the wounded man touched,

indicated respiration, and consequently, life. The passage along which

Jean Valjean was now proceeding was not so narrow as the first. Jean

Valjean walked through it with considerable difficulty. The rain of the

preceding day had not, as yet, entirely run off, and it created a

little torrent in the centre of the bottom, and he was forced to hug

the wall in order not to have his feet in the water.

Thus he proceeded in the gloom. He resembled the beings of the night

groping in the invisible and lost beneath the earth in veins of shadow.

Still, little by little, whether it was that the distant air-holes

emitted a little wavering light in this opaque gloom, or whether his

eyes had become accustomed to the obscurity, some vague vision returned

to him, and he began once more to gain a confused idea, now of the wall

which he touched, now of the vault beneath which he was passing. The

pupil dilates in the dark, and the soul dilates in misfortune and ends

by finding God there.

It was not easy to direct his course.

The line of the sewer re-echoes, so to speak, the line of the streets

which lie above it. There were then in Paris two thousand two hundred

streets. Let the reader imagine himself beneath that forest of gloomy

branches which is called the sewer. The system of sewers existing at

that epoch, placed end to end, would have given a length of eleven

leagues. We have said above, that the actual network, thanks to the

special activity of the last thirty years, was no less than sixty

leagues in extent.

Jean Valjean began by committing a blunder. He thought that he was

beneath the Rue Saint-Denis, and it was a pity that it was not so.

Under the Rue Saint-Denis there is an old stone sewer which dates from

Louis XIII. and which runs straight to the collecting sewer, called the

Grand Sewer, with but a single elbow, on the right, on the elevation of

the ancient Cour des Miracles, and a single branch, the Saint-Martin

sewer, whose four arms describe a cross. But the gut of the

Petite-Truanderie the entrance to which was in the vicinity of the

Corinthe wine-shop has never communicated with the sewer of the Rue

Saint-Denis; it ended at the Montmartre sewer, and it was in this that

Jean Valjean was entangled. There opportunities of losing oneself

abound. The Montmartre sewer is one of the most labyrinthine of the

ancient network. Fortunately, Jean Valjean had left behind him the

sewer of the markets whose geometrical plan presents the appearance of

a multitude of parrots’ roosts piled on top of each other; but he had

before him more than one embarrassing encounter and more than one

street corner—for they are streets—presenting itself in the gloom like

an interrogation point; first, on his left, the vast sewer of the

Plâtrière, a sort of Chinese puzzle, thrusting out and entangling its

chaos of Ts and Zs under the Post-Office and under the rotunda of the

Wheat Market, as far as the Seine, where it terminates in a Y;

secondly, on his right, the curving corridor of the Rue du Cadran with

its three teeth, which are also blind courts; thirdly, on his left, the

branch of the Mail, complicated, almost at its inception, with a sort

of fork, and proceeding from zig-zag to zig-zag until it ends in the

grand crypt of the outlet of the Louvre, truncated and ramified in

every direction; and lastly, the blind alley of a passage of the Rue

des Jeûneurs, without counting little ducts here and there, before

reaching the belt sewer, which alone could conduct him to some issue

sufficiently distant to be safe.

Had Jean Valjean had any idea of all that we have here pointed out, he

would speedily have perceived, merely by feeling the wall, that he was

not in the subterranean gallery of the Rue Saint-Denis. Instead of the

ancient stone, instead of the antique architecture, haughty and royal

even in the sewer, with pavement and string courses of granite and

mortar costing eight hundred livres the fathom, he would have felt

under his hand contemporary cheapness, economical expedients, porous

stone filled with mortar on a concrete foundation, which costs two

hundred francs the metre, and the bourgeoise masonry known as \_à petits

matériaux\_—small stuff; but of all this he knew nothing.

He advanced with anxiety, but with calmness, seeing nothing, knowing

nothing, buried in chance, that is to say, engulfed in providence.

By degrees, we will admit, a certain horror seized upon him. The gloom

which enveloped him penetrated his spirit. He walked in an enigma. This

aqueduct of the sewer is formidable; it interlaces in a dizzy fashion.

It is a melancholy thing to be caught in this Paris of shadows. Jean

Valjean was obliged to find and even to invent his route without seeing

it. In this unknown, every step that he risked might be his last. How

was he to get out? should he find an issue? should he find it in time?

would that colossal subterranean sponge with its stone cavities, allow

itself to be penetrated and pierced? should he there encounter some

unexpected knot in the darkness? should he arrive at the inextricable

and the impassable? would Marius die there of hemorrhage and he of

hunger? should they end by both getting lost, and by furnishing two

skeletons in a nook of that night? He did not know. He put all these

questions to himself without replying to them. The intestines of Paris

form a precipice. Like the prophet, he was in the belly of the monster.

All at once, he had a surprise. At the most unforeseen moment, and

without having ceased to walk in a straight line, he perceived that he

was no longer ascending; the water of the rivulet was beating against

his heels, instead of meeting him at his toes. The sewer was now

descending. Why? Was he about to arrive suddenly at the Seine? This

danger was a great one, but the peril of retreating was still greater.

He continued to advance.

It was not towards the Seine that he was proceeding. The ridge which

the soil of Paris forms on its right bank empties one of its watersheds

into the Seine and the other into the Grand Sewer. The crest of this

ridge which determines the division of the waters describes a very

capricious line. The culminating point, which is the point of

separation of the currents, is in the Sainte-Avoye sewer, beyond the

Rue Michel-le-Comte, in the sewer of the Louvre, near the boulevards,

and in the Montmartre sewer, near the Halles. It was this culminating

point that Jean Valjean had reached. He was directing his course

towards the belt sewer; he was on the right path. But he did not know

it.

Every time that he encountered a branch, he felt of its angles, and if

he found that the opening which presented itself was smaller than the

passage in which he was, he did not enter but continued his route,

rightly judging that every narrower way must needs terminate in a blind

alley, and could only lead him further from his goal, that is to say,

the outlet. Thus he avoided the quadruple trap which was set for him in

the darkness by the four labyrinths which we have just enumerated.

At a certain moment, he perceived that he was emerging from beneath the

Paris which was petrified by the uprising, where the barricades had

suppressed circulation, and that he was entering beneath the living and

normal Paris. Overhead he suddenly heard a noise as of thunder, distant

but continuous. It was the rumbling of vehicles.

He had been walking for about half an hour, at least according to the

calculation which he made in his own mind, and he had not yet thought

of rest; he had merely changed the hand with which he was holding

Marius. The darkness was more profound than ever, but its very depth

reassured him.

All at once, he saw his shadow in front of him. It was outlined on a

faint, almost indistinct reddish glow, which vaguely empurpled the

flooring vault underfoot, and the vault overhead, and gilded to his

right and to his left the two viscous walls of the passage. Stupefied,

he turned round.

Behind him, in the portion of the passage which he had just passed

through, at a distance which appeared to him immense, piercing the

dense obscurity, flamed a sort of horrible star which had the air of

surveying him.

It was the gloomy star of the police which was rising in the sewer.

In the rear of that star eight or ten forms were moving about in a

confused way, black, upright, indistinct, horrible.

CHAPTER II—EXPLANATION

On the day of the sixth of June, a battue of the sewers had been

ordered. It was feared that the vanquished might have taken to them for

refuge, and Prefect Gisquet was to search occult Paris while General

Bugeaud swept public Paris; a double and connected operation which

exacted a double strategy on the part of the public force, represented

above by the army and below by the police. Three squads of agents and

sewermen explored the subterranean drain of Paris, the first on the

right bank, the second on the left bank, the third in the city. The

agents of police were armed with carabines, with bludgeons, swords and

poignards.

That which was directed at Jean Valjean at that moment, was the lantern

of the patrol of the right bank.

This patrol had just visited the curving gallery and the three blind

alleys which lie beneath the Rue du Cadran. While they were passing

their lantern through the depths of these blind alleys, Jean Valjean

had encountered on his path the entrance to the gallery, had perceived

that it was narrower than the principal passage and had not penetrated

thither. He had passed on. The police, on emerging from the gallery du

Cadran, had fancied that they heard the sound of footsteps in the

direction of the belt sewer. They were, in fact, the steps of Jean

Valjean. The sergeant in command of the patrol had raised his lantern,

and the squad had begun to gaze into the mist in the direction whence

the sound proceeded.

This was an indescribable moment for Jean Valjean.

Happily, if he saw the lantern well, the lantern saw him but ill. It

was light and he was shadow. He was very far off, and mingled with the

darkness of the place. He hugged the wall and halted. Moreover, he did

not understand what it was that was moving behind him. The lack of

sleep and food, and his emotions had caused him also to pass into the

state of a visionary. He beheld a gleam, and around that gleam, forms.

What was it? He did not comprehend.

Jean Valjean having paused, the sound ceased.

The men of the patrol listened, and heard nothing, they looked and saw

nothing. They held a consultation.

There existed at that epoch at this point of the Montmartre sewer a

sort of crossroads called \_de service\_, which was afterwards

suppressed, on account of the little interior lake which formed there,

swallowing up the torrent of rain in heavy storms. The patrol could

form a cluster in this open space. Jean Valjean saw these spectres form

a sort of circle. These bull-dogs’ heads approached each other closely

and whispered together.

The result of this council held by the watch dogs was, that they had

been mistaken, that there had been no noise, that it was useless to get

entangled in the belt sewer, that it would only be a waste of time, but

that they ought to hasten towards Saint-Merry; that if there was

anything to do, and any “bousingot” to track out, it was in that

quarter.

From time to time, parties re-sole their old insults. In 1832, the word

bousingot formed the interim between the word jacobin, which had become

obsolete, and the word demagogue which has since rendered such

excellent service.

The sergeant gave orders to turn to the left, towards the watershed of

the Seine.

If it had occurred to them to separate into two squads, and to go in

both directions, Jean Valjean would have been captured. All hung on

that thread. It is probable that the instructions of the prefecture,

foreseeing a possibility of combat and insurgents in force, had

forbidden the patrol to part company. The patrol resumed its march,

leaving Jean Valjean behind it. Of all this movement, Jean Valjean

perceived nothing, except the eclipse of the lantern which suddenly

wheeled round.

Before taking his departure, the sergeant, in order to acquit his

policeman’s conscience, discharged his gun in the direction of Jean

Valjean. The detonation rolled from echo to echo in the crypt, like the

rumbling of that titanic entrail. A bit of plaster which fell into the

stream and splashed up the water a few paces away from Jean Valjean,

warned him that the ball had struck the arch over his head.

Slow and measured steps resounded for some time on the timber work,

gradually dying away as they retreated to a greater distance; the group

of black forms vanished, a glimmer of light oscillated and floated,

communicating to the vault a reddish glow which grew fainter, then

disappeared; the silence became profound once more, the obscurity

became complete, blindness and deafness resumed possession of the

shadows; and Jean Valjean, not daring to stir as yet, remained for a

long time leaning with his back against the wall, with straining ears,

and dilated pupils, watching the disappearance of that phantom patrol.

CHAPTER III—THE “SPUN” MAN

This justice must be rendered to the police of that period, that even

in the most serious public junctures, it imperturbably fulfilled its

duties connected with the sewers and surveillance. A revolt was, in its

eyes, no pretext for allowing malefactors to take the bit in their own

mouths, and for neglecting society for the reason that the government

was in peril. The ordinary service was performed correctly in company

with the extraordinary service, and was not troubled by the latter. In

the midst of an incalculable political event already begun, under the

pressure of a possible revolution, a police agent, “spun” a thief

without allowing himself to be distracted by insurrection and

barricades.

It was something precisely parallel which took place on the afternoon

of the 6th of June on the banks of the Seine, on the slope of the right

shore, a little beyond the Pont des Invalides.

There is no longer any bank there now. The aspect of the locality has

changed.

On that bank, two men, separated by a certain distance, seemed to be

watching each other while mutually avoiding each other. The one who was

in advance was trying to get away, the one in the rear was trying to

overtake the other.

It was like a game of checkers played at a distance and in silence.

Neither seemed to be in any hurry, and both walked slowly, as though

each of them feared by too much haste to make his partner redouble his

pace.

One would have said that it was an appetite following its prey, and

purposely without wearing the air of doing so. The prey was crafty and

on its guard.

The proper relations between the hunted pole-cat and the hunting dog

were observed. The one who was seeking to escape had an insignificant

mien and not an impressive appearance; the one who was seeking to seize

him was rude of aspect, and must have been rude to encounter.

The first, conscious that he was the more feeble, avoided the second;

but he avoided him in a manner which was deeply furious; any one who

could have observed him would have discerned in his eyes the sombre

hostility of flight, and all the menace that fear contains.

The shore was deserted; there were no passers-by; not even a boatman

nor a lighter-man was in the skiffs which were moored here and there.

It was not easy to see these two men, except from the quay opposite,

and to any person who had scrutinized them at that distance, the man

who was in advance would have appeared like a bristling, tattered, and

equivocal being, who was uneasy and trembling beneath a ragged blouse,

and the other like a classic and official personage, wearing the

frock-coat of authority buttoned to the chin.

Perchance the reader might recognize these two men, if he were to see

them closer at hand.

What was the object of the second man?

Probably to succeed in clothing the first more warmly.

When a man clothed by the state pursues a man in rags, it is in order

to make of him a man who is also clothed by the state. Only, the whole

question lies in the color. To be dressed in blue is glorious; to be

dressed in red is disagreeable.

There is a purple from below.

It is probably some unpleasantness and some purple of this sort which

the first man is desirous of shirking.

If the other allowed him to walk on, and had not seized him as yet, it

was, judging from all appearances, in the hope of seeing him lead up to

some significant meeting-place and to some group worth catching. This

delicate operation is called “spinning.”

What renders this conjecture entirely probable is that the buttoned-up

man, on catching sight from the shore of a hackney-coach on the quay as

it was passing along empty, made a sign to the driver; the driver

understood, evidently recognized the person with whom he had to deal,

turned about and began to follow the two men at the top of the quay, at

a foot-pace. This was not observed by the slouching and tattered

personage who was in advance.

The hackney-coach rolled along the trees of the Champs-Élysées. The

bust of the driver, whip in hand, could be seen moving along above the

parapet.

One of the secret instructions of the police authorities to their

agents contains this article: “Always have on hand a hackney-coach, in

case of emergency.”

While these two men were manœuvring, each on his own side, with

irreproachable strategy, they approached an inclined plane on the quay

which descended to the shore, and which permitted cab-drivers arriving

from Passy to come to the river and water their horses. This inclined

plane was suppressed later on, for the sake of symmetry; horses may die

of thirst, but the eye is gratified.

It is probable that the man in the blouse had intended to ascend this

inclined plane, with a view to making his escape into the

Champs-Élysées, a place ornamented with trees, but, in return, much

infested with policemen, and where the other could easily exercise

violence.

This point on the quay is not very far distant from the house brought

to Paris from Moret in 1824, by Colonel Brack, and designated as “the

house of François I.” A guard house is situated close at hand.

To the great surprise of his watcher, the man who was being tracked did

not mount by the inclined plane for watering. He continued to advance

along the quay on the shore.

His position was visibly becoming critical.

What was he intending to do, if not to throw himself into the Seine?

Henceforth, there existed no means of ascending to the quay; there was

no other inclined plane, no staircase; and they were near the spot,

marked by the bend in the Seine towards the Pont de Jéna, where the

bank, growing constantly narrower, ended in a slender tongue, and was

lost in the water. There he would inevitably find himself blocked

between the perpendicular wall on his right, the river on his left and

in front of him, and the authorities on his heels.

It is true that this termination of the shore was hidden from sight by

a heap of rubbish six or seven feet in height, produced by some

demolition or other. But did this man hope to conceal himself

effectually behind that heap of rubbish, which one need but skirt? The

expedient would have been puerile. He certainly was not dreaming of

such a thing. The innocence of thieves does not extend to that point.

The pile of rubbish formed a sort of projection at the water’s edge,

which was prolonged in a promontory as far as the wall of the quay.

The man who was being followed arrived at this little mound and went

round it, so that he ceased to be seen by the other.

The latter, as he did not see, could not be seen; he took advantage of

this fact to abandon all dissimulation and to walk very rapidly. In a

few moments, he had reached the rubbish heap and passed round it. There

he halted in sheer amazement. The man whom he had been pursuing was no

longer there.

Total eclipse of the man in the blouse.

The shore, beginning with the rubbish heap, was only about thirty paces

long, then it plunged into the water which beat against the wall of the

quay. The fugitive could not have thrown himself into the Seine without

being seen by the man who was following him. What had become of him?

The man in the buttoned-up coat walked to the extremity of the shore,

and remained there in thought for a moment, his fists clenched, his

eyes searching. All at once he smote his brow. He had just perceived,

at the point where the land came to an end and the water began, a large

iron grating, low, arched, garnished with a heavy lock and with three

massive hinges. This grating, a sort of door pierced at the base of the

quay, opened on the river as well as on the shore. A blackish stream

passed under it. This stream discharged into the Seine.

Beyond the heavy, rusty iron bars, a sort of dark and vaulted corridor

could be descried. The man folded his arms and stared at the grating

with an air of reproach.

As this gaze did not suffice, he tried to thrust it aside; he shook it,

it resisted solidly. It is probable that it had just been opened,

although no sound had been heard, a singular circumstance in so rusty a

grating; but it is certain that it had been closed again. This

indicated that the man before whom that door had just opened had not a

hook but a key.

This evidence suddenly burst upon the mind of the man who was trying to

move the grating, and evoked from him this indignant ejaculation:

“That is too much! A government key!”

Then, immediately regaining his composure, he expressed a whole world

of interior ideas by this outburst of monosyllables accented almost

ironically: “Come! Come! Come! Come!”

That said, and in the hope of something or other, either that he should

see the man emerge or other men enter, he posted himself on the watch

behind a heap of rubbish, with the patient rage of a pointer.

The hackney-coach, which regulated all its movements on his, had, in

its turn, halted on the quay above him, close to the parapet. The

coachman, foreseeing a prolonged wait, encased his horses’ muzzles in

the bag of oats which is damp at the bottom, and which is so familiar

to Parisians, to whom, be it said in parenthesis, the Government

sometimes applies it. The rare passers-by on the Pont de Jéna turned

their heads, before they pursued their way, to take a momentary glance

at these two motionless items in the landscape, the man on the shore,

the carriage on the quay.

CHAPTER IV—HE ALSO BEARS HIS CROSS

Jean Valjean had resumed his march and had not again paused.

This march became more and more laborious. The level of these vaults

varies; the average height is about five feet, six inches, and has been

calculated for the stature of a man; Jean Valjean was forced to bend

over, in order not to strike Marius against the vault; at every step he

had to bend, then to rise, and to feel incessantly of the wall. The

moisture of the stones, and the viscous nature of the timber framework

furnished but poor supports to which to cling, either for hand or foot.

He stumbled along in the hideous dung-heap of the city. The

intermittent gleams from the air-holes only appeared at very long

intervals, and were so wan that the full sunlight seemed like the light

of the moon; all the rest was mist, miasma, opaqueness, blackness. Jean

Valjean was both hungry and thirsty; especially thirsty; and this, like

the sea, was a place full of water where a man cannot drink. His

strength, which was prodigious, as the reader knows, and which had been

but little decreased by age, thanks to his chaste and sober life, began

to give way, nevertheless. Fatigue began to gain on him; and as his

strength decreased, it made the weight of his burden increase. Marius,

who was, perhaps, dead, weighed him down as inert bodies weigh. Jean

Valjean held him in such a manner that his chest was not oppressed, and

so that respiration could proceed as well as possible. Between his legs

he felt the rapid gliding of the rats. One of them was frightened to

such a degree that he bit him. From time to time, a breath of fresh air

reached him through the vent-holes of the mouths of the sewer, and

reanimated him.

It might have been three hours past midday when he reached the

belt-sewer.

He was, at first, astonished at this sudden widening. He found himself,

all at once, in a gallery where his outstretched hands could not reach

the two walls, and beneath a vault which his head did not touch. The

Grand Sewer is, in fact, eight feet wide and seven feet high.

At the point where the Montmartre sewer joins the Grand Sewer, two

other subterranean galleries, that of the Rue de Provence, and that of

the Abattoir, form a square. Between these four ways, a less sagacious

man would have remained undecided. Jean Valjean selected the broadest,

that is to say, the belt-sewer. But here the question again came

up—should he descend or ascend? He thought that the situation required

haste, and that he must now gain the Seine at any risk. In other terms,

he must descend. He turned to the left.

It was well that he did so, for it is an error to suppose that the

belt-sewer has two outlets, the one in the direction of Bercy, the

other towards Passy, and that it is, as its name indicates, the

subterranean girdle of the Paris on the right bank. The Grand Sewer,

which is, it must be remembered, nothing else than the old brook of

Ménilmontant, terminates, if one ascends it, in a blind sack, that is

to say, at its ancient point of departure which was its source, at the

foot of the knoll of Ménilmontant. There is no direct communication

with the branch which collects the waters of Paris beginning with the

Quartier Popincourt, and which falls into the Seine through the Amelot

sewer above the ancient Isle Louviers. This branch, which completes the

collecting sewer, is separated from it, under the Rue Ménilmontant

itself, by a pile which marks the dividing point of the waters, between

upstream and downstream. If Jean Valjean had ascended the gallery he

would have arrived, after a thousand efforts, and broken down with

fatigue, and in an expiring condition, in the gloom, at a wall. He

would have been lost.

In case of necessity, by retracing his steps a little way, and entering

the passage of the Filles-du-Calvaire, on condition that he did not

hesitate at the subterranean crossing of the Carrefour Boucherat, and

by taking the corridor Saint-Louis, then the Saint-Gilles gut on the

left, then turning to the right and avoiding the Saint-Sebastian

gallery, he might have reached the Amelot sewer, and thence, provided

that he did not go astray in the sort of F which lies under the

Bastille, he might have attained the outlet on the Seine near the

Arsenal. But in order to do this, he must have been thoroughly familiar

with the enormous madrepore of the sewer in all its ramifications and

in all its openings. Now, we must again insist that he knew nothing of

that frightful drain which he was traversing; and had any one asked him

in what he was, he would have answered: “In the night.”

His instinct served him well. To descend was, in fact, possible safety.

He left on his right the two narrow passages which branch out in the

form of a claw under the Rue Laffitte and the Rue Saint-Georges and the

long, bifurcated corridor of the Chaussée d’Antin.

A little beyond an affluent, which was, probably, the Madeleine branch,

he halted. He was extremely weary. A passably large air-hole, probably

the man-hole in the Rue d’Anjou, furnished a light that was almost

vivid. Jean Valjean, with the gentleness of movement which a brother

would exercise towards his wounded brother, deposited Marius on the

banquette of the sewer. Marius’ blood-stained face appeared under the

wan light of the air-hole like the ashes at the bottom of a tomb. His

eyes were closed, his hair was plastered down on his temples like a

painter’s brushes dried in red wash; his hands hung limp and dead. A

clot of blood had collected in the knot of his cravat; his limbs were

cold, and blood was clotted at the corners of his mouth; his shirt had

thrust itself into his wounds, the cloth of his coat was chafing the

yawning gashes in the living flesh. Jean Valjean, pushing aside the

garments with the tips of his fingers, laid his hand upon Marius’

breast; his heart was still beating. Jean Valjean tore up his shirt,

bandaged the young man’s wounds as well as he was able and stopped the

flowing blood; then bending over Marius, who still lay unconscious and

almost without breathing, in that half light, he gazed at him with

inexpressible hatred.

On disarranging Marius’ garments, he had found two things in his

pockets, the roll which had been forgotten there on the preceding

evening, and Marius’ pocketbook. He ate the roll and opened the

pocketbook. On the first page he found the four lines written by

Marius. The reader will recall them:

“My name is Marius Pontmercy. Carry my body to my grandfather, M.

Gillenormand, Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, No. 6, in the Marais.”

Jean Valjean read these four lines by the light of the air-hole, and

remained for a moment as though absorbed in thought, repeating in a low

tone: “Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, number 6, Monsieur Gillenormand.” He

replaced the pocketbook in Marius’ pocket. He had eaten, his strength

had returned to him; he took Marius up once more upon his back, placed

the latter’s head carefully on his right shoulder, and resumed his

descent of the sewer.

The Grand Sewer, directed according to the course of the valley of

Ménilmontant, is about two leagues long. It is paved throughout a

notable portion of its extent.

This torch of the names of the streets of Paris, with which we are

illuminating for the reader Jean Valjean’s subterranean march, Jean

Valjean himself did not possess. Nothing told him what zone of the city

he was traversing, nor what way he had made. Only the growing pallor of

the pools of light which he encountered from time to time indicated to

him that the sun was withdrawing from the pavement, and that the day

would soon be over; and the rolling of vehicles overhead, having become

intermittent instead of continuous, then having almost ceased, he

concluded that he was no longer under central Paris, and that he was

approaching some solitary region, in the vicinity of the outer

boulevards, or the extreme outer quays. Where there are fewer houses

and streets, the sewer has fewer air-holes. The gloom deepened around

Jean Valjean. Nevertheless, he continued to advance, groping his way in

the dark.

Suddenly this darkness became terrible.

CHAPTER V—IN THE CASE OF SAND AS IN THAT OF WOMAN, THERE IS A FINENESS

WHICH IS TREACHEROUS

He felt that he was entering the water, and that he no longer had a

pavement under his feet, but only mud.

It sometimes happens, that on certain shores of Bretagne or Scotland a

man, either a traveller or a fisherman, while walking at low tide on

the beach far from shore, suddenly notices that for several minutes

past, he has been walking with some difficulty. The beach under foot is

like pitch; his soles stick fast to it; it is no longer sand, it is

bird-lime. The strand is perfectly dry, but at every step that he

takes, as soon as the foot is raised, the print is filled with water.

The eye, however, has perceived no change; the immense beach is smooth

and tranquil, all the sand has the same aspect, nothing distinguishes

the soil that is solid from that which is not solid; the joyous little

cloud of sand-lice continues to leap tumultuously under the feet of the

passer-by.

The man pursues his way, he walks on, turns towards the land, endeavors

to approach the shore. He is not uneasy. Uneasy about what? Only he is

conscious that the heaviness of his feet seems to be increasing at

every step that he takes. All at once he sinks in. He sinks in two or

three inches. Decidedly, he is not on the right road; he halts to get

his bearings. Suddenly he glances at his feet; his feet have

disappeared. The sand has covered them. He draws his feet out of the

sand, he tries to retrace his steps, he turns back, he sinks in more

deeply than before. The sand is up to his ankles, he tears himself free

from it and flings himself to the left, the sand reaches to mid-leg, he

flings himself to the right, the sand comes up to his knees. Then, with

indescribable terror, he recognizes the fact that he is caught in a

quicksand, and that he has beneath him that frightful medium in which

neither man can walk nor fish can swim. He flings away his burden, if

he have one, he lightens himself, like a ship in distress; it is too

late, the sand is above his knees.

He shouts, he waves his hat, or his handkerchief, the sand continually

gains on him; if the beach is deserted, if the land is too far away, if

the bank of sand is too ill-famed, there is no hero in the

neighborhood, all is over, he is condemned to be engulfed. He is

condemned to that terrible interment, long, infallible, implacable,

which it is impossible to either retard or hasten, which lasts for

hours, which will not come to an end, which seizes you erect, free, in

the flush of health, which drags you down by the feet, which, at every

effort that you attempt, at every shout that you utter, draws you a

little lower, which has the air of punishing you for your resistance by

a redoubled grasp, which forces a man to return slowly to earth, while

leaving him time to survey the horizon, the trees, the verdant country,

the smoke of the villages on the plain, the sails of the ships on the

sea, the birds which fly and sing, the sun and the sky. This engulfment

is the sepulchre which assumes a tide, and which mounts from the depths

of the earth towards a living man. Each minute is an inexorable

layer-out of the dead. The wretched man tries to sit down, to lie down,

to climb; every movement that he makes buries him deeper; he

straightens himself up, he sinks; he feels that he is being swallowed

up; he shrieks, implores, cries to the clouds, wrings his hands, grows

desperate. Behold him in the sand up to his belly, the sand reaches to

his breast, he is only a bust now. He uplifts his hands, utters furious

groans, clenches his nails on the beach, tries to cling fast to that

ashes, supports himself on his elbows in order to raise himself from

that soft sheath, and sobs frantically; the sand mounts higher. The

sand has reached his shoulders, the sand reaches to his throat; only

his face is visible now. His mouth cries aloud, the sand fills it;

silence. His eyes still gaze forth, the sand closes them, night. Then

his brow decreases, a little hair quivers above the sand; a hand

projects, pierces the surface of the beach, waves and disappears.

Sinister obliteration of a man.

Sometimes a rider is engulfed with his horse; sometimes the carter is

swallowed up with his cart; all founders in that strand. It is

shipwreck elsewhere than in the water. It is the earth drowning a man.

The earth, permeated with the ocean, becomes a pitfall. It presents

itself in the guise of a plain, and it yawns like a wave. The abyss is

subject to these treacheries.

This melancholy fate, always possible on certain sea beaches, was also

possible, thirty years ago, in the sewers of Paris.

Before the important works, undertaken in 1833, the subterranean drain

of Paris was subject to these sudden slides.

The water filtered into certain subjacent strata, which were

particularly friable; the foot-way, which was of flag-stones, as in the

ancient sewers, or of cement on concrete, as in the new galleries,

having no longer an underpinning, gave way. A fold in a flooring of

this sort means a crack, means crumbling. The framework crumbled away

for a certain length. This crevice, the hiatus of a gulf of mire, was

called a \_fontis\_, in the special tongue. What is a \_fontis?\_ It is the

quicksands of the seashore suddenly encountered under the surface of

the earth; it is the beach of Mont Saint-Michel in a sewer. The soaked

soil is in a state of fusion, as it were; all its molecules are in

suspension in soft medium; it is not earth and it is not water. The

depth is sometimes very great. Nothing can be more formidable than such

an encounter. If the water predominates, death is prompt, the man is

swallowed up; if earth predominates, death is slow.

Can any one picture to himself such a death? If being swallowed by the

earth is terrible on the seashore, what is it in a cesspool? Instead of

the open air, the broad daylight, the clear horizon, those vast sounds,

those free clouds whence rains life, instead of those barks descried in

the distance, of that hope under all sorts of forms, of probable

passers-by, of succor possible up to the very last moment,—instead of

all this, deafness, blindness, a black vault, the inside of a tomb

already prepared, death in the mire beneath a cover! slow suffocation

by filth, a stone box where asphyxia opens its claw in the mire and

clutches you by the throat; fetidness mingled with the death-rattle;

slime instead of the strand, sulfuretted hydrogen in place of the

hurricane, dung in place of the ocean! And to shout, to gnash one’s

teeth, and to writhe, and to struggle, and to agonize, with that

enormous city which knows nothing of it all, over one’s head!

Inexpressible is the horror of dying thus! Death sometimes redeems his

atrocity by a certain terrible dignity. On the funeral pile, in

shipwreck, one can be great; in the flames as in the foam, a superb

attitude is possible; one there becomes transfigured as one perishes.

But not here. Death is filthy. It is humiliating to expire. The supreme

floating visions are abject. Mud is synonymous with shame. It is petty,

ugly, infamous. To die in a butt of Malvoisie, like Clarence, is

permissible; in the ditch of a scavenger, like Escoubleau, is horrible.

To struggle therein is hideous; at the same time that one is going

through the death agony, one is floundering about. There are shadows

enough for hell, and mire enough to render it nothing but a slough, and

the dying man knows not whether he is on the point of becoming a

spectre or a frog.

Everywhere else the sepulchre is sinister; here it is deformed.

The depth of the \_fontis\_ varied, as well as their length and their

density, according to the more or less bad quality of the sub-soil.

Sometimes a \_fontis\_ was three or four feet deep, sometimes eight or

ten; sometimes the bottom was unfathomable. Here the mire was almost

solid, there almost liquid. In the Lunière fontis, it would have taken

a man a day to disappear, while he would have been devoured in five

minutes by the Philippeaux slough. The mire bears up more or less,

according to its density. A child can escape where a man will perish.

The first law of safety is to get rid of every sort of load. Every

sewerman who felt the ground giving way beneath him began by flinging

away his sack of tools, or his back-basket, or his hod.

The fontis were due to different causes: the friability of the soil;

some landslip at a depth beyond the reach of man; the violent summer

rains; the incessant flooding of winter; long, drizzling showers.

Sometimes the weight of the surrounding houses on a marly or sandy soil

forced out the vaults of the subterranean galleries and caused them to

bend aside, or it chanced that a flooring vault burst and split under

this crushing thrust. In this manner, the heaping up of the Parthénon,

obliterated, a century ago, a portion of the vaults of Saint-Geneviève

hill. When a sewer was broken in under the pressure of the houses, the

mischief was sometimes betrayed in the street above by a sort of space,

like the teeth of a saw, between the paving-stones; this crevice was

developed in an undulating line throughout the entire length of the

cracked vault, and then, the evil being visible, the remedy could be

promptly applied. It also frequently happened, that the interior

ravages were not revealed by any external scar, and in that case, woe

to the sewermen. When they entered without precaution into the sewer,

they were liable to be lost. Ancient registers make mention of several

scavengers who were buried in fontis in this manner. They give many

names; among others, that of the sewerman who was swallowed up in a

quagmire under the man-hole of the Rue Carême-Prenant, a certain Blaise

Poutrain; this Blaise Poutrain was the brother of Nicholas Poutrain,

who was the last grave-digger of the cemetery called the Charnier des

Innocents, in 1785, the epoch when that cemetery expired.

There was also that young and charming Vicomte d’Escoubleau, of whom we

have just spoken, one of the heroes of the siege of Lérida, where they

delivered the assault in silk stockings, with violins at their head.

D’Escoubleau, surprised one night at his cousin’s, the Duchesse de

Sourdis’, was drowned in a quagmire of the Beautreillis sewer, in which

he had taken refuge in order to escape from the Duke. Madame de

Sourdis, when informed of his death, demanded her smelling-bottle, and

forgot to weep, through sniffling at her salts. In such cases, there is

no love which holds fast; the sewer extinguishes it. Hero refuses to

wash the body of Leander. Thisbe stops her nose in the presence of

Pyramus and says: “Phew!”

CHAPTER VI—THE FONTIS

Jean Valjean found himself in the presence of a fontis.

This sort of quagmire was common at that period in the subsoil of the

Champs-Élysées, difficult to handle in the hydraulic works and a bad

preservative of the subterranean constructions, on account of its

excessive fluidity. This fluidity exceeds even the inconsistency of the

sands of the Quartier Saint-Georges, which could only be conquered by a

stone construction on a concrete foundation, and the clayey strata,

infected with gas, of the Quartier des Martyrs, which are so liquid

that the only way in which a passage was effected under the gallery des

Martyrs was by means of a cast-iron pipe. When, in 1836, the old stone

sewer beneath the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, in which we now see Jean

Valjean, was demolished for the purpose of reconstructing it, the

quicksand, which forms the subsoil of the Champs-Élysées as far as the

Seine, presented such an obstacle, that the operation lasted nearly six

months, to the great clamor of the dwellers on the riverside,

particularly those who had hotels and carriages. The work was more than

unhealthy; it was dangerous. It is true that they had four months and a

half of rain, and three floods of the Seine.

The fontis which Jean Valjean had encountered was caused by the

downpour of the preceding day. The pavement, badly sustained by the

subjacent sand, had given way and had produced a stoppage of the water.

Infiltration had taken place, a slip had followed. The dislocated

bottom had sunk into the ooze. To what extent? Impossible to say. The

obscurity was more dense there than elsewhere. It was a pit of mire in

a cavern of night.

Jean Valjean felt the pavement vanishing beneath his feet. He entered

this slime. There was water on the surface, slime at the bottom. He

must pass it. To retrace his steps was impossible. Marius was dying,

and Jean Valjean exhausted. Besides, where was he to go? Jean Valjean

advanced. Moreover, the pit seemed, for the first few steps, not to be

very deep. But in proportion as he advanced, his feet plunged deeper.

Soon he had the slime up to his calves and water above his knees. He

walked on, raising Marius in his arms, as far above the water as he

could. The mire now reached to his knees, and the water to his waist.

He could no longer retreat. This mud, dense enough for one man, could

not, obviously, uphold two. Marius and Jean Valjean would have stood a

chance of extricating themselves singly. Jean Valjean continued to

advance, supporting the dying man, who was, perhaps, a corpse.

The water came up to his arm-pits; he felt that he was sinking; it was

only with difficulty that he could move in the depth of ooze which he

had now reached. The density, which was his support, was also an

obstacle. He still held Marius on high, and with an unheard-of

expenditure of force, he advanced still; but he was sinking. He had

only his head above the water now and his two arms holding up Marius.

In the old paintings of the deluge there is a mother holding her child

thus.

He sank still deeper, he turned his face to the rear, to escape the

water, and in order that he might be able to breathe; anyone who had

seen him in that gloom would have thought that what he beheld was a

mask floating on the shadows; he caught a faint glimpse above him of

the drooping head and livid face of Marius; he made a desperate effort

and launched his foot forward; his foot struck something solid; a point

of support. It was high time.

He straightened himself up, and rooted himself upon that point of

support with a sort of fury. This produced upon him the effect of the

first step in a staircase leading back to life.

The point of support, thus encountered in the mire at the supreme

moment, was the beginning of the other watershed of the pavement, which

had bent but had not given way, and which had curved under the water

like a plank and in a single piece. Well built pavements form a vault

and possess this sort of firmness. This fragment of the vaulting,

partly submerged, but solid, was a veritable inclined plane, and, once

on this plane, he was safe. Jean Valjean mounted this inclined plane

and reached the other side of the quagmire.

As he emerged from the water, he came in contact with a stone and fell

upon his knees. He reflected that this was but just, and he remained

there for some time, with his soul absorbed in words addressed to God.

He rose to his feet, shivering, chilled, foul-smelling, bowed beneath

the dying man whom he was dragging after him, all dripping with slime,

and his soul filled with a strange light.

CHAPTER VII—ONE SOMETIMES RUNS AGROUND WHEN ONE FANCIES THAT ONE IS

DISEMBARKING

He set out on his way once more.

However, although he had not left his life in the fontis, he seemed to

have left his strength behind him there. That supreme effort had

exhausted him. His lassitude was now such that he was obliged to pause

for breath every three or four steps, and lean against the wall. Once

he was forced to seat himself on the banquette in order to alter

Marius’ position, and he thought that he should have to remain there.

But if his vigor was dead, his energy was not. He rose again.

He walked on desperately, almost fast, proceeded thus for a hundred

paces, almost without drawing breath, and suddenly came in contact with

the wall. He had reached an elbow of the sewer, and, arriving at the

turn with head bent down, he had struck the wall. He raised his eyes,

and at the extremity of the vault, far, very far away in front of him,

he perceived a light. This time it was not that terrible light; it was

good, white light. It was daylight. Jean Valjean saw the outlet.

A damned soul, who, in the midst of the furnace, should suddenly

perceive the outlet of Gehenna, would experience what Jean Valjean

felt. It would fly wildly with the stumps of its burned wings towards

that radiant portal. Jean Valjean was no longer conscious of fatigue,

he no longer felt Marius’ weight, he found his legs once more of steel,

he ran rather than walked. As he approached, the outlet became more and

more distinctly defined. It was a pointed arch, lower than the vault,

which gradually narrowed, and narrower than the gallery, which closed

in as the vault grew lower. The tunnel ended like the interior of a

funnel; a faulty construction, imitated from the wickets of

penitentiaries, logical in a prison, illogical in a sewer, and which

has since been corrected.

Jean Valjean reached the outlet.

There he halted.

It certainly was the outlet, but he could not get out.

The arch was closed by a heavy grating, and the grating, which, to all

appearance, rarely swung on its rusty hinges, was clamped to its stone

jamb by a thick lock, which, red with rust, seemed like an enormous

brick. The keyhole could be seen, and the robust latch, deeply sunk in

the iron staple. The door was plainly double-locked. It was one of

those prison locks which old Paris was so fond of lavishing.

Beyond the grating was the open air, the river, the daylight, the

shore, very narrow but sufficient for escape. The distant quays, Paris,

that gulf in which one so easily hides oneself, the broad horizon,

liberty. On the right, downstream, the bridge of Jéna was discernible,

on the left, upstream, the bridge of the Invalides; the place would

have been a propitious one in which to await the night and to escape.

It was one of the most solitary points in Paris; the shore which faces

the Grand-Caillou. Flies were entering and emerging through the bars of

the grating.

It might have been half-past eight o’clock in the evening. The day was

declining.

Jean Valjean laid Marius down along the wall, on the dry portion of the

vaulting, then he went to the grating and clenched both fists round the

bars; the shock which he gave it was frenzied, but it did not move. The

grating did not stir. Jean Valjean seized the bars one after the other,

in the hope that he might be able to tear away the least solid, and to

make of it a lever wherewith to raise the door or to break the lock.

Not a bar stirred. The teeth of a tiger are not more firmly fixed in

their sockets. No lever; no prying possible. The obstacle was

invincible. There was no means of opening the gate.

Must he then stop there? What was he to do? What was to become of him?

He had not the strength to retrace his steps, to recommence the journey

which he had already taken. Besides, how was he to again traverse that

quagmire whence he had only extricated himself as by a miracle? And

after the quagmire, was there not the police patrol, which assuredly

could not be twice avoided? And then, whither was he to go? What

direction should he pursue? To follow the incline would not conduct him

to his goal. If he were to reach another outlet, he would find it

obstructed by a plug or a grating. Every outlet was, undoubtedly,

closed in that manner. Chance had unsealed the grating through which he

had entered, but it was evident that all the other sewer mouths were

barred. He had only succeeded in escaping into a prison.

All was over. Everything that Jean Valjean had done was useless.

Exhaustion had ended in failure.

They were both caught in the immense and gloomy web of death, and Jean

Valjean felt the terrible spider running along those black strands and

quivering in the shadows. He turned his back to the grating, and fell

upon the pavement, hurled to earth rather than seated, close to Marius,

who still made no movement, and with his head bent between his knees.

This was the last drop of anguish.

Of what was he thinking during this profound depression? Neither of

himself nor of Marius. He was thinking of Cosette.

CHAPTER VIII—THE TORN COAT-TAIL

In the midst of this prostration, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and

a low voice said to him:

“Half shares.”

Some person in that gloom? Nothing so closely resembles a dream as

despair. Jean Valjean thought that he was dreaming. He had heard no

footsteps. Was it possible? He raised his eyes.

A man stood before him.

This man was clad in a blouse; his feet were bare; he held his shoes in

his left hand; he had evidently removed them in order to reach Jean

Valjean, without allowing his steps to be heard.

Jean Valjean did not hesitate for an instant. Unexpected as was this

encounter, this man was known to him. The man was Thénardier.

Although awakened, so to speak, with a start, Jean Valjean, accustomed

to alarms, and steeled to unforeseen shocks that must be promptly

parried, instantly regained possession of his presence of mind.

Moreover, the situation could not be made worse, a certain degree of

distress is no longer capable of a crescendo, and Thénardier himself

could add nothing to this blackness of this night.

A momentary pause ensued.

Thénardier, raising his right hand to a level with his forehead, formed

with it a shade, then he brought his eyelashes together, by screwing up

his eyes, a motion which, in connection with a slight contraction of

the mouth, characterizes the sagacious attention of a man who is

endeavoring to recognize another man. He did not succeed. Jean Valjean,

as we have just stated, had his back turned to the light, and he was,

moreover, so disfigured, so bemired, so bleeding that he would have

been unrecognizable in full noonday. On the contrary, illuminated by

the light from the grating, a cellar light, it is true, livid, yet

precise in its lividness, Thénardier, as the energetic popular metaphor

expresses it, immediately “leaped into” Jean Valjean’s eyes. This

inequality of conditions sufficed to assure some advantage to Jean

Valjean in that mysterious duel which was on the point of beginning

between the two situations and the two men. The encounter took place

between Jean Valjean veiled and Thénardier unmasked.

Jean Valjean immediately perceived that Thénardier did not recognize

him.

They surveyed each other for a moment in that half-gloom, as though

taking each other’s measure. Thénardier was the first to break the

silence.

“How are you going to manage to get out?”

Jean Valjean made no reply. Thénardier continued:

“It’s impossible to pick the lock of that gate. But still you must get

out of this.”

“That is true,” said Jean Valjean.

“Well, half shares then.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“You have killed that man; that’s all right. I have the key.”

Thénardier pointed to Marius. He went on:

“I don’t know you, but I want to help you. You must be a friend.”

Jean Valjean began to comprehend. Thénardier took him for an assassin.

Thénardier resumed:

“Listen, comrade. You didn’t kill that man without looking to see what

he had in his pockets. Give me my half. I’ll open the door for you.”

And half drawing from beneath his tattered blouse a huge key, he added:

“Do you want to see how a key to liberty is made? Look here.”

Jean Valjean “remained stupid”—the expression belongs to the elder

Corneille—to such a degree that he doubted whether what he beheld was

real. It was Providence appearing in horrible guise, and his good angel

springing from the earth in the form of Thénardier.

Thénardier thrust his fist into a large pocket concealed under his

blouse, drew out a rope and offered it to Jean Valjean.

“Hold on,” said he, “I’ll give you the rope to boot.”

“What is the rope for?”

“You will need a stone also, but you can find one outside. There’s a

heap of rubbish.”

“What am I to do with a stone?”

“Idiot, you’ll want to sling that stiff into the river, you’ll need a

stone and a rope, otherwise it would float on the water.”

Jean Valjean took the rope. There is no one who does not occasionally

accept in this mechanical way.

Thénardier snapped his fingers as though an idea had suddenly occurred

to him.

“Ah, see here, comrade, how did you contrive to get out of that slough

yonder? I haven’t dared to risk myself in it. Phew! you don’t smell

good.”

After a pause he added:

“I’m asking you questions, but you’re perfectly right not to answer.

It’s an apprenticeship against that cursed quarter of an hour before

the examining magistrate. And then, when you don’t talk at all, you run

no risk of talking too loud. That’s no matter, as I can’t see your face

and as I don’t know your name, you are wrong in supposing that I don’t

know who you are and what you want. I twig. You’ve broken up that

gentleman a bit; now you want to tuck him away somewhere. The river,

that great hider of folly, is what you want. I’ll get you out of your

scrape. Helping a good fellow in a pinch is what suits me to a hair.”

While expressing his approval of Jean Valjean’s silence, he endeavored

to force him to talk. He jostled his shoulder in an attempt to catch a

sight of his profile, and he exclaimed, without, however, raising his

tone:

“Apropos of that quagmire, you’re a hearty animal. Why didn’t you toss

the man in there?”

Jean Valjean preserved silence.

Thénardier resumed, pushing the rag which served him as a cravat to the

level of his Adam’s apple, a gesture which completes the capable air of

a serious man:

“After all, you acted wisely. The workmen, when they come to-morrow to

stop up that hole, would certainly have found the stiff abandoned

there, and it might have been possible, thread by thread, straw by

straw, to pick up the scent and reach you. Some one has passed through

the sewer. Who? Where did he get out? Was he seen to come out? The

police are full of cleverness. The sewer is treacherous and tells tales

of you. Such a find is a rarity, it attracts attention, very few people

make use of the sewers for their affairs, while the river belongs to

everybody. The river is the true grave. At the end of a month they fish

up your man in the nets at Saint-Cloud. Well, what does one care for

that? It’s carrion! Who killed that man? Paris. And justice makes no

inquiries. You have done well.”

The more loquacious Thénardier became, the more mute was Jean Valjean.

Again Thénardier shook him by the shoulder.

“Now let’s settle this business. Let’s go shares. You have seen my key,

show me your money.”

Thénardier was haggard, fierce, suspicious, rather menacing, yet

amicable.

There was one singular circumstance; Thénardier’s manners were not

simple; he had not the air of being wholly at his ease; while affecting

an air of mystery, he spoke low; from time to time he laid his finger

on his mouth, and muttered, “hush!” It was difficult to divine why.

There was no one there except themselves. Jean Valjean thought that

other ruffians might possibly be concealed in some nook, not very far

off, and that Thénardier did not care to share with them.

Thénardier resumed:

“Let’s settle up. How much did the stiff have in his bags?”

Jean Valjean searched his pockets.

It was his habit, as the reader will remember, to always have some

money about him. The mournful life of expedients to which he had been

condemned imposed this as a law upon him. On this occasion, however, he

had been caught unprepared. When donning his uniform of a National

Guardsman on the preceding evening, he had forgotten, dolefully

absorbed as he was, to take his pocket-book. He had only some small

change in his fob. He turned out his pocket, all soaked with ooze, and

spread out on the banquette of the vault one louis d’or, two five-franc

pieces, and five or six large sous.

Thénardier thrust out his lower lip with a significant twist of the

neck.

“You knocked him over cheap,” said he.

He set to feeling the pockets of Jean Valjean and Marius, with the

greatest familiarity. Jean Valjean, who was chiefly concerned in

keeping his back to the light, let him have his way.

While handling Marius’ coat, Thénardier, with the skill of a

pickpocket, and without being noticed by Jean Valjean, tore off a strip

which he concealed under his blouse, probably thinking that this morsel

of stuff might serve, later on, to identify the assassinated man and

the assassin. However, he found no more than the thirty francs.

“That’s true,” said he, “both of you together have no more than that.”

And, forgetting his motto: “half shares,” he took all.

He hesitated a little over the large sous. After due reflection, he

took them also, muttering:

“Never mind! You cut folks’ throats too cheap altogether.”

That done, he once more drew the big key from under his blouse.

“Now, my friend, you must leave. It’s like the fair here, you pay when

you go out. You have paid, now clear out.”

And he began to laugh.

Had he, in lending to this stranger the aid of his key, and in making

some other man than himself emerge from that portal, the pure and

disinterested intention of rescuing an assassin? We may be permitted to

doubt this.

Thénardier helped Jean Valjean to replace Marius on his shoulders, then

he betook himself to the grating on tiptoe, and barefooted, making Jean

Valjean a sign to follow him, looked out, laid his finger on his mouth,

and remained for several seconds, as though in suspense; his inspection

finished, he placed the key in the lock. The bolt slipped back and the

gate swung open. It neither grated nor squeaked. It moved very softly.

It was obvious that this gate and those hinges, carefully oiled, were

in the habit of opening more frequently than was supposed. This

softness was suspicious; it hinted at furtive goings and comings,

silent entrances and exits of nocturnal men, and the wolf-like tread of

crime.

The sewer was evidently an accomplice of some mysterious band. This

taciturn grating was a receiver of stolen goods.

Thénardier opened the gate a little way, allowing just sufficient space

for Jean Valjean to pass out, closed the grating again, gave the key a

double turn in the lock and plunged back into the darkness, without

making any more noise than a breath. He seemed to walk with the velvet

paws of a tiger.

A moment later, that hideous providence had retreated into the

invisibility.

Jean Valjean found himself in the open air.

CHAPTER IX—MARIUS PRODUCES ON SOME ONE WHO IS A JUDGE OF THE MATTER,

THE EFFECT OF BEING DEAD

He allowed Marius to slide down upon the shore.

They were in the open air!

The miasmas, darkness, horror lay behind him. The pure, healthful,

living, joyous air that was easy to breathe inundated him. Everywhere

around him reigned silence, but that charming silence when the sun has

set in an unclouded azure sky. Twilight had descended; night was

drawing on, the great deliverer, the friend of all those who need a

mantle of darkness that they may escape from an anguish. The sky

presented itself in all directions like an enormous calm. The river

flowed to his feet with the sound of a kiss. The aerial dialogue of the

nests bidding each other good night in the elms of the Champs-Élysées

was audible. A few stars, daintily piercing the pale blue of the

zenith, and visible to reverie alone, formed imperceptible little

splendors amid the immensity. Evening was unfolding over the head of

Jean Valjean all the sweetness of the infinite.

It was that exquisite and undecided hour which says neither yes nor no.

Night was already sufficiently advanced to render it possible to lose

oneself at a little distance and yet there was sufficient daylight to

permit of recognition at close quarters.

For several seconds, Jean Valjean was irresistibly overcome by that

august and caressing serenity; such moments of oblivion do come to men;

suffering refrains from harassing the unhappy wretch; everything is

eclipsed in the thoughts; peace broods over the dreamer like night;

and, beneath the twilight which beams and in imitation of the sky which

is illuminated, the soul becomes studded with stars. Jean Valjean could

not refrain from contemplating that vast, clear shadow which rested

over him; thoughtfully he bathed in the sea of ecstasy and prayer in

the majestic silence of the eternal heavens. Then he bent down swiftly

to Marius, as though the sentiment of duty had returned to him, and,

dipping up water in the hollow of his hand, he gently sprinkled a few

drops on the latter’s face. Marius’ eyelids did not open; but his

half-open mouth still breathed.

Jean Valjean was on the point of dipping his hand in the river once

more, when, all at once, he experienced an indescribable embarrassment,

such as a person feels when there is some one behind him whom he does

not see.

We have already alluded to this impression, with which everyone is

familiar.

He turned round.

Some one was, in fact, behind him, as there had been a short while

before.

A man of lofty stature, enveloped in a long coat, with folded arms, and

bearing in his right fist a bludgeon of which the leaden head was

visible, stood a few paces in the rear of the spot where Jean Valjean

was crouching over Marius.

With the aid of the darkness, it seemed a sort of apparition. An

ordinary man would have been alarmed because of the twilight, a

thoughtful man on account of the bludgeon. Jean Valjean recognized

Javert.

The reader has divined, no doubt, that Thénardier’s pursuer was no

other than Javert. Javert, after his unlooked-for escape from the

barricade, had betaken himself to the prefecture of police, had

rendered a verbal account to the Prefect in person in a brief audience,

had then immediately gone on duty again, which implied—the note, the

reader will recollect, which had been captured on his person—a certain

surveillance of the shore on the right bank of the Seine near the

Champs-Élysées, which had, for some time past, aroused the attention of

the police. There he had caught sight of Thénardier and had followed

him. The reader knows the rest.

Thus it will be easily understood that that grating, so obligingly

opened to Jean Valjean, was a bit of cleverness on Thénardier’s part.

Thénardier intuitively felt that Javert was still there; the man spied

upon has a scent which never deceives him; it was necessary to fling a

bone to that sleuth-hound. An assassin, what a godsend! Such an

opportunity must never be allowed to slip. Thénardier, by putting Jean

Valjean outside in his stead, provided a prey for the police, forced

them to relinquish his scent, made them forget him in a bigger

adventure, repaid Javert for his waiting, which always flatters a spy,

earned thirty francs, and counted with certainty, so far as he himself

was concerned, on escaping with the aid of this diversion.

Jean Valjean had fallen from one danger upon another.

These two encounters, this falling one after the other, from Thénardier

upon Javert, was a rude shock.

Javert did not recognize Jean Valjean, who, as we have stated, no

longer looked like himself. He did not unfold his arms, he made sure of

his bludgeon in his fist, by an imperceptible movement, and said in a

curt, calm voice:

“Who are you?”

“I.”

“Who is ‘I’?”

“Jean Valjean.”

Javert thrust his bludgeon between his teeth, bent his knees, inclined

his body, laid his two powerful hands on the shoulders of Jean Valjean,

which were clamped within them as in a couple of vices, scrutinized

him, and recognized him. Their faces almost touched. Javert’s look was

terrible.

Jean Valjean remained inert beneath Javert’s grasp, like a lion

submitting to the claws of a lynx.

“Inspector Javert,” said he, “you have me in your power. Moreover, I

have regarded myself as your prisoner ever since this morning. I did

not give you my address with any intention of escaping from you. Take

me. Only grant me one favor.”

Javert did not appear to hear him. He kept his eyes riveted on Jean

Valjean. His chin being contracted, thrust his lips upwards towards his

nose, a sign of savage reverie. At length he released Jean Valjean,

straightened himself stiffly up without bending, grasped his bludgeon

again firmly, and, as though in a dream, he murmured rather than

uttered this question:

“What are you doing here? And who is this man?”

He still abstained from addressing Jean Valjean as \_thou\_.

Jean Valjean replied, and the sound of his voice appeared to rouse

Javert:

“It is with regard to him that I desire to speak to you. Dispose of me

as you see fit; but first help me to carry him home. That is all that I

ask of you.”

Javert’s face contracted as was always the case when any one seemed to

think him capable of making a concession. Nevertheless, he did not say

“no.”

Again he bent over, drew from his pocket a handkerchief which he

moistened in the water and with which he then wiped Marius’

blood-stained brow.

“This man was at the barricade,” said he in a low voice and as though

speaking to himself. “He is the one they called Marius.”

A spy of the first quality, who had observed everything, listened to

everything, and taken in everything, even when he thought that he was

to die; who had played the spy even in his agony, and who, with his

elbows leaning on the first step of the sepulchre, had taken notes.

He seized Marius’ hand and felt his pulse.

“He is wounded,” said Jean Valjean.

“He is a dead man,” said Javert.

Jean Valjean replied:

“No. Not yet.”

“So you have brought him thither from the barricade?” remarked Javert.

His preoccupation must indeed have been very profound for him not to

insist on this alarming rescue through the sewer, and for him not to

even notice Jean Valjean’s silence after his question.

Jean Valjean, on his side, seemed to have but one thought. He resumed:

“He lives in the Marais, Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, with his

grandfather. I do not recollect his name.”

Jean Valjean fumbled in Marius’ coat, pulled out his pocket-book,

opened it at the page which Marius had pencilled, and held it out to

Javert.

There was still sufficient light to admit of reading. Besides this,

Javert possessed in his eye the feline phosphorescence of night birds.

He deciphered the few lines written by Marius, and muttered:

“Gillenormand, Rue des Filles-du Calvaire, No. 6.”

Then he exclaimed: “Coachman!”

The reader will remember that the hackney-coach was waiting in case of

need.

Javert kept Marius’ pocket-book.

A moment later, the carriage, which had descended by the inclined plane

of the watering-place, was on the shore. Marius was laid upon the back

seat, and Javert seated himself on the front seat beside Jean Valjean.

The door slammed, and the carriage drove rapidly away, ascending the

quays in the direction of the Bastille.

They quitted the quays and entered the streets. The coachman, a black

form on his box, whipped up his thin horses. A glacial silence reigned

in the carriage. Marius, motionless, with his body resting in the

corner, and his head drooping on his breast, his arms hanging, his legs

stiff, seemed to be awaiting only a coffin; Jean Valjean seemed made of

shadow, and Javert of stone, and in that vehicle full of night, whose

interior, every time that it passed in front of a street lantern,

appeared to be turned lividly wan, as by an intermittent flash of

lightning, chance had united and seemed to be bringing face to face the

three forms of tragic immobility, the corpse, the spectre, and the

statue.

CHAPTER X—RETURN OF THE SON WHO WAS PRODIGAL OF HIS LIFE

At every jolt over the pavement, a drop of blood trickled from Marius’

hair.

Night had fully closed in when the carriage arrived at No. 6, Rue des

Filles-du-Calvaire.

Javert was the first to alight; he made sure with one glance of the

number on the carriage gate, and, raising the heavy knocker of beaten

iron, embellished in the old style, with a male goat and a satyr

confronting each other, he gave a violent peal. The gate opened a

little way and Javert gave it a push. The porter half made his

appearance yawning, vaguely awake, and with a candle in his hand.

Everyone in the house was asleep. People go to bed betimes in the

Marais, especially on days when there is a revolt. This good, old

quarter, terrified at the Revolution, takes refuge in slumber, as

children, when they hear the Bugaboo coming, hide their heads hastily

under their coverlet.

In the meantime Jean Valjean and the coachman had taken Marius out of

the carriage, Jean Valjean supporting him under the armpits, and the

coachman under the knees.

As they thus bore Marius, Jean Valjean slipped his hand under the

latter’s clothes, which were broadly rent, felt his breast, and assured

himself that his heart was still beating. It was even beating a little

less feebly, as though the movement of the carriage had brought about a

certain fresh access of life.

Javert addressed the porter in a tone befitting the government, and the

presence of the porter of a factious person.

“Some person whose name is Gillenormand?”

“Here. What do you want with him?”

“His son is brought back.”

“His son?” said the porter stupidly.

“He is dead.”

Jean Valjean, who, soiled and tattered, stood behind Javert, and whom

the porter was surveying with some horror, made a sign to him with his

head that this was not so.

The porter did not appear to understand either Javert’s words or Jean

Valjean’s sign.

Javert continued:

“He went to the barricade, and here he is.”

“To the barricade?” ejaculated the porter.

“He has got himself killed. Go waken his father.”

The porter did not stir.

“Go along with you!” repeated Javert.

And he added:

“There will be a funeral here to-morrow.”

For Javert, the usual incidents of the public highway were

categorically classed, which is the beginning of foresight and

surveillance, and each contingency had its own compartment; all

possible facts were arranged in drawers, as it were, whence they

emerged on occasion, in variable quantities; in the street, uproar,

revolt, carnival, and funeral.

The porter contented himself with waking Basque. Basque woke Nicolette;

Nicolette roused great-aunt Gillenormand.

As for the grandfather, they let him sleep on, thinking that he would

hear about the matter early enough in any case.

Marius was carried up to the first floor, without any one in the other

parts of the house being aware of the fact, and deposited on an old

sofa in M. Gillenormand’s antechamber; and while Basque went in search

of a physician, and while Nicolette opened the linen-presses, Jean

Valjean felt Javert touch him on the shoulder. He understood and

descended the stairs, having behind him the step of Javert who was

following him.

The porter watched them take their departure as he had watched their

arrival, in terrified somnolence.

They entered the carriage once more, and the coachman mounted his box.

“Inspector Javert,” said Jean, “grant me yet another favor.”

“What is it?” demanded Javert roughly.

“Let me go home for one instant. Then you shall do whatever you like

with me.”

Javert remained silent for a few moments, with his chin drawn back into

the collar of his great-coat, then he lowered the glass and front:

“Driver,” said he, “Rue de l’Homme Armé, No. 7.”

CHAPTER XI—CONCUSSION IN THE ABSOLUTE

They did not open their lips again during the whole space of their

ride.

What did Jean Valjean want? To finish what he had begun; to warn

Cosette, to tell her where Marius was, to give her, possibly, some

other useful information, to take, if he could, certain final measures.

As for himself, so far as he was personally concerned, all was over; he

had been seized by Javert and had not resisted; any other man than

himself in like situation would, perhaps, have had some vague thoughts

connected with the rope which Thénardier had given him, and of the bars

of the first cell that he should enter; but, let us impress it upon the

reader, after the Bishop, there had existed in Jean Valjean a profound

hesitation in the presence of any violence, even when directed against

himself.

Suicide, that mysterious act of violence against the unknown which may

contain, in a measure, the death of the soul, was impossible to Jean

Valjean.

At the entrance to the Rue de l’Homme Armé, the carriage halted, the

way being too narrow to admit of the entrance of vehicles. Javert and

Jean Valjean alighted.

The coachman humbly represented to “monsieur l’Inspecteur,” that the

Utrecht velvet of his carriage was all spotted with the blood of the

assassinated man, and with mire from the assassin. That is the way he

understood it. He added that an indemnity was due him. At the same

time, drawing his certificate book from his pocket, he begged the

inspector to have the goodness to write him “a bit of an attestation.”

Javert thrust aside the book which the coachman held out to him, and

said:

“How much do you want, including your time of waiting and the drive?”

“It comes to seven hours and a quarter,” replied the man, “and my

velvet was perfectly new. Eighty francs, Mr. Inspector.”

Javert drew four napoleons from his pocket and dismissed the carriage.

Jean Valjean fancied that it was Javert’s intention to conduct him on

foot to the post of the Blancs-Manteaux or to the post of the Archives,

both of which are close at hand.

They entered the street. It was deserted as usual. Javert followed Jean

Valjean. They reached No. 7. Jean Valjean knocked. The door opened.

“It is well,” said Javert. “Go upstairs.”

He added with a strange expression, and as though he were exerting an

effort in speaking in this manner:

“I will wait for you here.”

Jean Valjean looked at Javert. This mode of procedure was but little in

accord with Javert’s habits. However, he could not be greatly surprised

that Javert should now have a sort of haughty confidence in him, the

confidence of the cat which grants the mouse liberty to the length of

its claws, seeing that Jean Valjean had made up his mind to surrender

himself and to make an end of it. He pushed open the door, entered the

house, called to the porter who was in bed and who had pulled the cord

from his couch: “It is I!” and ascended the stairs.

On arriving at the first floor, he paused. All sorrowful roads have

their stations. The window on the landing-place, which was a

sash-window, was open. As in many ancient houses, the staircase got its

light from without and had a view on the street. The street-lantern,

situated directly opposite, cast some light on the stairs, and thus

effected some economy in illumination.

Jean Valjean, either for the sake of getting the air, or mechanically,

thrust his head out of this window. He leaned out over the street. It

is short, and the lantern lighted it from end to end. Jean Valjean was

overwhelmed with amazement; there was no longer any one there.

Javert had taken his departure.

CHAPTER XII—THE GRANDFATHER

Basque and the porter had carried Marius into the drawing-room, as he

still lay stretched out, motionless, on the sofa upon which he had been

placed on his arrival. The doctor who had been sent for had hastened

thither. Aunt Gillenormand had risen.

Aunt Gillenormand went and came, in affright, wringing her hands and

incapable of doing anything but saying: “Heavens! is it possible?” At

times she added: “Everything will be covered with blood.” When her

first horror had passed off, a certain philosophy of the situation

penetrated her mind, and took form in the exclamation: “It was bound to

end in this way!” She did not go so far as: “I told you so!” which is

customary on this sort of occasion. At the physician’s orders, a camp

bed had been prepared beside the sofa. The doctor examined Marius, and

after having found that his pulse was still beating, that the wounded

man had no very deep wound on his breast, and that the blood on the

corners of his lips proceeded from his nostrils, he had him placed flat

on the bed, without a pillow, with his head on the same level as his

body, and even a trifle lower, and with his bust bare in order to

facilitate respiration. Mademoiselle Gillenormand, on perceiving that

they were undressing Marius, withdrew. She set herself to telling her

beads in her own chamber.

The trunk had not suffered any internal injury; a bullet, deadened by

the pocket-book, had turned aside and made the tour of his ribs with a

hideous laceration, which was of no great depth, and consequently, not

dangerous. The long, underground journey had completed the dislocation

of the broken collar-bone, and the disorder there was serious. The arms

had been slashed with sabre cuts. Not a single scar disfigured his

face; but his head was fairly covered with cuts; what would be the

result of these wounds on the head? Would they stop short at the hairy

cuticle, or would they attack the brain? As yet, this could not be

decided. A grave symptom was that they had caused a swoon, and that

people do not always recover from such swoons. Moreover, the wounded

man had been exhausted by hemorrhage. From the waist down, the

barricade had protected the lower part of the body from injury.

Basque and Nicolette tore up linen and prepared bandages; Nicolette

sewed them, Basque rolled them. As lint was lacking, the doctor, for

the time being, arrested the bleeding with layers of wadding. Beside

the bed, three candles burned on a table where the case of surgical

instruments lay spread out. The doctor bathed Marius’ face and hair

with cold water. A full pail was reddened in an instant. The porter,

candle in hand, lighted them.

The doctor seemed to be pondering sadly. From time to time, he made a

negative sign with his head, as though replying to some question which

he had inwardly addressed to himself.

A bad sign for the sick man are these mysterious dialogues of the

doctor with himself.

At the moment when the doctor was wiping Marius’ face, and lightly

touching his still closed eyes with his finger, a door opened at the

end of the drawing-room, and a long, pallid figure made its appearance.

This was the grandfather.

The revolt had, for the past two days, deeply agitated, enraged and

engrossed the mind of M. Gillenormand. He had not been able to sleep on

the previous night, and he had been in a fever all day long. In the

evening, he had gone to bed very early, recommending that everything in

the house should be well barred, and he had fallen into a doze through

sheer fatigue.

Old men sleep lightly; M. Gillenormand’s chamber adjoined the

drawing-room, and in spite of all the precautions that had been taken,

the noise had awakened him. Surprised at the rift of light which he saw

under his door, he had risen from his bed, and had groped his way

thither.

He stood astonished on the threshold, one hand on the handle of the

half-open door, with his head bent a little forward and quivering, his

body wrapped in a white dressing-gown, which was straight and as

destitute of folds as a winding-sheet; and he had the air of a phantom

who is gazing into a tomb.

He saw the bed, and on the mattress that young man, bleeding, white

with a waxen whiteness, with closed eyes and gaping mouth, and pallid

lips, stripped to the waist, slashed all over with crimson wounds,

motionless and brilliantly lighted up.

The grandfather trembled from head to foot as powerfully as ossified

limbs can tremble, his eyes, whose corneæ were yellow on account of his

great age, were veiled in a sort of vitreous glitter, his whole face

assumed in an instant the earthy angles of a skull, his arms fell

pendent, as though a spring had broken, and his amazement was betrayed

by the outspreading of the fingers of his two aged hands, which

quivered all over, his knees formed an angle in front, allowing,

through the opening in his dressing-gown, a view of his poor bare legs,

all bristling with white hairs, and he murmured:

“Marius!”

“Sir,” said Basque, “Monsieur has just been brought back. He went to

the barricade, and....”

“He is dead!” cried the old man in a terrible voice. “Ah! The rascal!”

Then a sort of sepulchral transformation straightened up this

centenarian as erect as a young man.

“Sir,” said he, “you are the doctor. Begin by telling me one thing. He

is dead, is he not?”

The doctor, who was at the highest pitch of anxiety, remained silent.

M. Gillenormand wrung his hands with an outburst of terrible laughter.

“He is dead! He is dead! He is dead! He has got himself killed on the

barricades! Out of hatred to me! He did that to spite me! Ah! You

blood-drinker! This is the way he returns to me! Misery of my life, he

is dead!”

He went to the window, threw it wide open as though he were stifling,

and, erect before the darkness, he began to talk into the street, to

the night:

“Pierced, sabred, exterminated, slashed, hacked in pieces! Just look at

that, the villain! He knew well that I was waiting for him, and that I

had had his room arranged, and that I had placed at the head of my bed

his portrait taken when he was a little child! He knew well that he had

only to come back, and that I had been recalling him for years, and

that I remained by my fireside, with my hands on my knees, not knowing

what to do, and that I was mad over it! You knew well, that you had but

to return and to say: ‘It is I,’ and you would have been the master of

the house, and that I should have obeyed you, and that you could have

done whatever you pleased with your old numskull of a grandfather! you

knew that well, and you said:

“No, he is a Royalist, I will not go! And you went to the barricades,

and you got yourself killed out of malice! To revenge yourself for what

I said to you about Monsieur le Duc de Berry. It is infamous! Go to bed

then and sleep tranquilly! he is dead, and this is my awakening.”

The doctor, who was beginning to be uneasy in both quarters, quitted

Marius for a moment, went to M. Gillenormand, and took his arm. The

grandfather turned round, gazed at him with eyes which seemed

exaggerated in size and bloodshot, and said to him calmly:

“I thank you, sir. I am composed, I am a man, I witnessed the death of

Louis XVI., I know how to bear events. One thing is terrible and that

is to think that it is your newspapers which do all the mischief. You

will have scribblers, chatterers, lawyers, orators, tribunes,

discussions, progress, enlightenment, the rights of man, the liberty of

the press, and this is the way that your children will be brought home

to you. Ah! Marius! It is abominable! Killed! Dead before me! A

barricade! Ah, the scamp! Doctor, you live in this quarter, I believe?

Oh! I know you well. I see your cabriolet pass my window. I am going to

tell you. You are wrong to think that I am angry. One does not fly into

a rage against a dead man. That would be stupid. This is a child whom I

have reared. I was already old while he was very young. He played in

the Tuileries garden with his little shovel and his little chair, and

in order that the inspectors might not grumble, I stopped up the holes

that he made in the earth with his shovel, with my cane. One day he

exclaimed: Down with Louis XVIII.! and off he went. It was no fault of

mine. He was all rosy and blond. His mother is dead. Have you ever

noticed that all little children are blond? Why is it so? He is the son

of one of those brigands of the Loire, but children are innocent of

their fathers’ crimes. I remember when he was no higher than that. He

could not manage to pronounce his Ds. He had a way of talking that was

so sweet and indistinct that you would have thought it was a bird

chirping. I remember that once, in front of the Hercules Farnese,

people formed a circle to admire him and marvel at him, he was so

handsome, was that child! He had a head such as you see in pictures. I

talked in a deep voice, and I frightened him with my cane, but he knew

very well that it was only to make him laugh. In the morning, when he

entered my room, I grumbled, but he was like the sunlight to me, all

the same. One cannot defend oneself against those brats. They take hold

of you, they hold you fast, they never let you go again. The truth is,

that there never was a cupid like that child. Now, what can you say for

your Lafayettes, your Benjamin Constants, and your Tirecuir de

Corcelles who have killed him? This cannot be allowed to pass in this

fashion.”

He approached Marius, who still lay livid and motionless, and to whom

the physician had returned, and began once more to wring his hands. The

old man’s pallid lips moved as though mechanically, and permitted the

passage of words that were barely audible, like breaths in the death

agony:

“Ah! heartless lad! Ah! clubbist! Ah! wretch! Ah! Septembrist!”

Reproaches in the low voice of an agonizing man, addressed to a corpse.

Little by little, as it is always indispensable that internal eruptions

should come to the light, the sequence of words returned, but the

grandfather appeared no longer to have the strength to utter them, his

voice was so weak, and extinct, that it seemed to come from the other

side of an abyss:

“It is all the same to me, I am going to die too, that I am. And to

think that there is not a hussy in Paris who would not have been

delighted to make this wretch happy! A scamp who, instead of amusing

himself and enjoying life, went off to fight and get himself shot down

like a brute! And for whom? Why? For the Republic! Instead of going to

dance at the Chaumière, as it is the duty of young folks to do! What’s

the use of being twenty years old? The Republic, a cursed pretty folly!

Poor mothers, beget fine boys, do! Come, he is dead. That will make two

funerals under the same carriage gate. So you have got yourself

arranged like this for the sake of General Lamarque’s handsome eyes!

What had that General Lamarque done to you? A slasher! A chatter-box!

To get oneself killed for a dead man! If that isn’t enough to drive any

one mad! Just think of it! At twenty! And without so much as turning

his head to see whether he was not leaving something behind him! That’s

the way poor, good old fellows are forced to die alone, nowadays.

Perish in your corner, owl! Well, after all, so much the better, that

is what I was hoping for, this will kill me on the spot. I am too old,

I am a hundred years old, I am a hundred thousand years old, I ought,

by rights, to have been dead long ago. This blow puts an end to it. So

all is over, what happiness! What is the good of making him inhale

ammonia and all that parcel of drugs? You are wasting your trouble, you

fool of a doctor! Come, he’s dead, completely dead. I know all about

it, I am dead myself too. He hasn’t done things by half. Yes, this age

is infamous, infamous and that’s what I think of you, of your ideas, of

your systems, of your masters, of your oracles, of your doctors, of

your scape-graces of writers, of your rascally philosophers, and of all

the revolutions which, for the last sixty years, have been frightening

the flocks of crows in the Tuileries! But you were pitiless in getting

yourself killed like this, I shall not even grieve over your death, do

you understand, you assassin?”

At that moment, Marius slowly opened his eyes, and his glance, still

dimmed by lethargic wonder, rested on M. Gillenormand.

“Marius!” cried the old man. “Marius! My little Marius! my child! my

well-beloved son! You open your eyes, you gaze upon me, you are alive,

thanks!”

And he fell fainting.

BOOK FOURTH—JAVERT DERAILED

CHAPTER I

Javert passed slowly down the Rue de l’Homme Armé.

He walked with drooping head for the first time in his life, and

likewise, for the first time in his life, with his hands behind his

back.

Up to that day, Javert had borrowed from Napoleon’s attitudes, only

that which is expressive of resolution, with arms folded across the

chest; that which is expressive of uncertainty—with the hands behind

the back—had been unknown to him. Now, a change had taken place; his

whole person, slow and sombre, was stamped with anxiety.

He plunged into the silent streets.

Nevertheless, he followed one given direction.

He took the shortest cut to the Seine, reached the Quai des Ormes,

skirted the quay, passed the Grève, and halted at some distance from

the post of the Place du Châtelet, at the angle of the Pont Notre-Dame.

There, between the Notre-Dame and the Pont au Change on the one hand,

and the Quai de la Mégisserie and the Quai aux Fleurs on the other, the

Seine forms a sort of square lake, traversed by a rapid.

This point of the Seine is dreaded by mariners. Nothing is more

dangerous than this rapid, hemmed in, at that epoch, and irritated by

the piles of the mill on the bridge, now demolished. The two bridges,

situated thus close together, augment the peril; the water hurries in

formidable wise through the arches. It rolls in vast and terrible

waves; it accumulates and piles up there; the flood attacks the piles

of the bridges as though in an effort to pluck them up with great

liquid ropes. Men who fall in there never reappear; the best of

swimmers are drowned there.

Javert leaned both elbows on the parapet, his chin resting in both

hands, and, while his nails were mechanically twined in the abundance

of his whiskers, he meditated.

A novelty, a revolution, a catastrophe had just taken place in the

depths of his being; and he had something upon which to examine

himself.

Javert was undergoing horrible suffering.

For several hours, Javert had ceased to be simple. He was troubled;

that brain, so limpid in its blindness, had lost its transparency; that

crystal was clouded. Javert felt duty divided within his conscience,

and he could not conceal the fact from himself. When he had so

unexpectedly encountered Jean Valjean on the banks of the Seine, there

had been in him something of the wolf which regains his grip on his

prey, and of the dog who finds his master again.

He beheld before him two paths, both equally straight, but he beheld

two; and that terrified him; him, who had never in all his life known

more than one straight line. And, the poignant anguish lay in this,

that the two paths were contrary to each other. One of these straight

lines excluded the other. Which of the two was the true one?

His situation was indescribable.

To owe his life to a malefactor, to accept that debt and to repay it;

to be, in spite of himself, on a level with a fugitive from justice,

and to repay his service with another service; to allow it to be said

to him, “Go,” and to say to the latter in his turn: “Be free”; to

sacrifice to personal motives duty, that general obligation, and to be

conscious, in those personal motives, of something that was also

general, and, perchance, superior, to betray society in order to remain

true to his conscience; that all these absurdities should be realized

and should accumulate upon him,—this was what overwhelmed him.

One thing had amazed him,—this was that Jean Valjean should have done

him a favor, and one thing petrified him,—that he, Javert, should have

done Jean Valjean a favor.

Where did he stand? He sought to comprehend his position, and could no

longer find his bearings.

What was he to do now? To deliver up Jean Valjean was bad; to leave

Jean Valjean at liberty was bad. In the first case, the man of

authority fell lower than the man of the galleys, in the second, a

convict rose above the law, and set his foot upon it. In both cases,

dishonor for him, Javert. There was disgrace in any resolution at which

he might arrive. Destiny has some extremities which rise

perpendicularly from the impossible, and beyond which life is no longer

anything but a precipice. Javert had reached one of those extremities.

One of his anxieties consisted in being constrained to think. The very

violence of all these conflicting emotions forced him to it. Thought

was something to which he was unused, and which was peculiarly painful.

In thought there always exists a certain amount of internal rebellion;

and it irritated him to have that within him.

Thought on any subject whatever, outside of the restricted circle of

his functions, would have been for him in any case useless and a

fatigue; thought on the day which had just passed was a torture.

Nevertheless, it was indispensable that he should take a look into his

conscience, after such shocks, and render to himself an account of

himself.

What he had just done made him shudder. He, Javert, had seen fit to

decide, contrary to all the regulations of the police, contrary to the

whole social and judicial organization, contrary to the entire code,

upon a release; this had suited him; he had substituted his own affairs

for the affairs of the public; was not this unjustifiable? Every time

that he brought himself face to face with this deed without a name

which he had committed, he trembled from head to foot. Upon what should

he decide? One sole resource remained to him; to return in all haste to

the Rue de l’Homme Armé, and commit Jean Valjean to prison. It was

clear that that was what he ought to do. He could not.

Something barred his way in that direction.

Something? What? Is there in the world, anything outside of the

tribunals, executory sentences, the police and the authorities? Javert

was overwhelmed.

A galley-slave sacred! A convict who could not be touched by the law!

And that the deed of Javert!

Was it not a fearful thing that Javert and Jean Valjean, the man made

to proceed with vigor, the man made to submit,—that these two men who

were both the things of the law, should have come to such a pass, that

both of them had set themselves above the law? What then! such

enormities were to happen and no one was to be punished! Jean Valjean,

stronger than the whole social order, was to remain at liberty, and he,

Javert, was to go on eating the government’s bread!

His reverie gradually became terrible.

He might, athwart this reverie, have also reproached himself on the

subject of that insurgent who had been taken to the Rue des

Filles-du-Calvaire; but he never even thought of that. The lesser fault

was lost in the greater. Besides, that insurgent was, obviously, a dead

man, and, legally, death puts an end to pursuit.

Jean Valjean was the load which weighed upon his spirit.

Jean Valjean disconcerted him. All the axioms which had served him as

points of support all his life long, had crumbled away in the presence

of this man. Jean Valjean’s generosity towards him, Javert, crushed

him. Other facts which he now recalled, and which he had formerly

treated as lies and folly, now recurred to him as realities. M.

Madeleine reappeared behind Jean Valjean, and the two figures were

superposed in such fashion that they now formed but one, which was

venerable. Javert felt that something terrible was penetrating his

soul—admiration for a convict. Respect for a galley-slave—is that a

possible thing? He shuddered at it, yet could not escape from it. In

vain did he struggle, he was reduced to confess, in his inmost heart,

the sublimity of that wretch. This was odious.

A benevolent malefactor, merciful, gentle, helpful, clement, a convict,

returning good for evil, giving back pardon for hatred, preferring pity

to vengeance, preferring to ruin himself rather than to ruin his enemy,

saving him who had smitten him, kneeling on the heights of virtue, more

nearly akin to an angel than to a man. Javert was constrained to admit

to himself that this monster existed.

Things could not go on in this manner.

Certainly, and we insist upon this point, he had not yielded without

resistance to that monster, to that infamous angel, to that hideous

hero, who enraged almost as much as he amazed him. Twenty times, as he

sat in that carriage face to face with Jean Valjean, the legal tiger

had roared within him. A score of times he had been tempted to fling

himself upon Jean Valjean, to seize him and devour him, that is to say,

to arrest him. What more simple, in fact? To cry out at the first post

that they passed:—“Here is a fugitive from justice, who has broken his

ban!” to summon the gendarmes and say to them: “This man is yours!”

then to go off, leaving that condemned man there, to ignore the rest

and not to meddle further in the matter. This man is forever a prisoner

of the law; the law may do with him what it will. What could be more

just? Javert had said all this to himself; he had wished to pass

beyond, to act, to apprehend the man, and then, as at present, he had

not been able to do it; and every time that his arm had been raised

convulsively towards Jean Valjean’s collar, his hand had fallen back

again, as beneath an enormous weight, and in the depths of his thought

he had heard a voice, a strange voice crying to him:—“It is well.

Deliver up your savior. Then have the basin of Pontius Pilate brought

and wash your claws.”

Then his reflections reverted to himself and beside Jean Valjean

glorified he beheld himself, Javert, degraded.

A convict was his benefactor!

But then, why had he permitted that man to leave him alive? He had the

right to be killed in that barricade. He should have asserted that

right. It would have been better to summon the other insurgents to his

succor against Jean Valjean, to get himself shot by force.

His supreme anguish was the loss of certainty. He felt that he had been

uprooted. The code was no longer anything more than a stump in his

hand. He had to deal with scruples of an unknown species. There had

taken place within him a sentimental revelation entirely distinct from

legal affirmation, his only standard of measurement hitherto. To remain

in his former uprightness did not suffice. A whole order of unexpected

facts had cropped up and subjugated him. A whole new world was dawning

on his soul: kindness accepted and repaid, devotion, mercy, indulgence,

violences committed by pity on austerity, respect for persons, no more

definitive condemnation, no more conviction, the possibility of a tear

in the eye of the law, no one knows what justice according to God,

running in inverse sense to justice according to men. He perceived amid

the shadows the terrible rising of an unknown moral sun; it horrified

and dazzled him. An owl forced to the gaze of an eagle.

He said to himself that it was true that there were exceptional cases,

that authority might be put out of countenance, that the rule might be

inadequate in the presence of a fact, that everything could not be

framed within the text of the code, that the unforeseen compelled

obedience, that the virtue of a convict might set a snare for the

virtue of the functionary, that destiny did indulge in such ambushes,

and he reflected with despair that he himself had not even been

fortified against a surprise.

He was forced to acknowledge that goodness did exist. This convict had

been good. And he himself, unprecedented circumstance, had just been

good also. So he was becoming depraved.

He found that he was a coward. He conceived a horror of himself.

Javert’s ideal, was not to be human, to be grand, to be sublime; it was

to be irreproachable.

Now, he had just failed in this.

How had he come to such a pass? How had all this happened? He could not

have told himself. He clasped his head in both hands, but in spite of

all that he could do, he could not contrive to explain it to himself.

He had certainly always entertained the intention of restoring Jean

Valjean to the law of which Jean Valjean was the captive, and of which

he, Javert, was the slave. Not for a single instant while he held him

in his grasp had he confessed to himself that he entertained the idea

of releasing him. It was, in some sort, without his consciousness, that

his hand had relaxed and had let him go free.

All sorts of interrogation points flashed before his eyes. He put

questions to himself, and made replies to himself, and his replies

frightened him. He asked himself: “What has that convict done, that

desperate fellow, whom I have pursued even to persecution, and who has

had me under his foot, and who could have avenged himself, and who owed

it both to his rancor and to his safety, in leaving me my life, in

showing mercy upon me? His duty? No. Something more. And I in showing

mercy upon him in my turn—what have I done? My duty? No. Something

more. So there is something beyond duty?” Here he took fright; his

balance became disjointed; one of the scales fell into the abyss, the

other rose heavenward, and Javert was no less terrified by the one

which was on high than by the one which was below. Without being in the

least in the world what is called Voltairian or a philosopher, or

incredulous, being, on the contrary, respectful by instinct, towards

the established church, he knew it only as an august fragment of the

social whole; order was his dogma, and sufficed for him; ever since he

had attained to man’s estate and the rank of a functionary, he had

centred nearly all his religion in the police. Being,—and here we

employ words without the least irony and in their most serious

acceptation, being, as we have said, a spy as other men are priests. He

had a superior, M. Gisquet; up to that day he had never dreamed of that

other superior, God.

This new chief, God, he became unexpectedly conscious of, and he felt

embarrassed by him. This unforeseen presence threw him off his

bearings; he did not know what to do with this superior, he, who was

not ignorant of the fact that the subordinate is bound always to bow,

that he must not disobey, nor find fault, nor discuss, and that, in the

presence of a superior who amazes him too greatly, the inferior has no

other resource than that of handing in his resignation.

But how was he to set about handing in his resignation to God?

However things might stand,—and it was to this point that he reverted

constantly,—one fact dominated everything else for him, and that was,

that he had just committed a terrible infraction of the law. He had

just shut his eyes on an escaped convict who had broken his ban. He had

just set a galley-slave at large. He had just robbed the laws of a man

who belonged to them. That was what he had done. He no longer

understood himself. The very reasons for his action escaped him; only

their vertigo was left with him. Up to that moment he had lived with

that blind faith which gloomy probity engenders. This faith had quitted

him, this probity had deserted him. All that he had believed in melted

away. Truths which he did not wish to recognize were besieging him,

inexorably. Henceforth, he must be a different man. He was suffering

from the strange pains of a conscience abruptly operated on for the

cataract. He saw that which it was repugnant to him to behold. He felt

himself emptied, useless, put out of joint with his past life, turned

out, dissolved. Authority was dead within him. He had no longer any

reason for existing.

A terrible situation! to be touched.

To be granite and to doubt! to be the statue of Chastisement cast in

one piece in the mould of the law, and suddenly to become aware of the

fact that one cherishes beneath one’s breast of bronze something absurd

and disobedient which almost resembles a heart! To come to the pass of

returning good for good, although one has said to oneself up to that

day that that good is evil! to be the watch-dog, and to lick the

intruder’s hand! to be ice and melt! to be the pincers and to turn into

a hand! to suddenly feel one’s fingers opening! to relax one’s

grip,—what a terrible thing!

The man-projectile no longer acquainted with his route and retreating!

To be obliged to confess this to oneself: infallibility is not

infallible, there may exist error in the dogma, all has not been said

when a code speaks, society is not perfect, authority is complicated

with vacillation, a crack is possible in the immutable, judges are but

men, the law may err, tribunals may make a mistake! to behold a rift in

the immense blue pane of the firmament!

That which was passing in Javert was the Fampoux of a rectilinear

conscience, the derailment of a soul, the crushing of a probity which

had been irresistibly launched in a straight line and was breaking

against God. It certainly was singular that the stoker of order, that

the engineer of authority, mounted on the blind iron horse with its

rigid road, could be unseated by a flash of light! that the immovable,

the direct, the correct, the geometrical, the passive, the perfect,

could bend! that there should exist for the locomotive a road to

Damascus!

God, always within man, and refractory, He, the true conscience, to the

false; a prohibition to the spark to die out; an order to the ray to

remember the sun; an injunction to the soul to recognize the veritable

absolute when confronted with the fictitious absolute, humanity which

cannot be lost; the human heart indestructible; that splendid

phenomenon, the finest, perhaps, of all our interior marvels, did

Javert understand this? Did Javert penetrate it? Did Javert account for

it to himself? Evidently he did not. But beneath the pressure of that

incontestable incomprehensibility he felt his brain bursting.

He was less the man transfigured than the victim of this prodigy. In

all this he perceived only the tremendous difficulty of existence. It

seemed to him that, henceforth, his respiration was repressed forever.

He was not accustomed to having something unknown hanging over his

head.

Up to this point, everything above him had been, to his gaze, merely a

smooth, limpid and simple surface; there was nothing incomprehensible,

nothing obscure; nothing that was not defined, regularly disposed,

linked, precise, circumscribed, exact, limited, closed, fully provided

for; authority was a plane surface; there was no fall in it, no

dizziness in its presence. Javert had never beheld the unknown except

from below. The irregular, the unforeseen, the disordered opening of

chaos, the possible slip over a precipice—this was the work of the

lower regions, of rebels, of the wicked, of wretches. Now Javert threw

himself back, and he was suddenly terrified by this unprecedented

apparition: a gulf on high.

What! one was dismantled from top to bottom! one was disconcerted,

absolutely! In what could one trust! That which had been agreed upon

was giving way! What! the defect in society’s armor could be discovered

by a magnanimous wretch! What! an honest servitor of the law could

suddenly find himself caught between two crimes—the crime of allowing a

man to escape and the crime of arresting him! everything was not

settled in the orders given by the State to the functionary! There

might be blind alleys in duty! What,—all this was real! was it true

that an ex-ruffian, weighed down with convictions, could rise erect and

end by being in the right? Was this credible? were there cases in which

the law should retire before transfigured crime, and stammer its

excuses?—Yes, that was the state of the case! and Javert saw it! and

Javert had touched it! and not only could he not deny it, but he had

taken part in it. These were realities. It was abominable that actual

facts could reach such deformity. If facts did their duty, they would

confine themselves to being proofs of the law; facts—it is God who

sends them. Was anarchy, then, on the point of now descending from on

high?

Thus,—and in the exaggeration of anguish, and the optical illusion of

consternation, all that might have corrected and restrained this

impression was effaced, and society, and the human race, and the

universe were, henceforth, summed up in his eyes, in one simple and

terrible feature,—thus the penal laws, the thing judged, the force due

to legislation, the decrees of the sovereign courts, the magistracy,

the government, prevention, repression, official cruelty, wisdom, legal

infallibility, the principle of authority, all the dogmas on which rest

political and civil security, sovereignty, justice, public truth, all

this was rubbish, a shapeless mass, chaos; he himself, Javert, the spy

of order, incorruptibility in the service of the police, the bull-dog

providence of society, vanquished and hurled to earth; and, erect, at

the summit of all that ruin, a man with a green cap on his head and a

halo round his brow; this was the astounding confusion to which he had

come; this was the fearful vision which he bore within his soul.

Was this to be endured? No.

A violent state, if ever such existed. There were only two ways of

escaping from it. One was to go resolutely to Jean Valjean, and restore

to his cell the convict from the galleys. The other....

Javert quitted the parapet, and, with head erect this time, betook

himself, with a firm tread, towards the station-house indicated by a

lantern at one of the corners of the Place du Châtelet.

On arriving there, he saw through the window a sergeant of police, and

he entered. Policemen recognize each other by the very way in which

they open the door of a station-house. Javert mentioned his name,

showed his card to the sergeant, and seated himself at the table of the

post on which a candle was burning. On a table lay a pen, a leaden

inkstand and paper, provided in the event of possible reports and the

orders of the night patrols. This table, still completed by its

straw-seated chair, is an institution; it exists in all police

stations; it is invariably ornamented with a box-wood saucer filled

with sawdust and a wafer box of cardboard filled with red wafers, and

it forms the lowest stage of official style. It is there that the

literature of the State has its beginning.

Javert took a pen and a sheet of paper, and began to write. This is

what he wrote:

A FEW OBSERVATIONS FOR THE GOOD OF THE SERVICE.

“In the first place: I beg Monsieur le Préfet to cast his eyes on

this.

“Secondly: prisoners, on arriving after examination, take off their

shoes and stand barefoot on the flagstones while they are being

searched. Many of them cough on their return to prison. This entails

hospital expenses.

“Thirdly: the mode of keeping track of a man with relays of police

agents from distance to distance, is good, but, on important occasions,

it is requisite that at least two agents should never lose sight of

each other, so that, in case one agent should, for any cause, grow weak

in his service, the other may supervise him and take his place.

“Fourthly: it is inexplicable why the special regulation of the prison

of the Madelonettes interdicts the prisoner from having a chair, even

by paying for it.

“Fifthly: in the Madelonettes there are only two bars to the canteen,

so that the canteen woman can touch the prisoners with her hand.

“Sixthly: the prisoners called barkers, who summon the other prisoners

to the parlor, force the prisoner to pay them two sous to call his name

distinctly. This is a theft.

“Seventhly: for a broken thread ten sous are withheld in the weaving

shop; this is an abuse of the contractor, since the cloth is none the

worse for it.

“Eighthly: it is annoying for visitors to La Force to be obliged to

traverse the boys’ court in order to reach the parlor of

Sainte-Marie-l’Égyptienne.

“Ninthly: it is a fact that any day gendarmes can be overheard

relating in the court-yard of the prefecture the interrogations put by

the magistrates to prisoners. For a gendarme, who should be sworn to

secrecy, to repeat what he has heard in the examination room is a grave

disorder.

“Tenthly: Mme. Henry is an honest woman; her canteen is very neat; but

it is bad to have a woman keep the wicket to the mouse-trap of the

secret cells. This is unworthy of the Conciergerie of a great

civilization.”

Javert wrote these lines in his calmest and most correct chirography,

not omitting a single comma, and making the paper screech under his

pen. Below the last line he signed:

“JAVERT,

“Inspector of the 1st class.

“The Post of the Place du Châtelet.

“June 7th, 1832, about one o’clock in the morning.”

Javert dried the fresh ink on the paper, folded it like a letter,

sealed it, wrote on the back: \_Note for the administration\_, left it on

the table, and quitted the post. The glazed and grated door fell to

behind him.

Again he traversed the Place du Châtelet diagonally, regained the quay,

and returned with automatic precision to the very point which he had

abandoned a quarter of an hour previously, leaned on his elbows and

found himself again in the same attitude on the same paving-stone of

the parapet. He did not appear to have stirred.

The darkness was complete. It was the sepulchral moment which follows

midnight. A ceiling of clouds concealed the stars. Not a single light

burned in the houses of the city; no one was passing; all of the

streets and quays which could be seen were deserted; Notre-Dame and the

towers of the Court-House seemed features of the night. A street

lantern reddened the margin of the quay. The outlines of the bridges

lay shapeless in the mist one behind the other. Recent rains had

swollen the river.

The spot where Javert was leaning was, it will be remembered, situated

precisely over the rapids of the Seine, perpendicularly above that

formidable spiral of whirlpools which loose and knot themselves again

like an endless screw.

Javert bent his head and gazed. All was black. Nothing was to be

distinguished. A sound of foam was audible; but the river could not be

seen. At moments, in that dizzy depth, a gleam of light appeared, and

undulated vaguely, water possessing the power of taking light, no one

knows whence, and converting it into a snake. The light vanished, and

all became indistinct once more. Immensity seemed thrown open there.

What lay below was not water, it was a gulf. The wall of the quay,

abrupt, confused, mingled with the vapors, instantly concealed from

sight, produced the effect of an escarpment of the infinite. Nothing

was to be seen, but the hostile chill of the water and the stale odor

of the wet stones could be felt. A fierce breath rose from this abyss.

The flood in the river, divined rather than perceived, the tragic

whispering of the waves, the melancholy vastness of the arches of the

bridge, the imaginable fall into that gloomy void, into all that shadow

was full of horror.

Javert remained motionless for several minutes, gazing at this opening

of shadow; he considered the invisible with a fixity that resembled

attention. The water roared. All at once he took off his hat and placed

it on the edge of the quay. A moment later, a tall black figure, which

a belated passer-by in the distance might have taken for a phantom,

appeared erect upon the parapet of the quay, bent over towards the

Seine, then drew itself up again, and fell straight down into the

shadows; a dull splash followed; and the shadow alone was in the secret

of the convulsions of that obscure form which had disappeared beneath

the water.

BOOK FIFTH—GRANDSON AND GRANDFATHER

CHAPTER I—IN WHICH THE TREE WITH THE ZINC PLASTER APPEARS AGAIN

Some time after the events which we have just recorded, Sieur

Boulatruelle experienced a lively emotion.

Sieur Boulatruelle was that road-mender of Montfermeil whom the reader

has already seen in the gloomy parts of this book.

Boulatruelle, as the reader may, perchance, recall, was a man who was

occupied with divers and troublesome matters. He broke stones and

damaged travellers on the highway.

Road-mender and thief as he was, he cherished one dream; he believed in

the treasures buried in the forest of Montfermeil. He hoped some day to

find the money in the earth at the foot of a tree; in the meanwhile, he

lived to search the pockets of passers-by.

Nevertheless, for an instant, he was prudent. He had just escaped

neatly. He had been, as the reader is aware, picked up in Jondrette’s

garret in company with the other ruffians. Utility of a vice: his

drunkenness had been his salvation. The authorities had never been able

to make out whether he had been there in the quality of a robber or a

man who had been robbed. An order of \_nolle prosequi\_, founded on his

well authenticated state of intoxication on the evening of the ambush,

had set him at liberty. He had taken to his heels. He had returned to

his road from Gagny to Lagny, to make, under administrative

supervision, broken stone for the good of the state, with downcast

mien, in a very pensive mood, his ardor for theft somewhat cooled; but

he was addicted nonetheless tenderly to the wine which had recently

saved him.

As for the lively emotion which he had experienced a short time after

his return to his road-mender’s turf-thatched cot, here it is:

One morning, Boulatruelle, while on his way as was his wont, to his

work, and possibly also to his ambush, a little before daybreak caught

sight, through the branches of the trees, of a man, whose back alone he

saw, but the shape of whose shoulders, as it seemed to him at that

distance and in the early dusk, was not entirely unfamiliar to him.

Boulatruelle, although intoxicated, had a correct and lucid memory, a

defensive arm that is indispensable to any one who is at all in

conflict with legal order.

“Where the deuce have I seen something like that man yonder?” he said

to himself. But he could make himself no answer, except that the man

resembled some one of whom his memory preserved a confused trace.

However, apart from the identity which he could not manage to catch,

Boulatruelle put things together and made calculations. This man did

not belong in the country-side. He had just arrived there. On foot,

evidently. No public conveyance passes through Montfermeil at that

hour. He had walked all night. Whence came he? Not from a very great

distance; for he had neither haversack, nor bundle. From Paris, no

doubt. Why was he in these woods? why was he there at such an hour?

what had he come there for?

Boulatruelle thought of the treasure. By dint of ransacking his memory,

he recalled in a vague way that he had already, many years before, had

a similar alarm in connection with a man who produced on him the effect

that he might well be this very individual.

“By the deuce,” said Boulatruelle, “I’ll find him again. I’ll discover

the parish of that parishioner. This prowler of Patron-Minette has a

reason, and I’ll know it. People can’t have secrets in my forest if I

don’t have a finger in the pie.”

He took his pick-axe which was very sharply pointed.

“There now,” he grumbled, “is something that will search the earth and

a man.”

And, as one knots one thread to another thread, he took up the line of

march at his best pace in the direction which the man must follow, and

set out across the thickets.

When he had compassed a hundred strides, the day, which was already

beginning to break, came to his assistance. Footprints stamped in the

sand, weeds trodden down here and there, heather crushed, young

branches in the brushwood bent and in the act of straightening

themselves up again with the graceful deliberation of the arms of a

pretty woman who stretches herself when she wakes, pointed out to him a

sort of track. He followed it, then lost it. Time was flying. He

plunged deeper into the woods and came to a sort of eminence. An early

huntsman who was passing in the distance along a path, whistling the

air of Guillery, suggested to him the idea of climbing a tree. Old as

he was, he was agile. There stood close at hand a beech-tree of great

size, worthy of Tityrus and of Boulatruelle. Boulatruelle ascended the

beech as high as he was able.

The idea was a good one. On scrutinizing the solitary waste on the side

where the forest is thoroughly entangled and wild, Boulatruelle

suddenly caught sight of his man.

Hardly had he got his eye upon him when he lost sight of him.

The man entered, or rather, glided into, an open glade, at a

considerable distance, masked by large trees, but with which

Boulatruelle was perfectly familiar, on account of having noticed, near

a large pile of porous stones, an ailing chestnut-tree bandaged with a

sheet of zinc nailed directly upon the bark. This glade was the one

which was formerly called the Blaru-bottom. The heap of stones,

destined for no one knows what employment, which was visible there

thirty years ago, is doubtless still there. Nothing equals a heap of

stones in longevity, unless it is a board fence. They are temporary

expedients. What a reason for lasting!

Boulatruelle, with the rapidity of joy, dropped rather than descended

from the tree. The lair was unearthed, the question now was to seize

the beast. That famous treasure of his dreams was probably there.

It was no small matter to reach that glade. By the beaten paths, which

indulge in a thousand teasing zigzags, it required a good quarter of an

hour. In a bee-line, through the underbrush, which is peculiarly dense,

very thorny, and very aggressive in that locality, a full half hour was

necessary. Boulatruelle committed the error of not comprehending this.

He believed in the straight line; a respectable optical illusion which

ruins many a man. The thicket, bristling as it was, struck him as the

best road.

“Let’s take to the wolves’ Rue de Rivoli,” said he.

Boulatruelle, accustomed to taking crooked courses, was on this

occasion guilty of the fault of going straight.

He flung himself resolutely into the tangle of undergrowth.

He had to deal with holly bushes, nettles, hawthorns, eglantines,

thistles, and very irascible brambles. He was much lacerated.

At the bottom of the ravine he found water which he was obliged to

traverse.

At last he reached the Blaru-bottom, after the lapse of forty minutes,

sweating, soaked, breathless, scratched, and ferocious.

There was no one in the glade. Boulatruelle rushed to the heap of

stones. It was in its place. It had not been carried off.

As for the man, he had vanished in the forest. He had made his escape.

Where? in what direction? into what thicket? Impossible to guess.

And, heartrending to say, there, behind the pile of stones, in front of

the tree with the sheet of zinc, was freshly turned earth, a pick-axe,

abandoned or forgotten, and a hole.

The hole was empty.

“Thief!” shrieked Boulatruelle, shaking his fist at the horizon.

CHAPTER II—MARIUS, EMERGING FROM CIVIL WAR, MAKES READY FOR DOMESTIC

WAR

For a long time, Marius was neither dead nor alive. For many weeks he

lay in a fever accompanied by delirium, and by tolerably grave cerebral

symptoms, caused more by the shocks of the wounds on the head than by

the wounds themselves.

He repeated Cosette’s name for whole nights in the melancholy loquacity

of fever, and with the sombre obstinacy of agony. The extent of some of

the lesions presented a serious danger, the suppuration of large wounds

being always liable to become re-absorbed, and consequently, to kill

the sick man, under certain atmospheric conditions; at every change of

weather, at the slightest storm, the physician was uneasy.

“Above all things,” he repeated, “let the wounded man be subjected to

no emotion.” The dressing of the wounds was complicated and difficult,

the fixation of apparatus and bandages by cerecloths not having been

invented as yet, at that epoch. Nicolette used up a sheet “as big as

the ceiling,” as she put it, for lint. It was not without difficulty

that the chloruretted lotions and the nitrate of silver overcame the

gangrene. As long as there was any danger, M. Gillenormand, seated in

despair at his grandson’s pillow, was, like Marius, neither alive nor

dead.

Every day, sometimes twice a day, a very well dressed gentleman with

white hair,—such was the description given by the porter,—came to

inquire about the wounded man, and left a large package of lint for the

dressings.

Finally, on the 7th of September, four months to a day, after the

sorrowful night when he had been brought back to his grandfather in a

dying condition, the doctor declared that he would answer for Marius.

Convalescence began. But Marius was forced to remain for two months

more stretched out on a long chair, on account of the results called up

by the fracture of his collar-bone. There always is a last wound like

that which will not close, and which prolongs the dressings

indefinitely, to the great annoyance of the sick person.

However, this long illness and this long convalescence saved him from

all pursuit. In France, there is no wrath, not even of a public

character, which six months will not extinguish. Revolts, in the

present state of society, are so much the fault of every one, that they

are followed by a certain necessity of shutting the eyes.

Let us add, that the inexcusable Gisquet order, which enjoined doctors

to lodge information against the wounded, having outraged public

opinion, and not opinion alone, but the King first of all, the wounded

were covered and protected by this indignation; and, with the exception

of those who had been made prisoners in the very act of combat, the

councils of war did not dare to trouble any one. So Marius was left in

peace.

M. Gillenormand first passed through all manner of anguish, and then

through every form of ecstasy. It was found difficult to prevent his

passing every night beside the wounded man; he had his big armchair

carried to Marius’ bedside; he required his daughter to take the finest

linen in the house for compresses and bandages. Mademoiselle

Gillenormand, like a sage and elderly person, contrived to spare the

fine linen, while allowing the grandfather to think that he was obeyed.

M. Gillenormand would not permit any one to explain to him, that for

the preparation of lint batiste is not nearly so good as coarse linen,

nor new linen as old linen. He was present at all the dressings of the

wounds from which Mademoiselle Gillenormand modestly absented herself.

When the dead flesh was cut away with scissors, he said: “Aïe! aïe!”

Nothing was more touching than to see him with his gentle, senile

palsy, offer the wounded man a cup of his cooling-draught. He

overwhelmed the doctor with questions. He did not observe that he asked

the same ones over and over again.

On the day when the doctor announced to him that Marius was out of

danger, the good man was in a delirium. He made his porter a present of

three louis. That evening, on his return to his own chamber, he danced

a gavotte, using his thumb and forefinger as castanets, and he sang the

following song:

“Jeanne est née à Fougère “Amour, tu vis en elle;

Vrai nid d’une bergère; Car c’est dans sa prunelle

J’adore son jupon, Que tu mets ton carquois.

Fripon. Narquois!

“Moi, je la chante, et j’aime,

Plus que Diane même,

Jeanne et ses durs tetons

Bretons.”61

Then he knelt upon a chair, and Basque, who was watching him through

the half-open door, made sure that he was praying.

Up to that time, he had not believed in God.

At each succeeding phase of improvement, which became more and more

pronounced, the grandfather raved. He executed a multitude of

mechanical actions full of joy; he ascended and descended the stairs,

without knowing why. A pretty female neighbor was amazed one morning at

receiving a big bouquet; it was M. Gillenormand who had sent it to her.

The husband made a jealous scene. M. Gillenormand tried to draw

Nicolette upon his knees. He called Marius, “M. le Baron.” He shouted:

“Long live the Republic!”

Every moment, he kept asking the doctor: “Is he no longer in danger?”

He gazed upon Marius with the eyes of a grandmother. He brooded over

him while he ate. He no longer knew himself, he no longer rendered

himself an account of himself. Marius was the master of the house,

there was abdication in his joy, he was the grandson of his grandson.

In the state of joy in which he then was, he was the most venerable of

children. In his fear lest he might fatigue or annoy the convalescent,

he stepped behind him to smile. He was content, joyous, delighted,

charming, young. His white locks added a gentle majesty to the gay

radiance of his visage. When grace is mingled with wrinkles, it is

adorable. There is an indescribable aurora in beaming old age.

As for Marius, as he allowed them to dress his wounds and care for him,

he had but one fixed idea: Cosette.

After the fever and delirium had left him, he did not again pronounce

her name, and it might have been supposed that he no longer thought of

her. He held his peace, precisely because his soul was there.

He did not know what had become of Cosette; the whole affair of the Rue

de la Chanvrerie was like a cloud in his memory; shadows that were

almost indistinct, floated through his mind, Éponine, Gavroche, Mabeuf,

the Thénardiers, all his friends gloomily intermingled with the smoke

of the barricade; the strange passage of M. Fauchelevent through that

adventure produced on him the effect of a puzzle in a tempest; he

understood nothing connected with his own life, he did not know how nor

by whom he had been saved, and no one of those around him knew this;

all that they had been able to tell him was, that he had been brought

home at night in a hackney-coach, to the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire;

past, present, future were nothing more to him than the mist of a vague

idea; but in that fog there was one immovable point, one clear and

precise outline, something made of granite, a resolution, a will; to

find Cosette once more. For him, the idea of life was not distinct from

the idea of Cosette. He had decreed in his heart that he would not

accept the one without the other, and he was immovably resolved to

exact of any person whatever, who should desire to force him to

live,—from his grandfather, from fate, from hell,—the restitution of

his vanished Eden.

He did not conceal from himself the fact that obstacles existed.

Let us here emphasize one detail, he was not won over and was but

little softened by all the solicitude and tenderness of his

grandfather. In the first place, he was not in the secret; then, in his

reveries of an invalid, which were still feverish, possibly, he

distrusted this tenderness as a strange and novel thing, which had for

its object his conquest. He remained cold. The grandfather absolutely

wasted his poor old smile. Marius said to himself that it was all right

so long as he, Marius, did not speak, and let things take their course;

but that when it became a question of Cosette, he would find another

face, and that his grandfather’s true attitude would be unmasked. Then

there would be an unpleasant scene; a recrudescence of family

questions, a confrontation of positions, every sort of sarcasm and all

manner of objections at one and the same time, Fauchelevent,

Coupelevent, fortune, poverty, a stone about his neck, the future.

Violent resistance; conclusion: a refusal. Marius stiffened himself in

advance.

And then, in proportion as he regained life, the old ulcers of his

memory opened once more, he reflected again on the past, Colonel

Pontmercy placed himself once more between M. Gillenormand and him,

Marius, he told himself that he had no true kindness to expect from a

person who had been so unjust and so hard to his father. And with

health, there returned to him a sort of harshness towards his

grandfather. The old man was gently pained by this. M. Gillenormand,

without however allowing it to appear, observed that Marius, ever since

the latter had been brought back to him and had regained consciousness,

had not once called him father. It is true that he did not say

“monsieur” to him; but he contrived not to say either the one or the

other, by means of a certain way of turning his phrases. Obviously, a

crisis was approaching.

As almost always happens in such cases, Marius skirmished before giving

battle, by way of proving himself. This is called “feeling the ground.”

One morning it came to pass that M. Gillenormand spoke slightingly of

the Convention, apropos of a newspaper which had fallen into his hands,

and gave vent to a Royalist harangue on Danton, Saint-Juste and

Robespierre.—“The men of ’93 were giants,” said Marius with severity.

The old man held his peace, and uttered not a sound during the

remainder of that day.

Marius, who had always present to his mind the inflexible grandfather

of his early years, interpreted this silence as a profound

concentration of wrath, augured from it a hot conflict, and augmented

his preparations for the fray in the inmost recesses of his mind.

He decided that, in case of a refusal, he would tear off his bandages,

dislocate his collar-bone, that he would lay bare all the wounds which

he had left, and would reject all food. His wounds were his munitions

of war. He would have Cosette or die.

He awaited the propitious moment with the crafty patience of the sick.

That moment arrived.

CHAPTER III—MARIUS ATTACKED

One day, M. Gillenormand, while his daughter was putting in order the

phials and cups on the marble of the commode, bent over Marius and said

to him in his tenderest accents: “Look here, my little Marius, if I

were in your place, I would eat meat now in preference to fish. A fried

sole is excellent to begin a convalescence with, but a good cutlet is

needed to put a sick man on his feet.”

Marius, who had almost entirely recovered his strength, collected the

whole of it, drew himself up into a sitting posture, laid his two

clenched fists on the sheets of his bed, looked his grandfather in the

face, assumed a terrible air, and said:

“This leads me to say something to you.”

“What is it?”

“That I wish to marry.”

“Agreed,” said his grandfather.—And he burst out laughing.

“How agreed?”

“Yes, agreed. You shall have your little girl.”

Marius, stunned and overwhelmed with the dazzling shock, trembled in

every limb.

M. Gillenormand went on:

“Yes, you shall have her, that pretty little girl of yours. She comes

every day in the shape of an old gentleman to inquire after you. Ever

since you were wounded, she has passed her time in weeping and making

lint. I have made inquiries. She lives in the Rue de l’Homme Armé, No.

7. Ah! There we have it! Ah! so you want her! Well, you shall have her.

You’re caught. You had arranged your little plot, you had said to

yourself:—‘I’m going to signify this squarely to my grandfather, to

that mummy of the Regency and of the Directory, to that ancient beau,

to that Dorante turned Géronte; he has indulged in his frivolities

also, that he has, and he has had his love affairs, and his grisettes

and his Cosettes; he has made his rustle, he has had his wings, he has

eaten of the bread of spring; he certainly must remember it.’ Ah! you

take the cockchafer by the horns. That’s good. I offer you a cutlet and

you answer me: ‘By the way, I want to marry.’ There’s a transition for

you! Ah! you reckoned on a bickering! You do not know that I am an old

coward. What do you say to that? You are vexed? You did not expect to

find your grandfather still more foolish than yourself, you are wasting

the discourse which you meant to bestow upon me, Mr. Lawyer, and that’s

vexatious. Well, so much the worse, rage away. I’ll do whatever you

wish, and that cuts you short, imbecile! Listen. I have made my

inquiries, I’m cunning too; she is charming, she is discreet, it is not

true about the lancer, she has made heaps of lint, she’s a jewel, she

adores you, if you had died, there would have been three of us, her

coffin would have accompanied mine. I have had an idea, ever since you

have been better, of simply planting her at your bedside, but it is

only in romances that young girls are brought to the bedsides of

handsome young wounded men who interest them. It is not done. What

would your aunt have said to it? You were nude three quarters of the

time, my good fellow. Ask Nicolette, who has not left you for a moment,

if there was any possibility of having a woman here. And then, what

would the doctor have said? A pretty girl does not cure a man of fever.

In short, it’s all right, let us say no more about it, all’s said,

all’s done, it’s all settled, take her. Such is my ferocity. You see, I

perceived that you did not love me. I said to myself: ‘Here now, I have

my little Cosette right under my hand, I’m going to give her to him, he

will be obliged to love me a little then, or he must tell the reason

why.’ Ah! so you thought that the old man was going to storm, to put on

a big voice, to shout no, and to lift his cane at all that aurora. Not

a bit of it. Cosette, so be it; love, so be it; I ask nothing better.

Pray take the trouble of getting married, sir. Be happy, my

well-beloved child.”

That said, the old man burst forth into sobs.

And he seized Marius’ head, and pressed it with both arms against his

breast, and both fell to weeping. This is one of the forms of supreme

happiness.

“Father!” cried Marius.

“Ah, so you love me!” said the old man.

An ineffable moment ensued. They were choking and could not speak.

At length the old man stammered:

“Come! his mouth is unstopped at last. He has said: ‘Father’ to me.”

Marius disengaged his head from his grandfather’s arms, and said

gently:

“But, father, now that I am quite well, it seems to me that I might see

her.”

“Agreed again, you shall see her to-morrow.”

“Father!”

“What?”

“Why not to-day?”

“Well, to-day then. Let it be to-day. You have called me ‘father’ three

times, and it is worth it. I will attend to it. She shall be brought

hither. Agreed, I tell you. It has already been put into verse. This is

the ending of the elegy of the ‘Jeune Malade’ by André Chénier, by

André Chénier whose throat was cut by the ras . . . by the giants of

’93.”

M. Gillenormand fancied that he detected a faint frown on the part of

Marius, who, in truth, as we must admit, was no longer listening to

him, and who was thinking far more of Cosette than of 1793.

The grandfather, trembling at having so inopportunely introduced André

Chénier, resumed precipitately:

“Cut his throat is not the word. The fact is that the great

revolutionary geniuses, who were not malicious, that is incontestable,

who were heroes, pardi! found that André Chénier embarrassed them

somewhat, and they had him guillot . . . that is to say, those great

men on the 7th of Thermidor, besought André Chénier, in the interests

of public safety, to be so good as to go....”

M. Gillenormand, clutched by the throat by his own phrase, could not

proceed. Being able neither to finish it nor to retract it, while his

daughter arranged the pillow behind Marius, who was overwhelmed with so

many emotions, the old man rushed headlong, with as much rapidity as

his age permitted, from the bed-chamber, shut the door behind him, and,

purple, choking and foaming at the mouth, his eyes starting from his

head, he found himself nose to nose with honest Basque, who was

blacking boots in the anteroom. He seized Basque by the collar, and

shouted full in his face in fury:—“By the hundred thousand Javottes of

the devil, those ruffians did assassinate him!”

“Who, sir?”

“André Chénier!”

“Yes, sir,” said Basque in alarm.

CHAPTER IV—MADEMOISELLE GILLENORMAND ENDS BY NO LONGER THINKING IT A

BAD THING THAT M. FAUCHELEVENT SHOULD HAVE ENTERED WITH SOMETHING UNDER

HIS ARM

Cosette and Marius beheld each other once more.

What that interview was like we decline to say. There are things which

one must not attempt to depict; the sun is one of them.

The entire family, including Basque and Nicolette, were assembled in

Marius’ chamber at the moment when Cosette entered it.

Precisely at that moment, the grandfather was on the point of blowing

his nose; he stopped short, holding his nose in his handkerchief, and

gazing over it at Cosette.

She appeared on the threshold; it seemed to him that she was surrounded

by a glory.

“Adorable!” he exclaimed.

Then he blew his nose noisily.

Cosette was intoxicated, delighted, frightened, in heaven. She was as

thoroughly alarmed as any one can be by happiness. She stammered all

pale, yet flushed, she wanted to fling herself into Marius’ arms, and

dared not. Ashamed of loving in the presence of all these people.

People are pitiless towards happy lovers; they remain when the latter

most desire to be left alone. Lovers have no need of any people

whatever.

With Cosette, and behind her, there had entered a man with white hair

who was grave yet smiling, though with a vague and heartrending smile.

It was “Monsieur Fauchelevent”; it was Jean Valjean.

He was very well dressed, as the porter had said, entirely in black, in

perfectly new garments, and with a white cravat.

The porter was a thousand leagues from recognizing in this correct

bourgeois, in this probable notary, the fear-inspiring bearer of the

corpse, who had sprung up at his door on the night of the 7th of June,

tattered, muddy, hideous, haggard, his face masked in blood and mire,

supporting in his arms the fainting Marius; still, his porter’s scent

was aroused. When M. Fauchelevent arrived with Cosette, the porter had

not been able to refrain from communicating to his wife this aside: “I

don’t know why it is, but I can’t help fancying that I’ve seen that

face before.”

M. Fauchelevent in Marius’ chamber, remained apart near the door. He

had under his arm, a package which bore considerable resemblance to an

octavo volume enveloped in paper. The enveloping paper was of a

greenish hue, and appeared to be mouldy.

“Does the gentleman always have books like that under his arm?”

Mademoiselle Gillenormand, who did not like books, demanded in a low

tone of Nicolette.

“Well,” retorted M. Gillenormand, who had overheard her, in the same

tone, “he’s a learned man. What then? Is that his fault? Monsieur

Boulard, one of my acquaintances, never walked out without a book under

his arm either, and he always had some old volume hugged to his heart

like that.”

And, with a bow, he said aloud:

“Monsieur Tranchelevent....”

Father Gillenormand did not do it intentionally, but inattention to

proper names was an aristocratic habit of his.

“Monsieur Tranchelevent, I have the honor of asking you, on behalf of

my grandson, Baron Marius Pontmercy, for the hand of Mademoiselle.”

Monsieur Tranchelevent bowed.

“That’s settled,” said the grandfather.

And, turning to Marius and Cosette, with both arms extended in

blessing, he cried:

“Permission to adore each other!”

They did not require him to repeat it twice. So much the worse! the

chirping began. They talked low. Marius, resting on his elbow on his

reclining chair, Cosette standing beside him. “Oh, heavens!” murmured

Cosette, “I see you once again! it is thou! it is you! The idea of

going and fighting like that! But why? It is horrible. I have been dead

for four months. Oh! how wicked it was of you to go to that battle!

What had I done to you? I pardon you, but you will never do it again. A

little while ago, when they came to tell us to come to you, I still

thought that I was about to die, but it was from joy. I was so sad! I

have not taken the time to dress myself, I must frighten people with my

looks! What will your relatives say to see me in a crumpled collar? Do

speak! You let me do all the talking. We are still in the Rue de

l’Homme Armé. It seems that your shoulder was terrible. They told me

that you could put your fist in it. And then, it seems that they cut

your flesh with the scissors. That is frightful. I have cried till I

have no eyes left. It is queer that a person can suffer like that. Your

grandfather has a very kindly air. Don’t disturb yourself, don’t rise

on your elbow, you will injure yourself. Oh! how happy I am! So our

unhappiness is over! I am quite foolish. I had things to say to you,

and I no longer know in the least what they were. Do you still love me?

We live in the Rue de l’Homme Armé. There is no garden. I made lint all

the time; stay, sir, look, it is your fault, I have a callous on my

fingers.”

“Angel!” said Marius.

\_Angel\_ is the only word in the language which cannot be worn out. No

other word could resist the merciless use which lovers make of it.

Then as there were spectators, they paused and said not a word more,

contenting themselves with softly touching each other’s hands.

M. Gillenormand turned towards those who were in the room and cried:

“Talk loud, the rest of you. Make a noise, you people behind the

scenes. Come, a little uproar, the deuce! so that the children can

chatter at their ease.”

And, approaching Marius and Cosette, he said to them in a very low

voice:

“Call each other \_thou\_. Don’t stand on ceremony.”

Aunt Gillenormand looked on in amazement at this irruption of light in

her elderly household. There was nothing aggressive about this

amazement; it was not the least in the world like the scandalized and

envious glance of an owl at two turtledoves, it was the stupid eye of a

poor innocent seven and fifty years of age; it was a life which had

been a failure gazing at that triumph, love.

“Mademoiselle Gillenormand senior,” said her father to her, “I told you

that this is what would happen to you.”

He remained silent for a moment, and then added:

“Look at the happiness of others.”

Then he turned to Cosette.

“How pretty she is! how pretty she is! She’s a Greuze. So you are going

to have that all to yourself, you scamp! Ah! my rogue, you are getting

off nicely with me, you are happy; if I were not fifteen years too old,

we would fight with swords to see which of us should have her. Come

now! I am in love with you, mademoiselle. It’s perfectly simple. It is

your right. You are in the right. Ah! what a sweet, charming little

wedding this will make! Our parish is Saint-Denis du Saint Sacrament,

but I will get a dispensation so that you can be married at Saint-Paul.

The church is better. It was built by the Jesuits. It is more

coquettish. It is opposite the fountain of Cardinal de Birague. The

masterpiece of Jesuit architecture is at Namur. It is called

Saint-Loup. You must go there after you are married. It is worth the

journey. Mademoiselle, I am quite of your mind, I think girls ought to

marry; that is what they are made for. There is a certain

Sainte-Catherine whom I should always like to see uncoiffed.62 It’s a

fine thing to remain a spinster, but it is chilly. The Bible says:

Multiply. In order to save the people, Jeanne d’Arc is needed; but in

order to make people, what is needed is Mother Goose. So, marry, my

beauties. I really do not see the use in remaining a spinster! I know

that they have their chapel apart in the church, and that they fall

back on the Society of the Virgin; but, sapristi, a handsome husband, a

fine fellow, and at the expiration of a year, a big, blond brat who

nurses lustily, and who has fine rolls of fat on his thighs, and who

musses up your breast in handfuls with his little rosy paws, laughing

the while like the dawn,—that’s better than holding a candle at

vespers, and chanting \_Turris Eburnea!\_”

The grandfather executed a pirouette on his eighty-year-old heels, and

began to talk again like a spring that has broken loose once more:

“Ainsi, bornant les cours de tes rêvasseries,

Alcippe, il est donc vrai, dans peu tu te maries.”63

“By the way!”

“What is it, father?”

“Have not you an intimate friend?”

“Yes, Courfeyrac.”

“What has become of him?”

“He is dead.”

“That is good.”

He seated himself near them, made Cosette sit down, and took their four

hands in his aged and wrinkled hands:

“She is exquisite, this darling. She’s a masterpiece, this Cosette! She

is a very little girl and a very great lady. She will only be a

Baroness, which is a come down for her; she was born a Marquise. What

eyelashes she has! Get it well fixed in your noddles, my children, that

you are in the true road. Love each other. Be foolish about it. Love is

the folly of men and the wit of God. Adore each other. Only,” he added,

suddenly becoming gloomy, “what a misfortune! It has just occurred to

me! More than half of what I possess is swallowed up in an annuity; so

long as I live, it will not matter, but after my death, a score of

years hence, ah! my poor children, you will not have a sou! Your

beautiful white hands, Madame la Baronne, will do the devil the honor

of pulling him by the tail.”64

At this point they heard a grave and tranquil voice say:

“Mademoiselle Euphrasie Fauchelevent possesses six hundred thousand

francs.”

It was the voice of Jean Valjean.

So far he had not uttered a single word, no one seemed to be aware that

he was there, and he had remained standing erect and motionless, behind

all these happy people.

“What has Mademoiselle Euphrasie to do with the question?” inquired the

startled grandfather.

“I am she,” replied Cosette.

“Six hundred thousand francs?” resumed M. Gillenormand.

“Minus fourteen or fifteen thousand francs, possibly,” said Jean

Valjean.

And he laid on the table the package which Mademoiselle Gillenormand

had mistaken for a book.

Jean Valjean himself opened the package; it was a bundle of bank-notes.

They were turned over and counted. There were five hundred notes for a

thousand francs each, and one hundred and sixty-eight of five hundred.

In all, five hundred and eighty-four thousand francs.

“This is a fine book,” said M. Gillenormand.

“Five hundred and eighty-four thousand francs!” murmured the aunt.

“This arranges things well, does it not, Mademoiselle Gillenormand

senior?” said the grandfather. “That devil of a Marius has ferreted out

the nest of a millionaire grisette in his tree of dreams! Just trust to

the love affairs of young folks now, will you! Students find

studentesses with six hundred thousand francs. Cherubino works better

than Rothschild.”

“Five hundred and eighty-four thousand francs!” repeated Mademoiselle

Gillenormand, in a low tone. “Five hundred and eighty-four! one might

as well say six hundred thousand!”

As for Marius and Cosette, they were gazing at each other while this

was going on; they hardly heeded this detail.

CHAPTER V—DEPOSIT YOUR MONEY IN A FOREST RATHER THAN WITH A NOTARY

The reader has, no doubt, understood, without necessitating a lengthy

explanation, that Jean Valjean, after the Champmathieu affair, had been

able, thanks to his first escape of a few days’ duration, to come to

Paris and to withdraw in season, from the hands of Laffitte, the sum

earned by him, under the name of Monsieur Madeleine, at

Montreuil-sur-Mer; and that fearing that he might be recaptured,—which

eventually happened—he had buried and hidden that sum in the forest of

Montfermeil, in the locality known as the Blaru-bottom. The sum, six

hundred and thirty thousand francs, all in bank-bills, was not very

bulky, and was contained in a box; only, in order to preserve the box

from dampness, he had placed it in a coffer filled with chestnut

shavings. In the same coffer he had placed his other treasures, the

Bishop’s candlesticks. It will be remembered that he had carried off

the candlesticks when he made his escape from Montreuil-sur-Mer. The

man seen one evening for the first time by Boulatruelle, was Jean

Valjean. Later on, every time that Jean Valjean needed money, he went

to get it in the Blaru-bottom. Hence the absences which we have

mentioned. He had a pickaxe somewhere in the heather, in a hiding-place

known to himself alone. When he beheld Marius convalescent, feeling

that the hour was at hand, when that money might prove of service, he

had gone to get it; it was he again, whom Boulatruelle had seen in the

woods, but on this occasion, in the morning instead of in the evening.

Boulatreulle inherited his pickaxe.

The actual sum was five hundred and eighty-four thousand, five hundred

francs. Jean Valjean withdrew the five hundred francs for himself.—“We

shall see hereafter,” he thought.

The difference between that sum and the six hundred and thirty thousand

francs withdrawn from Laffitte represented his expenditure in ten

years, from 1823 to 1833. The five years of his stay in the convent had

cost only five thousand francs.

Jean Valjean set the two candlesticks on the chimney-piece, where they

glittered to the great admiration of Toussaint.

Moreover, Jean Valjean knew that he was delivered from Javert. The

story had been told in his presence, and he had verified the fact in

the \_Moniteur\_, how a police inspector named Javert had been found

drowned under a boat belonging to some laundresses, between the Pont au

Change and the Pont-Neuf, and that a writing left by this man,

otherwise irreproachable and highly esteemed by his superiors, pointed

to a fit of mental aberration and a suicide.—“In fact,” thought Jean

Valjean, “since he left me at liberty, once having got me in his power,

he must have been already mad.”

CHAPTER VI—THE TWO OLD MEN DO EVERYTHING, EACH ONE AFTER HIS OWN

FASHION, TO RENDER COSETTE HAPPY

Everything was made ready for the wedding. The doctor, on being

consulted, declared that it might take place in February. It was then

December. A few ravishing weeks of perfect happiness passed.

The grandfather was not the least happy of them all. He remained for a

quarter of an hour at a time gazing at Cosette.

“The wonderful, beautiful girl!” he exclaimed. “And she has so sweet

and good an air! she is, without exception, the most charming girl that

I have ever seen in my life. Later on, she’ll have virtues with an odor

of violets. How graceful! one cannot live otherwise than nobly with

such a creature. Marius, my boy, you are a Baron, you are rich, don’t

go to pettifogging, I beg of you.”

Cosette and Marius had passed abruptly from the sepulchre to paradise.

The transition had not been softened, and they would have been stunned,

had they not been dazzled by it.

“Do you understand anything about it?” said Marius to Cosette.

“No,” replied Cosette, “but it seems to me that the good God is caring

for us.”

Jean Valjean did everything, smoothed away every difficulty, arranged

everything, made everything easy. He hastened towards Cosette’s

happiness with as much ardor, and, apparently with as much joy, as

Cosette herself.

As he had been a mayor, he understood how to solve that delicate

problem, with the secret of which he alone was acquainted, Cosette’s

civil status. If he were to announce her origin bluntly, it might

prevent the marriage, who knows? He extricated Cosette from all

difficulties. He concocted for her a family of dead people, a sure

means of not encountering any objections. Cosette was the only scion of

an extinct family; Cosette was not his own daughter, but the daughter

of the other Fauchelevent. Two brothers Fauchelevent had been gardeners

to the convent of the Petit-Picpus. Inquiry was made at that convent;

the very best information and the most respectable references abounded;

the good nuns, not very apt and but little inclined to fathom questions

of paternity, and not attaching any importance to the matter, had never

understood exactly of which of the two Fauchelevents Cosette was the

daughter. They said what was wanted and they said it with zeal. An

\_acte de notoriété\_ was drawn up. Cosette became in the eyes of the

law, Mademoiselle Euphrasie Fauchelevent. She was declared an orphan,

both father and mother being dead. Jean Valjean so arranged it that he

was appointed, under the name of Fauchelevent, as Cosette’s guardian,

with M. Gillenormand as supervising guardian over him.

As for the five hundred and eighty thousand francs, they constituted a

legacy bequeathed to Cosette by a dead person, who desired to remain

unknown. The original legacy had consisted of five hundred and

ninety-four thousand francs; but ten thousand francs had been expended

on the education of Mademoiselle Euphrasie, five thousand francs of

that amount having been paid to the convent. This legacy, deposited in

the hands of a third party, was to be turned over to Cosette at her

majority, or at the date of her marriage. This, taken as a whole, was

very acceptable, as the reader will perceive, especially when the sum

due was half a million. There were some peculiarities here and there,

it is true, but they were not noticed; one of the interested parties

had his eyes blindfolded by love, the others by the six hundred

thousand francs.

Cosette learned that she was not the daughter of that old man whom she

had so long called father. He was merely a kinsman; another

Fauchelevent was her real father. At any other time this would have

broken her heart. But at the ineffable moment which she was then

passing through, it cast but a slight shadow, a faint cloud, and she

was so full of joy that the cloud did not last long. She had Marius.

The young man arrived, the old man was effaced; such is life.

And then, Cosette had, for long years, been habituated to seeing

enigmas around her; every being who has had a mysterious childhood is

always prepared for certain renunciations.

Nevertheless, she continued to call Jean Valjean: Father.

Cosette, happy as the angels, was enthusiastic over Father

Gillenormand. It is true that he overwhelmed her with gallant

compliments and presents. While Jean Valjean was building up for

Cosette a normal situation in society and an unassailable status, M.

Gillenormand was superintending the basket of wedding gifts. Nothing so

amused him as being magnificent. He had given to Cosette a robe of

Binche guipure which had descended to him from his own grandmother.

“These fashions come up again,” said he, “ancient things are the rage,

and the young women of my old age dress like the old women of my

childhood.”

He rifled his respectable chests of drawers in Coromandel lacquer, with

swelling fronts, which had not been opened for years.—“Let us hear the

confession of these dowagers,” he said, “let us see what they have in

their paunches.” He noisily violated the pot-bellied drawers of all his

wives, of all his mistresses and of all his grandmothers. Pekins,

damasks, lampas, painted moires, robes of shot gros de Tours, India

kerchiefs embroidered in gold that could be washed, dauphines without a

right or wrong side, in the piece, Genoa and Alençon point lace,

parures in antique goldsmith’s work, ivory bon-bon boxes ornamented

with microscopic battles, gewgaws and ribbons—he lavished everything on

Cosette. Cosette, amazed, desperately in love with Marius, and wild

with gratitude towards M. Gillenormand, dreamed of a happiness without

limit clothed in satin and velvet. Her wedding basket seemed to her to

be upheld by seraphim. Her soul flew out into the azure depths, with

wings of Mechlin lace.

The intoxication of the lovers was only equalled, as we have already

said, by the ecstasy of the grandfather. A sort of flourish of trumpets

went on in the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire.

Every morning, a fresh offering of bric-à-brac from the grandfather to

Cosette. All possible knickknacks glittered around her.

One day Marius, who was fond of talking gravely in the midst of his

bliss, said, apropos of I know not what incident:

“The men of the revolution are so great, that they have the prestige of

the ages, like Cato and like Phocion, and each one of them seems to me

an antique memory.”

“Moire antique!” exclaimed the old gentleman. “Thanks, Marius. That is

precisely the idea of which I was in search.”

And on the following day, a magnificent dress of tea-rose colored moire

antique was added to Cosette’s wedding presents.

From these fripperies, the grandfather extracted a bit of wisdom.

“Love is all very well; but there must be something else to go with it.

The useless must be mingled with happiness. Happiness is only the

necessary. Season that enormously with the superfluous for me. A palace

and her heart. Her heart and the Louvre. Her heart and the grand

waterworks of Versailles. Give me my shepherdess and try to make her a

duchess. Fetch me Phyllis crowned with corn-flowers, and add a hundred

thousand francs income. Open for me a bucolic perspective as far as you

can see, beneath a marble colonnade. I consent to the bucolic and also

to the fairy spectacle of marble and gold. Dry happiness resembles dry

bread. One eats, but one does not dine. I want the superfluous, the

useless, the extravagant, excess, that which serves no purpose. I

remember to have seen, in the Cathedral of Strasburg, a clock, as tall

as a three-story house which marked the hours, which had the kindness

to indicate the hour, but which had not the air of being made for that;

and which, after having struck midday, or midnight,—midday, the hour of

the sun, or midnight, the hour of love,—or any other hour that you

like, gave you the moon and the stars, the earth and the sea, birds and

fishes, Phœbus and Phœbe, and a host of things which emerged from a

niche, and the twelve apostles, and the Emperor Charles the Fifth, and

Éponine, and Sabinus, and a throng of little gilded goodmen, who played

on the trumpet to boot. Without reckoning delicious chimes which it

sprinkled through the air, on every occasion, without any one’s knowing

why. Is a petty bald clock-face which merely tells the hour equal to

that? For my part, I am of the opinion of the big clock of Strasburg,

and I prefer it to the cuckoo clock from the Black Forest.”

M. Gillenormand talked nonsense in connection with the wedding, and all

the fripperies of the eighteenth century passed pell-mell through his

dithyrambs.

“You are ignorant of the art of festivals. You do not know how to

organize a day of enjoyment in this age,” he exclaimed. “Your

nineteenth century is weak. It lacks excess. It ignores the rich, it

ignores the noble. In everything it is clean-shaven. Your third estate

is insipid, colorless, odorless, and shapeless. The dreams of your

bourgeois who set up, as they express it: a pretty boudoir freshly

decorated, violet, ebony and calico. Make way! Make way! the Sieur

Curmudgeon is marrying Mademoiselle Clutch-penny. Sumptuousness and

splendor. A louis d’or has been stuck to a candle. There’s the epoch

for you. My demand is that I may flee from it beyond the Sarmatians.

Ah! in 1787, I predict that all was lost, from the day when I beheld

the Duc de Rohan, Prince de Léon, Duc de Chabot, Duc de Montbazon,

Marquis de Soubise, Vicomte de Thouars, peer of France, go to

Longchamps in a tapecu! That has borne its fruits. In this century, men

attend to business, they gamble on ’Change, they win money, they are

stingy. People take care of their surfaces and varnish them; every one

is dressed as though just out of a bandbox, washed, soaped, scraped,

shaved, combed, waked, smoothed, rubbed, brushed, cleaned on the

outside, irreproachable, polished as a pebble, discreet, neat, and at

the same time, death of my life, in the depths of their consciences

they have dung-heaps and cesspools that are enough to make a cow-herd

who blows his nose in his fingers, recoil. I grant to this age the

device: ‘Dirty Cleanliness.’ Don’t be vexed, Marius, give me permission

to speak; I say no evil of the people as you see, I am always harping

on your people, but do look favorably on my dealing a bit of a slap to

the bourgeoisie. I belong to it. He who loves well lashes well.

Thereupon, I say plainly, that nowadays people marry, but that they no

longer know how to marry. Ah! it is true, I regret the grace of the

ancient manners. I regret everything about them, their elegance, their

chivalry, those courteous and delicate ways, that joyous luxury which

every one possessed, music forming part of the wedding, a symphony

above stairs, a beating of drums below stairs, the dances, the joyous

faces round the table, the fine-spun gallant compliments, the songs,

the fireworks, the frank laughter, the devil’s own row, the huge knots

of ribbon. I regret the bride’s garter. The bride’s garter is cousin to

the girdle of Venus. On what does the war of Troy turn? On Helen’s

garter, parbleu! Why did they fight, why did Diomed the divine break

over the head of Meriones that great brazen helmet of ten points? why

did Achilles and Hector hew each other up with vast blows of their

lances? Because Helen allowed Paris to take her garter. With Cosette’s

garter, Homer would construct the \_Iliad\_. He would put in his poem, a

loquacious old fellow, like me, and he would call him Nestor. My

friends, in bygone days, in those amiable days of yore, people married

wisely; they had a good contract, and then they had a good carouse. As

soon as Cujas had taken his departure, Gamacho entered. But, in sooth!

the stomach is an agreeable beast which demands its due, and which

wants to have its wedding also. People supped well, and had at table a

beautiful neighbor without a guimpe so that her throat was only

moderately concealed. Oh! the large laughing mouths, and how gay we

were in those days! youth was a bouquet; every young man terminated in

a branch of lilacs or a tuft of roses; whether he was a shepherd or a

warrior; and if, by chance, one was a captain of dragoons, one found

means to call oneself Florian. People thought much of looking well.

They embroidered and tinted themselves. A bourgeois had the air of a

flower, a Marquis had the air of a precious stone. People had no straps

to their boots, they had no boots. They were spruce, shining, waved,

lustrous, fluttering, dainty, coquettish, which did not at all prevent

their wearing swords by their sides. The humming-bird has beak and

claws. That was the day of the \_Galland Indies\_. One of the sides of

that century was delicate, the other was magnificent; and by the green

cabbages! people amused themselves. To-day, people are serious. The

bourgeois is avaricious, the bourgeoise is a prude; your century is

unfortunate. People would drive away the Graces as being too low in the

neck. Alas! beauty is concealed as though it were ugliness. Since the

revolution, everything, including the ballet-dancers, has had its

trousers; a mountebank dancer must be grave; your rigadoons are

doctrinarian. It is necessary to be majestic. People would be greatly

annoyed if they did not carry their chins in their cravats. The ideal

of an urchin of twenty when he marries, is to resemble M.

Royer-Collard. And do you know what one arrives at with that majesty?

at being petty. Learn this: joy is not only joyous; it is great. But be

in love gayly then, what the deuce! marry, when you marry, with fever

and giddiness, and tumult, and the uproar of happiness! Be grave in

church, well and good. But, as soon as the mass is finished, sarpejou!

you must make a dream whirl around the bride. A marriage should be

royal and chimerical; it should promenade its ceremony from the

cathedral of Rheims to the pagoda of Chanteloup. I have a horror of a

paltry wedding. Ventregoulette! be in Olympus for that one day, at

least. Be one of the gods. Ah! people might be sylphs. Games and

Laughter, argiraspides; they are stupids. My friends, every recently

made bridegroom ought to be Prince Aldobrandini. Profit by that unique

minute in life to soar away to the empyrean with the swans and the

eagles, even if you do have to fall back on the morrow into the

bourgeoisie of the frogs. Don’t economize on the nuptials, do not prune

them of their splendors; don’t scrimp on the day when you beam. The

wedding is not the housekeeping. Oh! if I were to carry out my fancy,

it would be gallant, violins would be heard under the trees. Here is my

programme: sky-blue and silver. I would mingle with the festival the

rural divinities, I would convoke the Dryads and the Nereids. The

nuptials of Amphitrite, a rosy cloud, nymphs with well dressed locks

and entirely naked, an Academician offering quatrains to the goddess, a

chariot drawn by marine monsters.

“Triton trottait devant, et tirait de sa conque

Des sons si ravissants qu’il ravissait quiconque!”65

—there’s a festive programme, there’s a good one, or else I know

nothing of such matters, deuce take it!”

While the grandfather, in full lyrical effusion, was listening to

himself, Cosette and Marius grew intoxicated as they gazed freely at

each other.

Aunt Gillenormand surveyed all this with her imperturbable placidity.

Within the last five or six months she had experienced a certain amount

of emotions. Marius returned, Marius brought back bleeding, Marius

brought back from a barricade, Marius dead, then living, Marius

reconciled, Marius betrothed, Marius wedding a poor girl, Marius

wedding a millionairess. The six hundred thousand francs had been her

last surprise. Then, her indifference of a girl taking her first

communion returned to her. She went regularly to service, told her

beads, read her euchology, mumbled \_Aves\_ in one corner of the house,

while \_I love you\_ was being whispered in the other, and she beheld

Marius and Cosette in a vague way, like two shadows. The shadow was

herself.

There is a certain state of inert asceticism in which the soul,

neutralized by torpor, a stranger to that which may be designated as

the business of living, receives no impressions, either human, or

pleasant or painful, with the exception of earthquakes and

catastrophes. This devotion, as Father Gillenormand said to his

daughter, corresponds to a cold in the head. You smell nothing of life.

Neither any bad, nor any good odor.

Moreover, the six hundred thousand francs had settled the elderly

spinster’s indecision. Her father had acquired the habit of taking her

so little into account, that he had not consulted her in the matter of

consent to Marius’ marriage. He had acted impetuously, according to his

wont, having, a despot-turned slave, but a single thought,—to satisfy

Marius. As for the aunt,—it had not even occurred to him that the aunt

existed, and that she could have an opinion of her own, and, sheep as

she was, this had vexed her. Somewhat resentful in her inmost soul, but

impassible externally, she had said to herself: “My father has settled

the question of the marriage without reference to me; I shall settle

the question of the inheritance without consulting him.” She was rich,

in fact, and her father was not. She had reserved her decision on this

point. It is probable that, had the match been a poor one, she would

have left him poor. “So much the worse for my nephew! he is wedding a

beggar, let him be a beggar himself!” But Cosette’s half-million

pleased the aunt, and altered her inward situation so far as this pair

of lovers were concerned. One owes some consideration to six hundred

thousand francs, and it was evident that she could not do otherwise

than leave her fortune to these young people, since they did not need

it.

It was arranged that the couple should live with the grandfather—M.

Gillenormand insisted on resigning to them his chamber, the finest in

the house. “That will make me young again,” he said. “It’s an old plan

of mine. I have always entertained the idea of having a wedding in my

chamber.”

He furnished this chamber with a multitude of elegant trifles. He had

the ceiling and walls hung with an extraordinary stuff, which he had by

him in the piece, and which he believed to have emanated from Utrecht

with a buttercup-colored satin ground, covered with velvet auricula

blossoms.—“It was with that stuff,” said he, “that the bed of the

Duchesse d’Anville at la Roche-Guyon was draped.”—On the chimney-piece,

he set a little figure in Saxe porcelain, carrying a muff against her

nude stomach.

M. Gillenormand’s library became the lawyer’s study, which Marius

needed; a study, it will be remembered, being required by the council

of the order.

CHAPTER VII—THE EFFECTS OF DREAMS MINGLED WITH HAPPINESS

The lovers saw each other every day. Cosette came with M.

Fauchelevent.—“This is reversing things,” said Mademoiselle

Gillenormand, “to have the bride come to the house to do the courting

like this.” But Marius’ convalescence had caused the habit to become

established, and the armchairs of the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire,

better adapted to interviews than the straw chairs of the Rue de

l’Homme Armé, had rooted it. Marius and M. Fauchelevent saw each other,

but did not address each other. It seemed as though this had been

agreed upon. Every girl needs a chaperon. Cosette could not have come

without M. Fauchelevent. In Marius’ eyes, M. Fauchelevent was the

condition attached to Cosette. He accepted it. By dint of discussing

political matters, vaguely and without precision, from the point of

view of the general amelioration of the fate of all men, they came to

say a little more than “yes” and “no.” Once, on the subject of

education, which Marius wished to have free and obligatory, multiplied

under all forms lavished on every one, like the air and the sun in a

word, respirable for the entire population, they were in unison, and

they almost conversed. M. Fauchelevent talked well, and even with a

certain loftiness of language—still he lacked something indescribable.

M. Fauchelevent possessed something less and also something more, than

a man of the world.

Marius, inwardly, and in the depths of his thought, surrounded with all

sorts of mute questions this M. Fauchelevent, who was to him simply

benevolent and cold. There were moments when doubts as to his own

recollections occurred to him. There was a void in his memory, a black

spot, an abyss excavated by four months of agony.—Many things had been

lost therein. He had come to the point of asking himself whether it

were really a fact that he had seen M. Fauchelevent, so serious and so

calm a man, in the barricade.

This was not, however, the only stupor which the apparitions and the

disappearances of the past had left in his mind. It must not be

supposed that he was delivered from all those obsessions of the memory

which force us, even when happy, even when satisfied, to glance sadly

behind us. The head which does not turn backwards towards horizons that

have vanished contains neither thought nor love. At times, Marius

clasped his face between his hands, and the vague and tumultuous past

traversed the twilight which reigned in his brain. Again he beheld

Mabeuf fall, he heard Gavroche singing amid the grape-shot, he felt

beneath his lips the cold brow of Éponine; Enjolras, Courfeyrac, Jean

Prouvaire, Combeferre, Bossuet, Grantaire, all his friends rose erect

before him, then dispersed into thin air. Were all those dear,

sorrowful, valiant, charming or tragic beings merely dreams? had they

actually existed? The revolt had enveloped everything in its smoke.

These great fevers create great dreams. He questioned himself; he felt

himself; all these vanished realities made him dizzy. Where were they

all then? was it really true that all were dead? A fall into the

shadows had carried off all except himself. It all seemed to him to

have disappeared as though behind the curtain of a theatre. There are

curtains like this which drop in life. God passes on to the following

act.

And he himself—was he actually the same man? He, the poor man, was

rich; he, the abandoned, had a family; he, the despairing, was to marry

Cosette. It seemed to him that he had traversed a tomb, and that he had

entered into it black and had emerged from it white, and in that tomb

the others had remained. At certain moments, all these beings of the

past, returned and present, formed a circle around him, and

overshadowed him; then he thought of Cosette, and recovered his

serenity; but nothing less than this felicity could have sufficed to

efface that catastrophe.

M. Fauchelevent almost occupied a place among these vanished beings.

Marius hesitated to believe that the Fauchelevent of the barricade was

the same as this Fauchelevent in flesh and blood, sitting so gravely

beside Cosette. The first was, probably, one of those nightmares

occasioned and brought back by his hours of delirium. However, the

natures of both men were rigid, no question from Marius to M.

Fauchelevent was possible. Such an idea had not even occurred to him.

We have already indicated this characteristic detail.

Two men who have a secret in common, and who, by a sort of tacit

agreement, exchange not a word on the subject, are less rare than is

commonly supposed.

Once only, did Marius make the attempt. He introduced into the

conversation the Rue de la Chanvrerie, and, turning to M. Fauchelevent,

he said to him:

“Of course, you are acquainted with that street?”

“What street?”

“The Rue de la Chanvrerie.”

“I have no idea of the name of that street,” replied M. Fauchelevent,

in the most natural manner in the world.

The response which bore upon the name of the street and not upon the

street itself, appeared to Marius to be more conclusive than it really

was.

“Decidedly,” thought he, “I have been dreaming. I have been subject to

a hallucination. It was some one who resembled him. M. Fauchelevent was

not there.”’

CHAPTER VIII—TWO MEN IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND

Marius’ enchantment, great as it was, could not efface from his mind

other pre-occupations.

While the wedding was in preparation, and while awaiting the date fixed

upon, he caused difficult and scrupulous retrospective researches to be

made.

He owed gratitude in various quarters; he owed it on his father’s

account, he owed it on his own.

There was Thénardier; there was the unknown man who had brought him,

Marius, back to M. Gillenormand.

Marius endeavored to find these two men, not intending to marry, to be

happy, and to forget them, and fearing that, were these debts of

gratitude not discharged, they would leave a shadow on his life, which

promised so brightly for the future.

It was impossible for him to leave all these arrears of suffering

behind him, and he wished, before entering joyously into the future, to

obtain a quittance from the past.

That Thénardier was a villain detracted nothing from the fact that he

had saved Colonel Pontmercy. Thénardier was a ruffian in the eyes of

all the world except Marius.

And Marius, ignorant of the real scene in the battle field of Waterloo,

was not aware of the peculiar detail, that his father, so far as

Thénardier was concerned was in the strange position of being indebted

to the latter for his life, without being indebted to him for any

gratitude.

None of the various agents whom Marius employed succeeded in

discovering any trace of Thénardier. Obliteration appeared to be

complete in that quarter. Madame Thénardier had died in prison pending

the trial. Thénardier and his daughter Azelma, the only two remaining

of that lamentable group, had plunged back into the gloom. The gulf of

the social unknown had silently closed above those beings. On the

surface there was not visible so much as that quiver, that trembling,

those obscure concentric circles which announce that something has

fallen in, and that the plummet may be dropped.

Madame Thénardier being dead, Boulatruelle being eliminated from the

case, Claquesous having disappeared, the principal persons accused

having escaped from prison, the trial connected with the ambush in the

Gorbeau house had come to nothing.

That affair had remained rather obscure. The bench of Assizes had been

obliged to content themselves with two subordinates. Panchaud, alias

Printanier, alias Bigrenaille, and Demi-Liard, alias Deux-Milliards,

who had been inconsistently condemned, after a hearing of both sides of

the case, to ten years in the galleys. Hard labor for life had been the

sentence pronounced against the escaped and contumacious accomplices.

Thénardier, the head and leader, had been, through contumacy, likewise

condemned to death.

This sentence was the only information remaining about Thénardier,

casting upon that buried name its sinister light like a candle beside a

bier.

Moreover, by thrusting Thénardier back into the very remotest depths,

through a fear of being re-captured, this sentence added to the density

of the shadows which enveloped this man.

As for the other person, as for the unknown man who had saved Marius,

the researches were at first to some extent successful, then came to an

abrupt conclusion. They succeeded in finding the carriage which had

brought Marius to the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire on the evening of the

6th of June.

The coachman declared that, on the 6th of June, in obedience to the

commands of a police-agent, he had stood from three o’clock in the

afternoon until nightfall on the Quai des Champs-Élysées, above the

outlet of the Grand Sewer; that, towards nine o’clock in the evening,

the grating of the sewer, which abuts on the bank of the river, had

opened; that a man had emerged therefrom, bearing on his shoulders

another man, who seemed to be dead; that the agent, who was on the

watch at that point, had arrested the living man and had seized the

dead man; that, at the order of the police-agent, he, the coachman, had

taken “all those folks” into his carriage; that they had first driven

to the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire; that they had there deposited the

dead man; that the dead man was Monsieur Marius, and that he, the

coachman, recognized him perfectly, although he was alive “this time”;

that afterwards, they had entered the vehicle again, that he had

whipped up his horses; a few paces from the gate of the Archives, they

had called to him to halt; that there, in the street, they had paid him

and left him, and that the police-agent had led the other man away;

that he knew nothing more; that the night had been very dark.

Marius, as we have said, recalled nothing. He only remembered that he

had been seized from behind by an energetic hand at the moment when he

was falling backwards into the barricade; then, everything vanished so

far as he was concerned.

He had only regained consciousness at M. Gillenormand’s.

He was lost in conjectures.

He could not doubt his own identity. Still, how had it come to pass

that, having fallen in the Rue de la Chanvrerie, he had been picked up

by the police-agent on the banks of the Seine, near the Pont des

Invalides?

Some one had carried him from the Quartier des Halles to the

Champs-Élysées. And how? Through the sewer. Unheard-of devotion!

Some one? Who?

This was the man for whom Marius was searching.

Of this man, who was his savior, nothing; not a trace; not the faintest

indication.

Marius, although forced to preserve great reserve, in that direction,

pushed his inquiries as far as the prefecture of police. There, no more

than elsewhere, did the information obtained lead to any enlightenment.

The prefecture knew less about the matter than did the

hackney-coachman. They had no knowledge of any arrest having been made

on the 6th of June at the mouth of the Grand Sewer.

No report of any agent had been received there upon this matter, which

was regarded at the prefecture as a fable. The invention of this fable

was attributed to the coachman.

A coachman who wants a gratuity is capable of anything, even of

imagination. The fact was assured, nevertheless, and Marius could not

doubt it, unless he doubted his own identity, as we have just said.

Everything about this singular enigma was inexplicable.

What had become of that man, that mysterious man, whom the coachman had

seen emerge from the grating of the Grand Sewer bearing upon his back

the unconscious Marius, and whom the police-agent on the watch had

arrested in the very act of rescuing an insurgent? What had become of

the agent himself?

Why had this agent preserved silence? Had the man succeeded in making

his escape? Had he bribed the agent? Why did this man give no sign of

life to Marius, who owed everything to him? His disinterestedness was

no less tremendous than his devotion. Why had not that man appeared

again? Perhaps he was above compensation, but no one is above

gratitude. Was he dead? Who was the man? What sort of a face had he? No

one could tell him this.

The coachman answered: “The night was very dark.” Basque and Nicolette,

all in a flutter, had looked only at their young master all covered

with blood.

The porter, whose candle had lighted the tragic arrival of Marius, had

been the only one to take note of the man in question, and this is the

description that he gave:

“That man was terrible.”

Marius had the blood-stained clothing which he had worn when he had

been brought back to his grandfather preserved, in the hope that it

would prove of service in his researches.

On examining the coat, it was found that one skirt had been torn in a

singular way. A piece was missing.

One evening, Marius was speaking in the presence of Cosette and Jean

Valjean of the whole of that singular adventure, of the innumerable

inquiries which he had made, and of the fruitlessness of his efforts.

The cold countenance of “Monsieur Fauchelevent” angered him.

He exclaimed, with a vivacity which had something of wrath in it:

“Yes, that man, whoever he may have been, was sublime. Do you know what

he did, sir? He intervened like an archangel. He must have flung

himself into the midst of the battle, have stolen me away, have opened

the sewer, have dragged me into it and have carried me through it! He

must have traversed more than a league and a half in those frightful

subterranean galleries, bent over, weighed down, in the dark, in the

cesspool,—more than a league and a half, sir, with a corpse upon his

back! And with what object? With the sole object of saving the corpse.

And that corpse I was. He said to himself: ‘There may still be a

glimpse of life there, perchance; I will risk my own existence for that

miserable spark!’ And his existence he risked not once but twenty

times! And every step was a danger. The proof of it is, that on

emerging from the sewer, he was arrested. Do you know, sir, that that

man did all this? And he had no recompense to expect. What was I? An

insurgent. What was I? One of the conquered. Oh! if Cosette’s six

hundred thousand francs were mine….”

“They are yours,” interrupted Jean Valjean.

“Well,” resumed Marius, “I would give them all to find that man once

more.”

Jean Valjean remained silent.

BOOK SIXTH—THE SLEEPLESS NIGHT

CHAPTER I—THE 16TH OF FEBRUARY, 1833

The night of the 16th to the 17th of February, 1833, was a blessed

night. Above its shadows heaven stood open. It was the wedding night of

Marius and Cosette.

The day had been adorable.

It had not been the grand festival dreamed by the grandfather, a fairy

spectacle, with a confusion of cherubim and Cupids over the heads of

the bridal pair, a marriage worthy to form the subject of a painting to

be placed over a door; but it had been sweet and smiling.

The manner of marriage in 1833 was not the same as it is to-day. France

had not yet borrowed from England that supreme delicacy of carrying off

one’s wife, of fleeing, on coming out of church, of hiding oneself with

shame from one’s happiness, and of combining the ways of a bankrupt

with the delights of the Song of Songs. People had not yet grasped to

the full the chastity, exquisiteness, and decency of jolting their

paradise in a posting-chaise, of breaking up their mystery with

clic-clacs, of taking for a nuptial bed the bed of an inn, and of

leaving behind them, in a commonplace chamber, at so much a night, the

most sacred of the souvenirs of life mingled pell-mell with the

tête-à-tête of the conductor of the diligence and the maid-servant of

the inn.

In this second half of the nineteenth century in which we are now

living, the mayor and his scarf, the priest and his chasuble, the law

and God no longer suffice; they must be eked out by the Postilion de

Lonjumeau; a blue waistcoat turned up with red, and with bell buttons,

a plaque like a vantbrace, knee-breeches of green leather, oaths to the

Norman horses with their tails knotted up, false galloons, varnished

hat, long powdered locks, an enormous whip and tall boots. France does

not yet carry elegance to the length of doing like the English

nobility, and raining down on the post-chaise of the bridal pair a hail

storm of slippers trodden down at heel and of worn-out shoes, in memory

of Churchill, afterwards Marlborough, or Malbrouck, who was assailed on

his wedding-day by the wrath of an aunt which brought him good luck.

Old shoes and slippers do not, as yet, form a part of our nuptial

celebrations; but patience, as good taste continues to spread, we shall

come to that.

In 1833, a hundred years ago, marriage was not conducted at a full

trot.

Strange to say, at that epoch, people still imagined that a wedding was

a private and social festival, that a patriarchal banquet does not

spoil a domestic solemnity, that gayety, even in excess, provided it be

honest, and decent, does happiness no harm, and that, in short, it is a

good and a venerable thing that the fusion of these two destinies

whence a family is destined to spring, should begin at home, and that

the household should thenceforth have its nuptial chamber as its

witness.

And people were so immodest as to marry in their own homes.

The marriage took place, therefore, in accordance with this now

superannuated fashion, at M. Gillenormand’s house.

Natural and commonplace as this matter of marrying is, the banns to

publish, the papers to be drawn up, the mayoralty, and the church

produce some complication. They could not get ready before the 16th of

February.

Now, we note this detail, for the pure satisfaction of being exact, it

chanced that the 16th fell on Shrove Tuesday. Hesitations, scruples,

particularly on the part of Aunt Gillenormand.

“Shrove Tuesday!” exclaimed the grandfather, “so much the better. There

is a proverb:

“‘Mariage un Mardi gras

N’aura point enfants ingrats.’66

Let us proceed. Here goes for the 16th! Do you want to delay, Marius?”

“No, certainly not!” replied the lover.

“Let us marry, then,” cried the grandfather.

Accordingly, the marriage took place on the 16th, notwithstanding the

public merrymaking. It rained that day, but there is always in the sky

a tiny scrap of blue at the service of happiness, which lovers see,

even when the rest of creation is under an umbrella.

On the preceding evening, Jean Valjean handed to Marius, in the

presence of M. Gillenormand, the five hundred and eighty-four thousand

francs.

As the marriage was taking place under the régime of community of

property, the papers had been simple.

Henceforth, Toussaint was of no use to Jean Valjean; Cosette inherited

her and promoted her to the rank of lady’s maid.

As for Jean Valjean, a beautiful chamber in the Gillenormand house had

been furnished expressly for him, and Cosette had said to him in such

an irresistible manner: “Father, I entreat you,” that she had almost

persuaded him to promise that he would come and occupy it.

A few days before that fixed on for the marriage, an accident happened

to Jean Valjean; he crushed the thumb of his right hand. This was not a

serious matter; and he had not allowed any one to trouble himself about

it, nor to dress it, nor even to see his hurt, not even Cosette.

Nevertheless, this had forced him to swathe his hand in a linen

bandage, and to carry his arm in a sling, and had prevented his

signing. M. Gillenormand, in his capacity of Cosette’s

supervising-guardian, had supplied his place.

We will not conduct the reader either to the mayor’s office or to the

church. One does not follow a pair of lovers to that extent, and one is

accustomed to turn one’s back on the drama as soon as it puts a wedding

nosegay in its buttonhole. We will confine ourselves to noting an

incident which, though unnoticed by the wedding party, marked the

transit from the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire to the church of

Saint-Paul.

At that epoch, the northern extremity of the Rue Saint-Louis was in

process of repaving. It was barred off, beginning with the Rue du

Parc-Royal. It was impossible for the wedding carriages to go directly

to Saint-Paul. They were obliged to alter their course, and the

simplest way was to turn through the boulevard. One of the invited

guests observed that it was Shrove Tuesday, and that there would be a

jam of vehicles.—“Why?” asked M. Gillenormand—“Because of the

maskers.”—“Capital,” said the grandfather, “let us go that way. These

young folks are on the way to be married; they are about to enter the

serious part of life. This will prepare them for seeing a bit of the

masquerade.”

They went by way of the boulevard. The first wedding coach held Cosette

and Aunt Gillenormand, M. Gillenormand and Jean Valjean. Marius, still

separated from his betrothed according to usage, did not come until the

second. The nuptial train, on emerging from the Rue des

Filles-du-Calvaire, became entangled in a long procession of vehicles

which formed an endless chain from the Madeleine to the Bastille, and

from the Bastille to the Madeleine. Maskers abounded on the boulevard.

In spite of the fact that it was raining at intervals, Merry-Andrew,

Pantaloon and Clown persisted. In the good humor of that winter of

1833, Paris had disguised itself as Venice. Such Shrove Tuesdays are no

longer to be seen nowadays. Everything which exists being a scattered

Carnival, there is no longer any Carnival.

The sidewalks were overflowing with pedestrians and the windows with

curious spectators. The terraces which crown the peristyles of the

theatres were bordered with spectators. Besides the maskers, they

stared at that procession—peculiar to Shrove Tuesday as to

Longchamps,—of vehicles of every description, citadines, tapissières,

carioles, cabriolets marching in order, rigorously riveted to each

other by the police regulations, and locked into rails, as it were. Any

one in these vehicles is at once a spectator and a spectacle. Police

sergeants maintained, on the sides of the boulevard, these two

interminable parallel files, moving in contrary directions, and saw to

it that nothing interfered with that double current, those two brooks

of carriages, flowing, the one downstream, the other upstream, the one

towards the Chaussée d’Antin, the other towards the Faubourg

Saint-Antoine. The carriages of the peers of France and of the

Ambassadors, emblazoned with coats of arms, held the middle of the way,

going and coming freely. Certain joyous and magnificent trains, notably

that of the Bœuf Gras, had the same privilege. In this gayety of Paris,

England cracked her whip; Lord Seymour’s post-chaise, harassed by a

nickname from the populace, passed with great noise.

In the double file, along which the municipal guards galloped like

sheep-dogs, honest family coaches, loaded down with great-aunts and

grandmothers, displayed at their doors fresh groups of children in

disguise, Clowns of seven years of age, Columbines of six, ravishing

little creatures, who felt that they formed an official part of the

public mirth, who were imbued with the dignity of their harlequinade,

and who possessed the gravity of functionaries.

From time to time, a hitch arose somewhere in the procession of

vehicles; one or other of the two lateral files halted until the knot

was disentangled; one carriage delayed sufficed to paralyze the whole

line. Then they set out again on the march.

The wedding carriages were in the file proceeding towards the Bastille,

and skirting the right side of the Boulevard. At the top of the

Pont-aux-Choux, there was a stoppage. Nearly at the same moment, the

other file, which was proceeding towards the Madeleine, halted also. At

that point of the file there was a carriage-load of maskers.

These carriages, or to speak more correctly, these wagon-loads of

maskers are very familiar to Parisians. If they were missing on a

Shrove Tuesday, or at the Mid-Lent, it would be taken in bad part, and

people would say: “There’s something behind that. Probably the ministry

is about to undergo a change.” A pile of Cassandras, Harlequins and

Columbines, jolted along high above the passers-by, all possible

grotesquenesses, from the Turk to the savage, Hercules supporting

Marquises, fishwives who would have made Rabelais stop up his ears just

as the Mænads made Aristophanes drop his eyes, tow wigs, pink tights,

dandified hats, spectacles of a grimacer, three-cornered hats of Janot

tormented with a butterfly, shouts directed at pedestrians, fists on

hips, bold attitudes, bare shoulders, immodesty unchained; a chaos of

shamelessness driven by a coachman crowned with flowers; this is what

that institution was like.

Greece stood in need of the chariot of Thespis, France stands in need

of the hackney-coach of Vadé.

Everything can be parodied, even parody. The Saturnalia, that grimace

of antique beauty, ends, through exaggeration after exaggeration, in

Shrove Tuesday; and the Bacchanal, formerly crowned with sprays of vine

leaves and grapes, inundated with sunshine, displaying her marble

breast in a divine semi-nudity, having at the present day lost her

shape under the soaked rags of the North, has finally come to be called

the Jack-pudding.

The tradition of carriage-loads of maskers runs back to the most

ancient days of the monarchy. The accounts of Louis XI. allot to the

bailiff of the palace “twenty sous, Tournois, for three coaches of

mascarades in the crossroads.” In our day, these noisy heaps of

creatures are accustomed to have themselves driven in some ancient

cuckoo carriage, whose imperial they load down, or they overwhelm a

hired landau, with its top thrown back, with their tumultuous groups.

Twenty of them ride in a carriage intended for six. They cling to the

seats, to the rumble, on the cheeks of the hood, on the shafts. They

even bestride the carriage lamps. They stand, sit, lie, with their

knees drawn up in a knot, and their legs hanging. The women sit on the

men’s laps. Far away, above the throng of heads, their wild pyramid is

visible. These carriage-loads form mountains of mirth in the midst of

the rout. Collé, Panard and Piron flow from it, enriched with slang.

This carriage which has become colossal through its freight, has an air

of conquest. Uproar reigns in front, tumult behind. People vociferate,

shout, howl, there they break forth and writhe with enjoyment; gayety

roars; sarcasm flames forth, joviality is flaunted like a red flag; two

jades there drag farce blossomed forth into an apotheosis; it is the

triumphal car of laughter.

A laughter that is too cynical to be frank. In truth, this laughter is

suspicious. This laughter has a mission. It is charged with proving the

Carnival to the Parisians.

These fishwife vehicles, in which one feels one knows not what shadows,

set the philosopher to thinking. There is government therein. There one

lays one’s finger on a mysterious affinity between public men and

public women.

It certainly is sad that turpitude heaped up should give a sum total of

gayety, that by piling ignominy upon opprobrium the people should be

enticed, that the system of spying, and serving as caryatids to

prostitution should amuse the rabble when it confronts them, that the

crowd loves to behold that monstrous living pile of tinsel rags, half

dung, half light, roll by on four wheels howling and laughing, that

they should clap their hands at this glory composed of all shames, that

there would be no festival for the populace, did not the police

promenade in their midst these sorts of twenty-headed hydras of joy.

But what can be done about it? These be-ribboned and be-flowered

tumbrils of mire are insulted and pardoned by the laughter of the

public. The laughter of all is the accomplice of universal degradation.

Certain unhealthy festivals disaggregate the people and convert them

into the populace. And populaces, like tyrants, require buffoons. The

King has Roquelaure, the populace has the Merry-Andrew. Paris is a

great, mad city on every occasion that it is a great sublime city.

There the Carnival forms part of politics. Paris,—let us confess

it—willingly allows infamy to furnish it with comedy. She only demands

of her masters—when she has masters—one thing: “Paint me the mud.” Rome

was of the same mind. She loved Nero. Nero was a titanic lighterman.

Chance ordained, as we have just said, that one of these shapeless

clusters of masked men and women, dragged about on a vast calash,

should halt on the left of the boulevard, while the wedding train

halted on the right. The carriage-load of masks caught sight of the

wedding carriage containing the bridal party opposite them on the other

side of the boulevard.

“Hullo!” said a masker, “here’s a wedding.”

“A sham wedding,” retorted another. “We are the genuine article.”

And, being too far off to accost the wedding party, and fearing also,

the rebuke of the police, the two maskers turned their eyes elsewhere.

At the end of another minute, the carriage-load of maskers had their

hands full, the multitude set to yelling, which is the crowd’s caress

to masquerades; and the two maskers who had just spoken had to face the

throng with their comrades, and did not find the entire repertory of

projectiles of the fishmarkets too extensive to retort to the enormous

verbal attacks of the populace. A frightful exchange of metaphors took

place between the maskers and the crowd.

In the meanwhile, two other maskers in the same carriage, a Spaniard

with an enormous nose, an elderly air, and huge black moustache, and a

gaunt fishwife, who was quite a young girl, masked with a \_loup\_,67 had

also noticed the wedding, and while their companions and the passers-by

were exchanging insults, they had held a dialogue in a low voice.

Their aside was covered by the tumult and was lost in it. The gusts of

rain had drenched the front of the vehicle, which was wide open; the

breezes of February are not warm; as the fishwife, clad in a low-necked

gown, replied to the Spaniard, she shivered, laughed and coughed.

Here is their dialogue:

“Say, now.”

“What, daddy?”

“Do you see that old cove?”

“What old cove?”

“Yonder, in the first wedding-cart, on our side.”

“The one with his arm hung up in a black cravat?”

“Yes.”

“Well?”

“I’m sure that I know him.”

“Ah!”

“I’m willing that they should cut my throat, and I’m ready to swear

that I never said either you, thou, or I, in my life, if I don’t know

that Parisian.” [\_pantinois\_.]

“Paris in Pantin to-day.”

“Can you see the bride if you stoop down?”

“No.”

“And the bridegroom?”

“There’s no bridegroom in that trap.”

“Bah!”

“Unless it’s the old fellow.”

“Try to get a sight of the bride by stooping very low.”

“I can’t.”

“Never mind, that old cove who has something the matter with his paw I

know, and that I’m positive.”

“And what good does it do to know him?”

“No one can tell. Sometimes it does!”

“I don’t care a hang for old fellows, that I don’t!”

“I know him.”

“Know him, if you want to.”

“How the devil does he come to be one of the wedding party?”

“We are in it, too.”

“Where does that wedding come from?”

“How should I know?”

“Listen.”

“Well, what?”

“There’s one thing you ought to do.”

“What’s that?”

“Get off of our trap and spin that wedding.”

“What for?”

“To find out where it goes, and what it is. Hurry up and jump down,

trot, my girl, your legs are young.”

“I can’t quit the vehicle.”

“Why not?”

“I’m hired.”

“Ah, the devil!”

“I owe my fishwife day to the prefecture.”

“That’s true.”

“If I leave the cart, the first inspector who gets his eye on me will

arrest me. You know that well enough.”

“Yes, I do.”

“I’m bought by the government for to-day.”

“All the same, that old fellow bothers me.”

“Do the old fellows bother you? But you’re not a young girl.”

“He’s in the first carriage.”

“Well?”

“In the bride’s trap.”

“What then?”

“So he is the father.”

“What concern is that of mine?”

“I tell you that he’s the father.”

“As if he were the only father.”

“Listen.”

“What?”

“I can’t go out otherwise than masked. Here I’m concealed, no one knows

that I’m here. But to-morrow, there will be no more maskers. It’s Ash

Wednesday. I run the risk of being nabbed. I must sneak back into my

hole. But you are free.”

“Not particularly.”

“More than I am, at any rate.”

“Well, what of that?”

“You must try to find out where that wedding party went to.”

“Where it went?”

“Yes.”

“I know.”

“Where is it going then?”

“To the Cadran-Bleu.”

“In the first place, it’s not in that direction.”

“Well! to la Rapée.”

“Or elsewhere.”

“It’s free. Wedding parties are at liberty.”

“That’s not the point at all. I tell you that you must try to learn for

me what that wedding is, who that old cove belongs to, and where that

wedding pair lives.”

“I like that! that would be queer. It’s so easy to find out a wedding

party that passed through the street on a Shrove Tuesday, a week

afterwards. A pin in a hay-mow! It ain’t possible!”

“That don’t matter. You must try. You understand me, Azelma.”

The two files resumed their movement on both sides of the boulevard, in

opposite directions, and the carriage of the maskers lost sight of the

“trap” of the bride.

CHAPTER II—JEAN VALJEAN STILL WEARS HIS ARM IN A SLING

To realize one’s dream. To whom is this accorded? There must be

elections for this in heaven; we are all candidates, unknown to

ourselves; the angels vote. Cosette and Marius had been elected.

Cosette, both at the mayor’s office and at church, was dazzling and

touching. Toussaint, assisted by Nicolette, had dressed her.

Cosette wore over a petticoat of white taffeta, her robe of Binche

guipure, a veil of English point, a necklace of fine pearls, a wreath

of orange flowers; all this was white, and, from the midst of that

whiteness she beamed forth. It was an exquisite candor expanding and

becoming transfigured in the light. One would have pronounced her a

virgin on the point of turning into a goddess.

Marius’ handsome hair was lustrous and perfumed; here and there,

beneath the thick curls, pale lines—the scars of the barricade—were

visible.

The grandfather, haughty, with head held high, amalgamating more than

ever in his toilet and his manners all the elegances of the epoch of

Barras, escorted Cosette. He took the place of Jean Valjean, who, on

account of his arm being still in a sling, could not give his hand to

the bride.

Jean Valjean, dressed in black, followed them with a smile.

“Monsieur Fauchelevent,” said the grandfather to him, “this is a fine

day. I vote for the end of afflictions and sorrows. Henceforth, there

must be no sadness anywhere. Pardieu, I decree joy! Evil has no right

to exist. That there should be any unhappy men is, in sooth, a disgrace

to the azure of the sky. Evil does not come from man, who is good at

bottom. All human miseries have for their capital and central

government hell, otherwise, known as the Devil’s Tuileries. Good, here

I am uttering demagogical words! As far as I am concerned, I have no

longer any political opinions; let all men be rich, that is to say,

mirthful, and I confine myself to that.”

When, at the conclusion of all the ceremonies, after having pronounced

before the mayor and before the priest all possible “yesses,” after

having signed the registers at the municipality and at the sacristy,

after having exchanged their rings, after having knelt side by side

under the pall of white moire in the smoke of the censer, they arrived,

hand in hand, admired and envied by all, Marius in black, she in white,

preceded by the suisse, with the epaulets of a colonel, tapping the

pavement with his halberd, between two rows of astonished spectators,

at the portals of the church, both leaves of which were thrown wide

open, ready to enter their carriage again, and all being finished,

Cosette still could not believe that it was real. She looked at Marius,

she looked at the crowd, she looked at the sky: it seemed as though she

feared that she should wake up from her dream. Her amazed and uneasy

air added something indescribably enchanting to her beauty. They

entered the same carriage to return home, Marius beside Cosette; M.

Gillenormand and Jean Valjean sat opposite them; Aunt Gillenormand had

withdrawn one degree, and was in the second vehicle.

“My children,” said the grandfather, “here you are, Monsieur le Baron

and Madame la Baronne, with an income of thirty thousand livres.”

And Cosette, nestling close to Marius, caressed his ear with an angelic

whisper: “So it is true. My name is Marius. I am Madame Thou.”

These two creatures were resplendent. They had reached that irrevocable

and irrecoverable moment, at the dazzling intersection of all youth and

all joy. They realized the verses of Jean Prouvaire; they were forty

years old taken together. It was marriage sublimated; these two

children were two lilies. They did not see each other, they did not

contemplate each other. Cosette perceived Marius in the midst of a

glory; Marius perceived Cosette on an altar. And on that altar, and in

that glory, the two apotheoses mingling, in the background, one knows

not how, behind a cloud for Cosette, in a flash for Marius, there was

the ideal thing, the real thing, the meeting of the kiss and the dream,

the nuptial pillow. All the torments through which they had passed came

back to them in intoxication. It seemed to them that their sorrows,

their sleepless nights, their tears, their anguish, their terrors,

their despair, converted into caresses and rays of light, rendered

still more charming the charming hour which was approaching; and that

their griefs were but so many handmaidens who were preparing the toilet

of joy. How good it is to have suffered! Their unhappiness formed a

halo round their happiness. The long agony of their love was

terminating in an ascension.

It was the same enchantment in two souls, tinged with voluptuousness in

Marius, and with modesty in Cosette. They said to each other in low

tones: “We will go back to take a look at our little garden in the Rue

Plumet.” The folds of Cosette’s gown lay across Marius.

Such a day is an ineffable mixture of dream and of reality. One

possesses and one supposes. One still has time before one to divine.

The emotion on that day, of being at midday and of dreaming of midnight

is indescribable. The delights of these two hearts overflowed upon the

crowd, and inspired the passers-by with cheerfulness.

People halted in the Rue Saint-Antoine, in front of Saint-Paul, to gaze

through the windows of the carriage at the orange-flowers quivering on

Cosette’s head.

Then they returned home to the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire. Marius,

triumphant and radiant, mounted side by side with Cosette the staircase

up which he had been borne in a dying condition. The poor, who had

trooped to the door, and who shared their purses, blessed them. There

were flowers everywhere. The house was no less fragrant than the

church; after the incense, roses. They thought they heard voices

carolling in the infinite; they had God in their hearts; destiny

appeared to them like a ceiling of stars; above their heads they beheld

the light of a rising sun. All at once, the clock struck. Marius

glanced at Cosette’s charming bare arm, and at the rosy things which

were vaguely visible through the lace of her bodice, and Cosette,

intercepting Marius’ glance, blushed to her very hair.

Quite a number of old family friends of the Gillenormand family had

been invited; they pressed about Cosette. Each one vied with the rest

in saluting her as Madame la Baronne.

The officer, Théodule Gillenormand, now a captain, had come from

Chartres, where he was stationed in garrison, to be present at the

wedding of his cousin Pontmercy. Cosette did not recognize him.

He, on his side, habituated as he was to have women consider him

handsome, retained no more recollection of Cosette than of any other

woman.

“How right I was not to believe in that story about the lancer!” said

Father Gillenormand, to himself.

Cosette had never been more tender with Jean Valjean. She was in unison

with Father Gillenormand; while he erected joy into aphorisms and

maxims, she exhaled goodness like a perfume. Happiness desires that all

the world should be happy.

She regained, for the purpose of addressing Jean Valjean, inflections

of voice belonging to the time when she was a little girl. She caressed

him with her smile.

A banquet had been spread in the dining-room.

Illumination as brilliant as the daylight is the necessary seasoning of

a great joy. Mist and obscurity are not accepted by the happy. They do

not consent to be black. The night, yes; the shadows, no. If there is

no sun, one must be made.

The dining-room was full of gay things. In the centre, above the white

and glittering table, was a Venetian lustre with flat plates, with all

sorts of colored birds, blue, violet, red, and green, perched amid the

candles; around the chandelier, girandoles, on the walls, sconces with

triple and quintuple branches; mirrors, silverware, glassware, plate,

porcelain, faïence, pottery, gold and silversmith’s work, all was

sparkling and gay. The empty spaces between the candelabra were filled

in with bouquets, so that where there was not a light, there was a

flower.

In the antechamber, three violins and a flute softly played quartettes

by Haydn.

Jean Valjean had seated himself on a chair in the drawing-room, behind

the door, the leaf of which folded back upon him in such a manner as to

nearly conceal him. A few moments before they sat down to table,

Cosette came, as though inspired by a sudden whim, and made him a deep

courtesy, spreading out her bridal toilet with both hands, and with a

tenderly roguish glance, she asked him:

“Father, are you satisfied?”

“Yes,” said Jean Valjean, “I am content!”

“Well, then, laugh.”

Jean Valjean began to laugh.

A few moments later, Basque announced that dinner was served.

The guests, preceded by M. Gillenormand with Cosette on his arm,

entered the dining-room, and arranged themselves in the proper order

around the table.

Two large armchairs figured on the right and left of the bride, the

first for M. Gillenormand, the other for Jean Valjean. M. Gillenormand

took his seat. The other armchair remained empty.

They looked about for M. Fauchelevent.

He was no longer there.

M. Gillenormand questioned Basque.

“Do you know where M. Fauchelevent is?”

“Sir,” replied Basque, “I do, precisely. M. Fauchelevent told me to say

to you, sir, that he was suffering, his injured hand was paining him

somewhat, and that he could not dine with Monsieur le Baron and Madame

la Baronne. That he begged to be excused, that he would come to-morrow.

He has just taken his departure.”

That empty armchair chilled the effusion of the wedding feast for a

moment. But, if M. Fauchelevent was absent, M. Gillenormand was

present, and the grandfather beamed for two. He affirmed that M.

Fauchelevent had done well to retire early, if he were suffering, but

that it was only a slight ailment. This declaration sufficed. Moreover,

what is an obscure corner in such a submersion of joy? Cosette and

Marius were passing through one of those egotistical and blessed

moments when no other faculty is left to a person than that of

receiving happiness. And then, an idea occurred to M.

Gillenormand.—“Pardieu, this armchair is empty. Come hither, Marius.

Your aunt will permit it, although she has a right to you. This

armchair is for you. That is legal and delightful. Fortunatus beside

Fortunata.”—Applause from the whole table. Marius took Jean Valjean’s

place beside Cosette, and things fell out so that Cosette, who had, at

first, been saddened by Jean Valjean’s absence, ended by being

satisfied with it. From the moment when Marius took his place, and was

the substitute, Cosette would not have regretted God himself. She set

her sweet little foot, shod in white satin, on Marius’ foot.

The armchair being occupied, M. Fauchelevent was obliterated; and

nothing was lacking.

And, five minutes afterward, the whole table from one end to the other,

was laughing with all the animation of forgetfulness.

At dessert, M. Gillenormand, rising to his feet, with a glass of

champagne in his hand—only half full so that the palsy of his eighty

years might not cause an overflow,—proposed the health of the married

pair.

“You shall not escape two sermons,” he exclaimed. “This morning you had

one from the curé, this evening you shall have one from your

grandfather. Listen to me; I will give you a bit of advice: Adore each

other. I do not make a pack of gyrations, I go straight to the mark, be

happy. In all creation, only the turtledoves are wise. Philosophers

say: ‘Moderate your joys.’ I say: ‘Give rein to your joys.’ Be as much

smitten with each other as fiends. Be in a rage about it. The

philosophers talk stuff and nonsense. I should like to stuff their

philosophy down their gullets again. Can there be too many perfumes,

too many open rose-buds, too many nightingales singing, too many green

leaves, too much aurora in life? can people love each other too much?

can people please each other too much? Take care, Estelle, thou art too

pretty! Have a care, Nemorin, thou art too handsome! Fine stupidity, in

sooth! Can people enchant each other too much, cajole each other too

much, charm each other too much? Can one be too much alive, too happy?

Moderate your joys. Ah, indeed! Down with the philosophers! Wisdom

consists in jubilation. Make merry, let us make merry. Are we happy

because we are good, or are we good because we are happy? Is the Sancy

diamond called the Sancy because it belonged to Harley de Sancy, or

because it weighs six hundred carats? I know nothing about it, life is

full of such problems; the important point is to possess the Sancy and

happiness. Let us be happy without quibbling and quirking. Let us obey

the sun blindly. What is the sun? It is love. He who says love, says

woman. Ah! ah! behold omnipotence—women. Ask that demagogue of a Marius

if he is not the slave of that little tyrant of a Cosette. And of his

own free will, too, the coward! Woman! There is no Robespierre who

keeps his place but woman reigns. I am no longer Royalist except

towards that royalty. What is Adam? The kingdom of Eve. No ’89 for Eve.

There has been the royal sceptre surmounted by a fleur-de-lys, there

has been the imperial sceptre surmounted by a globe, there has been the

sceptre of Charlemagne, which was of iron, there has been the sceptre

of Louis the Great, which was of gold,—the revolution twisted them

between its thumb and forefinger, ha’penny straws; it is done with, it

is broken, it lies on the earth, there is no longer any sceptre, but

make me a revolution against that little embroidered handkerchief,

which smells of patchouli! I should like to see you do it. Try. Why is

it so solid? Because it is a gewgaw. Ah! you are the nineteenth

century? Well, what then? And we have been as foolish as you. Do not

imagine that you have effected much change in the universe, because

your trip-gallant is called the cholera-morbus, and because your

\_pourrée\_ is called the cachuca. In fact, the women must always be

loved. I defy you to escape from that. These friends are our angels.

Yes, love, woman, the kiss forms a circle from which I defy you to

escape; and, for my own part, I should be only too happy to re-enter

it. Which of you has seen the planet Venus, the coquette of the abyss,

the Célimène of the ocean, rise in the infinite, calming all here

below? The ocean is a rough Alcestis. Well, grumble as he will, when

Venus appears he is forced to smile. That brute beast submits. We are

all made so. Wrath, tempest, claps of thunder, foam to the very

ceiling. A woman enters on the scene, a planet rises; flat on your

face! Marius was fighting six months ago; to-day he is married. That is

well. Yes, Marius, yes, Cosette, you are in the right. Exist boldly for

each other, make us burst with rage that we cannot do the same,

idealize each other, catch in your beaks all the tiny blades of

felicity that exist on earth, and arrange yourselves a nest for life.

Pardi, to love, to be loved, what a fine miracle when one is young!

Don’t imagine that you have invented that. I, too, have had my dream,

I, too, have meditated, I, too, have sighed; I, too, have had a

moonlight soul. Love is a child six thousand years old. Love has the

right to a long white beard. Methusalem is a street arab beside Cupid.

For sixty centuries men and women have got out of their scrape by

loving. The devil, who is cunning, took to hating man; man, who is

still more cunning, took to loving woman. In this way he does more good

than the devil does him harm. This craft was discovered in the days of

the terrestrial paradise. The invention is old, my friends, but it is

perfectly new. Profit by it. Be Daphnis and Chloe, while waiting to

become Philemon and Baucis. Manage so that, when you are with each

other, nothing shall be lacking to you, and that Cosette may be the sun

for Marius, and that Marius may be the universe to Cosette. Cosette,

let your fine weather be the smile of your husband; Marius, let your

rain be your wife’s tears. And let it never rain in your household. You

have filched the winning number in the lottery; you have gained the

great prize, guard it well, keep it under lock and key, do not squander

it, adore each other and snap your fingers at all the rest. Believe

what I say to you. It is good sense. And good sense cannot lie. Be a

religion to each other. Each man has his own fashion of adoring God.

Saperlotte! the best way to adore God is to love one’s wife. \_I love

thee!\_ that’s my catechism. He who loves is orthodox. The oath of Henri

IV. places sanctity somewhere between feasting and drunkenness.

Ventre-saint-gris! I don’t belong to the religion of that oath. Woman

is forgotten in it. This astonishes me on the part of Henri IV. My

friends, long live women! I am old, they say; it’s astonishing how much

I feel in the mood to be young. I should like to go and listen to the

bagpipes in the woods. Children who contrive to be beautiful and

contented,—that intoxicates me. I would like greatly to get married, if

any one would have me. It is impossible to imagine that God could have

made us for anything but this: to idolize, to coo, to preen ourselves,

to be dove-like, to be dainty, to bill and coo our loves from morn to

night, to gaze at one’s image in one’s little wife, to be proud, to be

triumphant, to plume oneself; that is the aim of life. There, let not

that displease you which we used to think in our day, when we were

young folks. Ah! vertu-bamboche! what charming women there were in

those days, and what pretty little faces and what lovely lasses! I

committed my ravages among them. Then love each other. If people did

not love each other, I really do not see what use there would be in

having any springtime; and for my own part, I should pray the good God

to shut up all the beautiful things that he shows us, and to take away

from us and put back in his box, the flowers, the birds, and the pretty

maidens. My children, receive an old man’s blessing.”

The evening was gay, lively and agreeable. The grandfather’s sovereign

good humor gave the key-note to the whole feast, and each person

regulated his conduct on that almost centenarian cordiality. They

danced a little, they laughed a great deal; it was an amiable wedding.

Goodman Days of Yore might have been invited to it. However, he was

present in the person of Father Gillenormand.

There was a tumult, then silence.

The married pair disappeared.

A little after midnight, the Gillenormand house became a temple.

Here we pause. On the threshold of wedding nights stands a smiling

angel with his finger on his lips.

The soul enters into contemplation before that sanctuary where the

celebration of love takes place.

There should be flashes of light athwart such houses. The joy which

they contain ought to make its escape through the stones of the walls

in brilliancy, and vaguely illuminate the gloom. It is impossible that

this sacred and fatal festival should not give off a celestial radiance

to the infinite. Love is the sublime crucible wherein the fusion of the

man and the woman takes place; the being one, the being triple, the

being final, the human trinity proceeds from it. This birth of two

souls into one, ought to be an emotion for the gloom. The lover is the

priest; the ravished virgin is terrified. Something of that joy ascends

to God. Where true marriage is, that is to say, where there is love,

the ideal enters in. A nuptial bed makes a nook of dawn amid the

shadows. If it were given to the eye of the flesh to scan the

formidable and charming visions of the upper life, it is probable that

we should behold the forms of night, the winged unknowns, the blue

passers of the invisible, bend down, a throng of sombre heads, around

the luminous house, satisfied, showering benedictions, pointing out to

each other the virgin wife gently alarmed, sweetly terrified, and

bearing the reflection of human bliss upon their divine countenances.

If at that supreme hour, the wedded pair, dazzled with voluptuousness

and believing themselves alone, were to listen, they would hear in

their chamber a confused rustling of wings. Perfect happiness implies a

mutual understanding with the angels. That dark little chamber has all

heaven for its ceiling. When two mouths, rendered sacred by love,

approach to create, it is impossible that there should not be, above

that ineffable kiss, a quivering throughout the immense mystery of

stars.

These felicities are the true ones. There is no joy outside of these

joys. Love is the only ecstasy. All the rest weeps.

To love, or to have loved,—this suffices. Demand nothing more. There is

no other pearl to be found in the shadowy folds of life. To love is a

fulfilment.

CHAPTER III—THE INSEPARABLE

What had become of Jean Valjean?

Immediately after having laughed, at Cosette’s graceful command, when

no one was paying any heed to him, Jean Valjean had risen and had

gained the antechamber unperceived. This was the very room which, eight

months before, he had entered black with mud, with blood and powder,

bringing back the grandson to the grandfather. The old wainscoting was

garlanded with foliage and flowers; the musicians were seated on the

sofa on which they had laid Marius down. Basque, in a black coat,

knee-breeches, white stockings and white gloves, was arranging roses

round all of the dishes that were to be served. Jean Valjean pointed to

his arm in its sling, charged Basque to explain his absence, and went

away.

The long windows of the dining-room opened on the street. Jean Valjean

stood for several minutes, erect and motionless in the darkness,

beneath those radiant windows. He listened. The confused sounds of the

banquet reached his ear. He heard the loud, commanding tones of the

grandfather, the violins, the clatter of the plates, the bursts of

laughter, and through all that merry uproar, he distinguished Cosette’s

sweet and joyous voice.

He quitted the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, and returned to the Rue de

l’Homme Armé.

In order to return thither, he took the Rue Saint-Louis, the Rue

Culture-Sainte-Catherine, and the Blancs-Manteaux; it was a little

longer, but it was the road through which, for the last three months,

he had become accustomed to pass every day on his way from the Rue de

l’Homme Armé to the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, in order to avoid the

obstructions and the mud in the Rue Vieille-du-Temple.

This road, through which Cosette had passed, excluded for him all

possibility of any other itinerary.

Jean Valjean entered his lodgings. He lighted his candle and mounted

the stairs. The apartment was empty. Even Toussaint was no longer

there. Jean Valjean’s step made more noise than usual in the chambers.

All the cupboards stood open. He penetrated to Cosette’s bedroom. There

were no sheets on the bed. The pillow, covered with ticking, and

without a case or lace, was laid on the blankets folded up on the foot

of the mattress, whose covering was visible, and on which no one was

ever to sleep again. All the little feminine objects which Cosette was

attached to had been carried away; nothing remained except the heavy

furniture and the four walls. Toussaint’s bed was despoiled in like

manner. One bed only was made up, and seemed to be waiting some one,

and this was Jean Valjean’s bed.

Jean Valjean looked at the walls, closed some of the cupboard doors,

and went and came from one room to another.

Then he sought his own chamber once more, and set his candle on a

table.

He had disengaged his arm from the sling, and he used his right hand as

though it did not hurt him.

He approached his bed, and his eyes rested, was it by chance? was it

intentionally? on the \_inseparable\_ of which Cosette had been jealous,

on the little portmanteau which never left him. On his arrival in the

Rue de l’Homme Armé, on the 4th of June, he had deposited it on a round

table near the head of his bed. He went to this table with a sort of

vivacity, took a key from his pocket, and opened the valise.

From it he slowly drew forth the garments in which, ten years before,

Cosette had quitted Montfermeil; first the little gown, then the black

fichu, then the stout, coarse child’s shoes which Cosette might almost

have worn still, so tiny were her feet, then the fustian bodice, which

was very thick, then the knitted petticoat, next the apron with

pockets, then the woollen stockings. These stockings, which still

preserved the graceful form of a tiny leg, were no longer than Jean

Valjean’s hand. All this was black of hue. It was he who had brought

those garments to Montfermeil for her. As he removed them from the

valise, he laid them on the bed. He fell to thinking. He called up

memories. It was in winter, in a very cold month of December, she was

shivering, half-naked, in rags, her poor little feet were all red in

their wooden shoes. He, Jean Valjean, had made her abandon those rags

to clothe herself in these mourning habiliments. The mother must have

felt pleased in her grave, to see her daughter wearing mourning for

her, and, above all, to see that she was properly clothed, and that she

was warm. He thought of that forest of Montfermeil; they had traversed

it together, Cosette and he; he thought of what the weather had been,

of the leafless trees, of the wood destitute of birds, of the sunless

sky; it mattered not, it was charming. He arranged the tiny garments on

the bed, the fichu next to the petticoat, the stockings beside the

shoes, and he looked at them, one after the other. She was no taller

than that, she had her big doll in her arms, she had put her louis d’or

in the pocket of that apron, she had laughed, they walked hand in hand,

she had no one in the world but him.

Then his venerable, white head fell forward on the bed, that stoical

old heart broke, his face was engulfed, so to speak, in Cosette’s

garments, and if any one had passed up the stairs at that moment, he

would have heard frightful sobs.

CHAPTER IV—THE IMMORTAL LIVER 68

The old and formidable struggle, of which we have already witnessed so

many phases, began once more.

Jacob struggled with the angel but one night. Alas! how many times have

we beheld Jean Valjean seized bodily by his conscience, in the

darkness, and struggling desperately against it!

Unheard-of conflict! At certain moments the foot slips; at other

moments the ground crumbles away underfoot. How many times had that

conscience, mad for the good, clasped and overthrown him! How many

times had the truth set her knee inexorably upon his breast! How many

times, hurled to earth by the light, had he begged for mercy! How many

times had that implacable spark, lighted within him, and upon him by

the Bishop, dazzled him by force when he had wished to be blind! How

many times had he risen to his feet in the combat, held fast to the

rock, leaning against sophism, dragged in the dust, now getting the

upper hand of his conscience, again overthrown by it! How many times,

after an equivoque, after the specious and treacherous reasoning of

egotism, had he heard his irritated conscience cry in his ear: “A trip!

you wretch!” How many times had his refractory thoughts rattled

convulsively in his throat, under the evidence of duty! Resistance to

God. Funereal sweats. What secret wounds which he alone felt bleed!

What excoriations in his lamentable existence! How many times he had

risen bleeding, bruised, broken, enlightened, despair in his heart,

serenity in his soul! and, vanquished, he had felt himself the

conqueror. And, after having dislocated, broken, and rent his

conscience with red-hot pincers, it had said to him, as it stood over

him, formidable, luminous, and tranquil: “Now, go in peace!”

But on emerging from so melancholy a conflict, what a lugubrious peace,

alas!

Nevertheless, that night Jean Valjean felt that he was passing through

his final combat.

A heart-rending question presented itself.

Predestinations are not all direct; they do not open out in a straight

avenue before the predestined man; they have blind courts, impassable

alleys, obscure turns, disturbing crossroads offering the choice of

many ways. Jean Valjean had halted at that moment at the most perilous

of these crossroads.

He had come to the supreme crossing of good and evil. He had that

gloomy intersection beneath his eyes. On this occasion once more, as

had happened to him already in other sad vicissitudes, two roads opened

out before him, the one tempting, the other alarming.

Which was he to take?

He was counselled to the one which alarmed him by that mysterious index

finger which we all perceive whenever we fix our eyes on the darkness.

Once more, Jean Valjean had the choice between the terrible port and

the smiling ambush.

Is it then true? the soul may recover; but not fate. Frightful thing!

an incurable destiny!

This is the problem which presented itself to him:

In what manner was Jean Valjean to behave in relation to the happiness

of Cosette and Marius? It was he who had willed that happiness, it was

he who had brought it about; he had, himself, buried it in his

entrails, and at that moment, when he reflected on it, he was able to

enjoy the sort of satisfaction which an armorer would experience on

recognizing his factory mark on a knife, on withdrawing it, all

smoking, from his own breast.

Cosette had Marius, Marius possessed Cosette. They had everything, even

riches. And this was his doing.

But what was he, Jean Valjean, to do with this happiness, now that it

existed, now that it was there? Should he force himself on this

happiness? Should he treat it as belonging to him? No doubt, Cosette

did belong to another; but should he, Jean Valjean, retain of Cosette

all that he could retain? Should he remain the sort of father, half

seen but respected, which he had hitherto been? Should he, without

saying a word, bring his past to that future? Should he present himself

there, as though he had a right, and should he seat himself, veiled, at

that luminous fireside? Should he take those innocent hands into his

tragic hands, with a smile? Should he place upon the peaceful fender of

the Gillenormand drawing-room those feet of his, which dragged behind

them the disgraceful shadow of the law? Should he enter into

participation in the fair fortunes of Cosette and Marius? Should he

render the obscurity on his brow and the cloud upon theirs still more

dense? Should he place his catastrophe as a third associate in their

felicity? Should he continue to hold his peace? In a word, should he be

the sinister mute of destiny beside these two happy beings?

We must have become habituated to fatality and to encounters with it,

in order to have the daring to raise our eyes when certain questions

appear to us in all their horrible nakedness. Good or evil stands

behind this severe interrogation point. What are you going to do?

demands the sphinx.

This habit of trial Jean Valjean possessed. He gazed intently at the

sphinx.

He examined the pitiless problem under all its aspects.

Cosette, that charming existence, was the raft of this shipwreck. What

was he to do? To cling fast to it, or to let go his hold?

If he clung to it, he should emerge from disaster, he should ascend

again into the sunlight, he should let the bitter water drip from his

garments and his hair, he was saved, he should live.

And if he let go his hold?

Then the abyss.

Thus he took sad council with his thoughts. Or, to speak more

correctly, he fought; he kicked furiously internally, now against his

will, now against his conviction.

Happily for Jean Valjean that he had been able to weep. That relieved

him, possibly. But the beginning was savage. A tempest, more furious

than the one which had formerly driven him to Arras, broke loose within

him. The past surged up before him facing the present; he compared them

and sobbed. The silence of tears once opened, the despairing man

writhed.

He felt that he had been stopped short.

Alas! in this fight to the death between our egotism and our duty, when

we thus retreat step by step before our immutable ideal, bewildered,

furious, exasperated at having to yield, disputing the ground, hoping

for a possible flight, seeking an escape, what an abrupt and sinister

resistance does the foot of the wall offer in our rear!

To feel the sacred shadow which forms an obstacle!

The invisible inexorable, what an obsession!

Then, one is never done with conscience. Make your choice, Brutus; make

your choice, Cato. It is fathomless, since it is God. One flings into

that well the labor of one’s whole life, one flings in one’s fortune,

one flings in one’s riches, one flings in one’s success, one flings in

one’s liberty or fatherland, one flings in one’s well-being, one flings

in one’s repose, one flings in one’s joy! More! more! more! Empty the

vase! tip the urn! One must finish by flinging in one’s heart.

Somewhere in the fog of the ancient hells, there is a tun like that.

Is not one pardonable, if one at last refuses! Can the inexhaustible

have any right? Are not chains which are endless above human strength?

Who would blame Sisyphus and Jean Valjean for saying: “It is enough!”

The obedience of matter is limited by friction; is there no limit to

the obedience of the soul? If perpetual motion is impossible, can

perpetual self-sacrifice be exacted?

The first step is nothing, it is the last which is difficult. What was

the Champmathieu affair in comparison with Cosette’s marriage and of

that which it entailed? What is a re-entrance into the galleys,

compared to entrance into the void?

Oh, first step that must be descended, how sombre art thou! Oh, second

step, how black art thou!

How could he refrain from turning aside his head this time?

Martyrdom is sublimation, corrosive sublimation. It is a torture which

consecrates. One can consent to it for the first hour; one seats

oneself on the throne of glowing iron, one places on one’s head the

crown of hot iron, one accepts the globe of red hot iron, one takes the

sceptre of red hot iron, but the mantle of flame still remains to be

donned, and comes there not a moment when the miserable flesh revolts

and when one abdicates from suffering?

At length, Jean Valjean entered into the peace of exhaustion.

He weighed, he reflected, he considered the alternatives, the

mysterious balance of light and darkness.

Should he impose his galleys on those two dazzling children, or should

he consummate his irremediable engulfment by himself? On one side lay

the sacrifice of Cosette, on the other that of himself.

At what solution should he arrive? What decision did he come to?

What resolution did he take? What was his own inward definitive

response to the unbribable interrogatory of fatality? What door did he

decide to open? Which side of his life did he resolve upon closing and

condemning? Among all the unfathomable precipices which surrounded him,

which was his choice? What extremity did he accept? To which of the

gulfs did he nod his head?

His dizzy reverie lasted all night long.

He remained there until daylight, in the same attitude, bent double

over that bed, prostrate beneath the enormity of fate, crushed,

perchance, alas! with clenched fists, with arms outspread at right

angles, like a man crucified who has been un-nailed, and flung face

down on the earth. There he remained for twelve hours, the twelve long

hours of a long winter’s night, ice-cold, without once raising his

head, and without uttering a word. He was as motionless as a corpse,

while his thoughts wallowed on the earth and soared, now like the

hydra, now like the eagle. Any one to behold him thus motionless would

have pronounced him dead; all at once he shuddered convulsively, and

his mouth, glued to Cosette’s garments, kissed them; then it could be

seen that he was alive.

Who could see? Since Jean Valjean was alone, and there was no one

there.

The One who is in the shadows.

BOOK SEVENTH—THE LAST DRAUGHT FROM THE CUP

[Illustration: Last Drop from the Cup]

CHAPTER I—THE SEVENTH CIRCLE AND THE EIGHTH HEAVEN

The days that follow weddings are solitary. People respect the

meditations of the happy pair. And also, their tardy slumbers, to some

degree. The tumult of visits and congratulations only begins later on.

On the morning of the 17th of February, it was a little past midday

when Basque, with napkin and feather-duster under his arm, busy in

setting his antechamber to rights, heard a light tap at the door. There

had been no ring, which was discreet on such a day. Basque opened the

door, and beheld M. Fauchelevent. He introduced him into the

drawing-room, still encumbered and topsy-turvy, and which bore the air

of a field of battle after the joys of the preceding evening.

“\_Dame\_, sir,” remarked Basque, “we all woke up late.”

“Is your master up?” asked Jean Valjean.

“How is Monsieur’s arm?” replied Basque.

“Better. Is your master up?”

“Which one? the old one or the new one?”

“Monsieur Pontmercy.”

“Monsieur le Baron,” said Basque, drawing himself up.

A man is a Baron most of all to his servants. He counts for something

with them; they are what a philosopher would call, bespattered with the

title, and that flatters them. Marius, be it said in passing, a

militant republican as he had proved, was now a Baron in spite of

himself. A small revolution had taken place in the family in connection

with this title. It was now M. Gillenormand who clung to it, and Marius

who detached himself from it. But Colonel Pontmercy had written: “My

son will bear my title.” Marius obeyed. And then, Cosette, in whom the

woman was beginning to dawn, was delighted to be a Baroness.

“Monsieur le Baron?” repeated Basque. “I will go and see. I will tell

him that M. Fauchelevent is here.”

“No. Do not tell him that it is I. Tell him that some one wishes to

speak to him in private, and mention no name.”

“Ah!” ejaculated Basque.

“I wish to surprise him.”

“Ah!” ejaculated Basque once more, emitting his second “ah!” as an

explanation of the first.

And he left the room.

Jean Valjean remained alone.

The drawing-room, as we have just said, was in great disorder. It

seemed as though, by lending an ear, one might still hear the vague

noise of the wedding. On the polished floor lay all sorts of flowers

which had fallen from garlands and head-dresses. The wax candles,

burned to stumps, added stalactites of wax to the crystal drops of the

chandeliers. Not a single piece of furniture was in its place. In the

corners, three or four armchairs, drawn close together in a circle, had

the appearance of continuing a conversation. The whole effect was

cheerful. A certain grace still lingers round a dead feast. It has been

a happy thing. On the chairs in disarray, among those fading flowers,

beneath those extinct lights, people have thought of joy. The sun had

succeeded to the chandelier, and made its way gayly into the

drawing-room.

Several minutes elapsed. Jean Valjean stood motionless on the spot

where Basque had left him. He was very pale. His eyes were hollow, and

so sunken in his head by sleeplessness that they nearly disappeared in

their orbits. His black coat bore the weary folds of a garment that has

been up all night. The elbows were whitened with the down which the

friction of cloth against linen leaves behind it.

Jean Valjean stared at the window outlined on the polished floor at his

feet by the sun.

There came a sound at the door, and he raised his eyes.

Marius entered, his head well up, his mouth smiling, an indescribable

light on his countenance, his brow expanded, his eyes triumphant. He

had not slept either.

“It is you, father!” he exclaimed, on catching sight of Jean Valjean;

“that idiot of a Basque had such a mysterious air! But you have come

too early. It is only half past twelve. Cosette is asleep.”

That word: “Father,” said to M. Fauchelevent by Marius, signified:

supreme felicity. There had always existed, as the reader knows, a

lofty wall, a coldness and a constraint between them; ice which must be

broken or melted. Marius had reached that point of intoxication when

the wall was lowered, when the ice dissolved, and when M. Fauchelevent

was to him, as to Cosette, a father.

He continued: his words poured forth, as is the peculiarity of divine

paroxysms of joy.

“How glad I am to see you! If you only knew how we missed you

yesterday! Good morning, father. How is your hand? Better, is it not?”

And, satisfied with the favorable reply which he had made to himself,

he pursued:

“We have both been talking about you. Cosette loves you so dearly! You

must not forget that you have a chamber here, We want nothing more to

do with the Rue de l’Homme Armé. We will have no more of it at all. How

could you go to live in a street like that, which is sickly, which is

disagreeable, which is ugly, which has a barrier at one end, where one

is cold, and into which one cannot enter? You are to come and install

yourself here. And this very day. Or you will have to deal with

Cosette. She means to lead us all by the nose, I warn you. You have

your own chamber here, it is close to ours, it opens on the garden; the

trouble with the clock has been attended to, the bed is made, it is all

ready, you have only to take possession of it. Near your bed Cosette

has placed a huge, old, easy-chair covered with Utrecht velvet and she

has said to it: ‘Stretch out your arms to him.’ A nightingale comes to

the clump of acacias opposite your windows, every spring. In two months

more you will have it. You will have its nest on your left and ours on

your right. By night it will sing, and by day Cosette will prattle.

Your chamber faces due South. Cosette will arrange your books for you,

your Voyages of Captain Cook and the other,—Vancouver’s and all your

affairs. I believe that there is a little valise to which you are

attached, I have fixed upon a corner of honor for that. You have

conquered my grandfather, you suit him. We will live together. Do you

play whist? you will overwhelm my grandfather with delight if you play

whist. It is you who shall take Cosette to walk on the days when I am

at the courts, you shall give her your arm, you know, as you used to,

in the Luxembourg. We are absolutely resolved to be happy. And you

shall be included in it, in our happiness, do you hear, father? Come,

will you breakfast with us to-day?”

“Sir,” said Jean Valjean, “I have something to say to you. I am an

ex-convict.”

The limit of shrill sounds perceptible can be overleaped, as well in

the case of the mind as in that of the ear. These words: “I am an

ex-convict,” proceeding from the mouth of M. Fauchelevent and entering

the ear of Marius overshot the possible. It seemed to him that

something had just been said to him; but he did not know what. He stood

with his mouth wide open.

Then he perceived that the man who was addressing him was frightful.

Wholly absorbed in his own dazzled state, he had not, up to that

moment, observed the other man’s terrible pallor.

Jean Valjean untied the black cravat which supported his right arm,

unrolled the linen from around his hand, bared his thumb and showed it

to Marius.

“There is nothing the matter with my hand,” said he.

Marius looked at the thumb.

“There has not been anything the matter with it,” went on Jean Valjean.

There was, in fact, no trace of any injury.

Jean Valjean continued:

“It was fitting that I should be absent from your marriage. I absented

myself as much as was in my power. So I invented this injury in order

that I might not commit a forgery, that I might not introduce a flaw

into the marriage documents, in order that I might escape from

signing.”

Marius stammered.

“What is the meaning of this?”

“The meaning of it is,” replied Jean Valjean, “that I have been in the

galleys.”

“You are driving me mad!” exclaimed Marius in terror.

“Monsieur Pontmercy,” said Jean Valjean, “I was nineteen years in the

galleys. For theft. Then, I was condemned for life for theft, for a

second offence. At the present moment, I have broken my ban.”

In vain did Marius recoil before the reality, refuse the fact, resist

the evidence, he was forced to give way. He began to understand, and,

as always happens in such cases, he understood too much. An inward

shudder of hideous enlightenment flashed through him; an idea which

made him quiver traversed his mind. He caught a glimpse of a wretched

destiny for himself in the future.

“Say all, say all!” he cried. “You are Cosette’s father!”

And he retreated a couple of paces with a movement of indescribable

horror.

Jean Valjean elevated his head with so much majesty of attitude that he

seemed to grow even to the ceiling.

“It is necessary that you should believe me here, sir; although our

oath to others may not be received in law . . .”

Here he paused, then, with a sort of sovereign and sepulchral

authority, he added, articulating slowly, and emphasizing the

syllables:

“. . . You will believe me. I the father of Cosette! before God, no.

Monsieur le Baron Pontmercy, I am a peasant of Faverolles. I earned my

living by pruning trees. My name is not Fauchelevent, but Jean Valjean.

I am not related to Cosette. Reassure yourself.”

Marius stammered:

“Who will prove that to me?”

“I. Since I tell you so.”

Marius looked at the man. He was melancholy yet tranquil. No lie could

proceed from such a calm. That which is icy is sincere. The truth could

be felt in that chill of the tomb.

“I believe you,” said Marius.

Jean Valjean bent his head, as though taking note of this, and

continued:

“What am I to Cosette? A passer-by. Ten years ago, I did not know that

she was in existence. I love her, it is true. One loves a child whom

one has seen when very young, being old oneself. When one is old, one

feels oneself a grandfather towards all little children. You may, it

seems to me, suppose that I have something which resembles a heart. She

was an orphan. Without either father or mother. She needed me. That is

why I began to love her. Children are so weak that the first comer,

even a man like me, can become their protector. I have fulfilled this

duty towards Cosette. I do not think that so slight a thing can be

called a good action; but if it be a good action, well, say that I have

done it. Register this attenuating circumstance. To-day, Cosette passes

out of my life; our two roads part. Henceforth, I can do nothing for

her. She is Madame Pontmercy. Her providence has changed. And Cosette

gains by the change. All is well. As for the six hundred thousand

francs, you do not mention them to me, but I forestall your thought,

they are a deposit. How did that deposit come into my hands? What does

that matter? I restore the deposit. Nothing more can be demanded of me.

I complete the restitution by announcing my true name. That concerns

me. I have a reason for desiring that you should know who I am.”

And Jean Valjean looked Marius full in the face.

All that Marius experienced was tumultuous and incoherent. Certain

gusts of destiny produce these billows in our souls.

We have all undergone moments of trouble in which everything within us

is dispersed; we say the first things that occur to us, which are not

always precisely those which should be said. There are sudden

revelations which one cannot bear, and which intoxicate like baleful

wine. Marius was stupefied by the novel situation which presented

itself to him, to the point of addressing that man almost like a person

who was angry with him for this avowal.

“But why,” he exclaimed, “do you tell me all this? Who forces you to do

so? You could have kept your secret to yourself. You are neither

denounced, nor tracked nor pursued. You have a reason for wantonly

making such a revelation. Conclude. There is something more. In what

connection do you make this confession? What is your motive?”

“My motive?” replied Jean Valjean in a voice so low and dull that one

would have said that he was talking to himself rather than to Marius.

“From what motive, in fact, has this convict just said ‘I am a

convict’? Well, yes! the motive is strange. It is out of honesty. Stay,

the unfortunate point is that I have a thread in my heart, which keeps

me fast. It is when one is old that that sort of thread is particularly

solid. All life falls in ruin around one; one resists. Had I been able

to tear out that thread, to break it, to undo the knot or to cut it, to

go far away, I should have been safe. I had only to go away; there are

diligences in the Rue Bouloy; you are happy; I am going. I have tried

to break that thread, I have jerked at it, it would not break, I tore

my heart with it. Then I said: ‘I cannot live anywhere else than here.’

I must stay. Well, yes, you are right, I am a fool, why not simply

remain here? You offer me a chamber in this house, Madame Pontmercy is

sincerely attached to me, she said to the armchair: ‘Stretch out your

arms to him,’ your grandfather demands nothing better than to have me,

I suit him, we shall live together, and take our meals in common, I

shall give Cosette my arm . . . Madame Pontmercy, excuse me, it is a

habit, we shall have but one roof, one table, one fire, the same

chimney-corner in winter, the same promenade in summer, that is joy,

that is happiness, that is everything. We shall live as one family. One

family!”

At that word, Jean Valjean became wild. He folded his arms, glared at

the floor beneath his feet as though he would have excavated an abyss

therein, and his voice suddenly rose in thundering tones:

“As one family! No. I belong to no family. I do not belong to yours. I

do not belong to any family of men. In houses where people are among

themselves, I am superfluous. There are families, but there is nothing

of the sort for me. I am an unlucky wretch; I am left outside. Did I

have a father and mother? I almost doubt it. On the day when I gave

that child in marriage, all came to an end. I have seen her happy, and

that she is with a man whom she loves, and that there exists here a

kind old man, a household of two angels, and all joys in that house,

and that it was well, I said to myself: ‘Enter thou not.’ I could have

lied, it is true, have deceived you all, and remained Monsieur

Fauchelevent. So long as it was for her, I could lie; but now it would

be for myself, and I must not. It was sufficient for me to hold my

peace, it is true, and all would go on. You ask me what has forced me

to speak? a very odd thing; my conscience. To hold my peace was very

easy, however. I passed the night in trying to persuade myself to it;

you questioned me, and what I have just said to you is so extraordinary

that you have the right to do it; well, yes, I have passed the night in

alleging reasons to myself, and I gave myself very good reasons, I have

done what I could. But there are two things in which I have not

succeeded; in breaking the thread that holds me fixed, riveted and

sealed here by the heart, or in silencing some one who speaks softly to

me when I am alone. That is why I have come hither to tell you

everything this morning. Everything or nearly everything. It is useless

to tell you that which concerns only myself; I keep that to myself. You

know the essential points. So I have taken my mystery and have brought

it to you. And I have disembowelled my secret before your eyes. It was

not a resolution that was easy to take. I struggled all night long. Ah!

you think that I did not tell myself that this was no Champmathieu

affair, that by concealing my name I was doing no one any injury, that

the name of Fauchelevent had been given to me by Fauchelevent himself,

out of gratitude for a service rendered to him, and that I might

assuredly keep it, and that I should be happy in that chamber which you

offer me, that I should not be in any one’s way, that I should be in my

own little corner, and that, while you would have Cosette, I should

have the idea that I was in the same house with her. Each one of us

would have had his share of happiness. If I continued to be Monsieur

Fauchelevent, that would arrange everything. Yes, with the exception of

my soul. There was joy everywhere upon my surface, but the bottom of my

soul remained black. It is not enough to be happy, one must be content.

Thus I should have remained Monsieur Fauchelevent, thus I should have

concealed my true visage, thus, in the presence of your expansion, I

should have had an enigma, thus, in the midst of your full noonday, I

should have had shadows, thus, without crying ‘’ware,’ I should have

simply introduced the galleys to your fireside, I should have taken my

seat at your table with the thought that if you knew who I was, you

would drive me from it, I should have allowed myself to be served by

domestics who, had they known, would have said: ‘How horrible!’ I

should have touched you with my elbow, which you have a right to

dislike, I should have filched your clasps of the hand! There would

have existed in your house a division of respect between venerable

white locks and tainted white locks; at your most intimate hours, when

all hearts thought themselves open to the very bottom to all the rest,

when we four were together, your grandfather, you two and myself, a

stranger would have been present! I should have been side by side with

you in your existence, having for my only care not to disarrange the

cover of my dreadful pit. Thus, I, a dead man, should have thrust

myself upon you who are living beings. I should have condemned her to

myself forever. You and Cosette and I would have had all three of our

heads in the green cap! Does it not make you shudder? I am only the

most crushed of men; I should have been the most monstrous of men. And

I should have committed that crime every day! And I should have had

that face of night upon my visage every day! every day! And I should

have communicated to you a share in my taint every day! every day! to

you, my dearly beloved, my children, to you, my innocent creatures! Is

it nothing to hold one’s peace? is it a simple matter to keep silence?

No, it is not simple. There is a silence which lies. And my lie, and my

fraud and my indignity, and my cowardice and my treason and my crime, I

should have drained drop by drop, I should have spit it out, then

swallowed it again, I should have finished at midnight and have begun

again at midday, and my ‘good morning’ would have lied, and my ‘good

night’ would have lied, and I should have slept on it, I should have

eaten it, with my bread, and I should have looked Cosette in the face,

and I should have responded to the smile of the angel by the smile of

the damned soul, and I should have been an abominable villain! Why

should I do it? in order to be happy. In order to be happy. Have I the

right to be happy? I stand outside of life, sir.”

Jean Valjean paused. Marius listened. Such chains of ideas and of

anguishes cannot be interrupted. Jean Valjean lowered his voice once

more, but it was no longer a dull voice—it was a sinister voice.

“You ask why I speak? I am neither denounced, nor pursued, nor tracked,

you say. Yes! I am denounced! yes! I am tracked! By whom? By myself. It

is I who bar the passage to myself, and I drag myself, and I push

myself, and I arrest myself, and I execute myself, and when one holds

oneself, one is firmly held.”

And, seizing a handful of his own coat by the nape of the neck and

extending it towards Marius:

“Do you see that fist?” he continued. “Don’t you think that it holds

that collar in such a wise as not to release it? Well! conscience is

another grasp! If one desires to be happy, sir, one must never

understand duty; for, as soon as one has comprehended it, it is

implacable. One would say that it punished you for comprehending it;

but no, it rewards you; for it places you in a hell, where you feel God

beside you. One has no sooner lacerated his own entrails than he is at

peace with himself.”

And, with a poignant accent, he added:

“Monsieur Pontmercy, this is not common sense, I am an honest man. It

is by degrading myself in your eyes that I elevate myself in my own.

This has happened to me once before, but it was less painful then; it

was a mere nothing. Yes, an honest man. I should not be so if, through

my fault, you had continued to esteem me; now that you despise me, I am

so. I have that fatality hanging over me that, not being able to ever

have anything but stolen consideration, that consideration humiliates

me, and crushes me inwardly, and, in order that I may respect myself,

it is necessary that I should be despised. Then I straighten up again.

I am a galley-slave who obeys his conscience. I know well that that is

most improbable. But what would you have me do about it? it is the

fact. I have entered into engagements with myself; I keep them. There

are encounters which bind us, there are chances which involve us in

duties. You see, Monsieur Pontmercy, various things have happened to me

in the course of my life.”

Again Jean Valjean paused, swallowing his saliva with an effort, as

though his words had a bitter after-taste, and then he went on:

“When one has such a horror hanging over one, one has not the right to

make others share it without their knowledge, one has not the right to

make them slip over one’s own precipice without their perceiving it,

one has not the right to let one’s red blouse drag upon them, one has

no right to slyly encumber with one’s misery the happiness of others.

It is hideous to approach those who are healthy, and to touch them in

the dark with one’s ulcer. In spite of the fact that Fauchelevent lent

me his name, I have no right to use it; he could give it to me, but I

could not take it. A name is an \_I\_. You see, sir, that I have thought

somewhat, I have read a little, although I am a peasant; and you see

that I express myself properly. I understand things. I have procured

myself an education. Well, yes, to abstract a name and to place oneself

under it is dishonest. Letters of the alphabet can be filched, like a

purse or a watch. To be a false signature in flesh and blood, to be a

living false key, to enter the house of honest people by picking their

lock, never more to look straightforward, to forever eye askance, to be

infamous within the \_I\_, no! no! no! no! no! It is better to suffer, to

bleed, to weep, to tear one’s skin from the flesh with one’s nails, to

pass nights writhing in anguish, to devour oneself body and soul. That

is why I have just told you all this. Wantonly, as you say.”

He drew a painful breath, and hurled this final word:

“In days gone by, I stole a loaf of bread in order to live; to-day, in

order to live, I will not steal a name.”

“To live!” interrupted Marius. “You do not need that name in order to

live?”

“Ah! I understand the matter,” said Jean Valjean, raising and lowering

his head several times in succession.

A silence ensued. Both held their peace, each plunged in a gulf of

thoughts. Marius was sitting near a table and resting the corner of his

mouth on one of his fingers, which was folded back. Jean Valjean was

pacing to and fro. He paused before a mirror, and remained motionless.

Then, as though replying to some inward course of reasoning, he said,

as he gazed at the mirror, which he did not see:

“While, at present, I am relieved.”

He took up his march again, and walked to the other end of the

drawing-room. At the moment when he turned round, he perceived that

Marius was watching his walk. Then he said, with an inexpressible

intonation:

“I drag my leg a little. Now you understand why!”

Then he turned fully round towards Marius:

“And now, sir, imagine this: I have said nothing, I have remained

Monsieur Fauchelevent, I have taken my place in your house, I am one of

you, I am in my chamber, I come to breakfast in the morning in

slippers, in the evening all three of us go to the play, I accompany

Madame Pontmercy to the Tuileries, and to the Place Royale, we are

together, you think me your equal; one fine day you are there, and I am

there, we are conversing, we are laughing; all at once, you hear a

voice shouting this name: ‘Jean Valjean!’ and behold, that terrible

hand, the police, darts from the darkness, and abruptly tears off my

mask!”

Again he paused; Marius had sprung to his feet with a shudder. Jean

Valjean resumed:

“What do you say to that?”

Marius’ silence answered for him.

Jean Valjean continued:

“You see that I am right in not holding my peace. Be happy, be in

heaven, be the angel of an angel, exist in the sun, be content

therewith, and do not trouble yourself about the means which a poor

damned wretch takes to open his breast and force his duty to come

forth; you have before you, sir, a wretched man.”

Marius slowly crossed the room, and, when he was quite close to Jean

Valjean, he offered the latter his hand.

But Marius was obliged to step up and take that hand which was not

offered, Jean Valjean let him have his own way, and it seemed to Marius

that he pressed a hand of marble.

“My grandfather has friends,” said Marius; “I will procure your

pardon.”

“It is useless,” replied Jean Valjean. “I am believed to be dead, and

that suffices. The dead are not subjected to surveillance. They are

supposed to rot in peace. Death is the same thing as pardon.”

And, disengaging the hand which Marius held, he added, with a sort of

inexorable dignity:

“Moreover, the friend to whom I have recourse is the doing of my duty;

and I need but one pardon, that of my conscience.”

At that moment, a door at the other end of the drawing-room opened

gently half way, and in the opening Cosette’s head appeared. They saw

only her sweet face, her hair was in charming disorder, her eyelids

were still swollen with sleep. She made the movement of a bird, which

thrusts its head out of its nest, glanced first at her husband, then at

Jean Valjean, and cried to them with a smile, so that they seemed to

behold a smile at the heart of a rose:

“I will wager that you are talking politics. How stupid that is,

instead of being with me!”

Jean Valjean shuddered.

“Cosette! . . .” stammered Marius.

And he paused. One would have said that they were two criminals.

Cosette, who was radiant, continued to gaze at both of them. There was

something in her eyes like gleams of paradise.

“I have caught you in the very act,” said Cosette. “Just now, I heard

my father Fauchelevent through the door saying: ‘Conscience . . . doing

my duty . . .’ That is politics, indeed it is. I will not have it.

People should not talk politics the very next day. It is not right.”

“You are mistaken. Cosette,” said Marius, “we are talking business. We

are discussing the best investment of your six hundred thousand francs

. . .”

“That is not it at all,” interrupted Cosette. “I am coming. Does

anybody want me here?”

And, passing resolutely through the door, she entered the drawing-room.

She was dressed in a voluminous white dressing-gown, with a thousand

folds and large sleeves which, starting from the neck, fell to her

feet. In the golden heavens of some ancient gothic pictures, there are

these charming sacks fit to clothe the angels.

She contemplated herself from head to foot in a long mirror, then

exclaimed, in an outburst of ineffable ecstasy:

“There was once a King and a Queen. Oh! how happy I am!”

That said, she made a curtsey to Marius and to Jean Valjean.

“There,” said she, “I am going to install myself near you in an

easy-chair, we breakfast in half an hour, you shall say anything you

like, I know well that men must talk, and I will be very good.”

Marius took her by the arm and said lovingly to her:

“We are talking business.”

“By the way,” said Cosette, “I have opened my window, a flock of

pierrots has arrived in the garden,—Birds, not maskers. To-day is

Ash-Wednesday; but not for the birds.”

“I tell you that we are talking business, go, my little Cosette, leave

us alone for a moment. We are talking figures. That will bore you.”

“You have a charming cravat on this morning, Marius. You are very

dandified, monseigneur. No, it will not bore me.”

“I assure you that it will bore you.”

“No. Since it is you. I shall not understand you, but I shall listen to

you. When one hears the voices of those whom one loves, one does not

need to understand the words that they utter. That we should be here

together—that is all that I desire. I shall remain with you, bah!”

“You are my beloved Cosette! Impossible.”

“Impossible!”

“Yes.”

“Very good,” said Cosette. “I was going to tell you some news. I could

have told you that your grandfather is still asleep, that your aunt is

at mass, that the chimney in my father Fauchelevent’s room smokes, that

Nicolette has sent for the chimney-sweep, that Toussaint and Nicolette

have already quarrelled, that Nicolette makes sport of Toussaint’s

stammer. Well, you shall know nothing. Ah! it is impossible? you shall

see, gentlemen, that I, in my turn, can say: It is impossible. Then who

will be caught? I beseech you, my little Marius, let me stay here with

you two.”

“I swear to you, that it is indispensable that we should be alone.”

“Well, am I anybody?”

Jean Valjean had not uttered a single word. Cosette turned to him:

“In the first place, father, I want you to come and embrace me. What do

you mean by not saying anything instead of taking my part? who gave me

such a father as that? You must perceive that my family life is very

unhappy. My husband beats me. Come, embrace me instantly.”

Jean Valjean approached.

Cosette turned toward Marius.

“As for you, I shall make a face at you.”

Then she presented her brow to Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean advanced a step toward her.

Cosette recoiled.

“Father, you are pale. Does your arm hurt you?”

“It is well,” said Jean Valjean.

“Did you sleep badly?”

“No.”

“Are you sad?”

“No.”

“Embrace me if you are well, if you sleep well, if you are content, I

will not scold you.”

And again she offered him her brow.

Jean Valjean dropped a kiss upon that brow whereon rested a celestial

gleam.

“Smile.”

Jean Valjean obeyed. It was the smile of a spectre.

“Now, defend me against my husband.”

“Cosette! . . .” ejaculated Marius.

“Get angry, father. Say that I must stay. You can certainly talk before

me. So you think me very silly. What you say is astonishing! business,

placing money in a bank a great matter truly. Men make mysteries out of

nothing. I am very pretty this morning. Look at me, Marius.”

And with an adorable shrug of the shoulders, and an indescribably

exquisite pout, she glanced at Marius.

“I love you!” said Marius.

“I adore you!” said Cosette.

And they fell irresistibly into each other’s arms.

“Now,” said Cosette, adjusting a fold of her dressing-gown, with a

triumphant little grimace, “I shall stay.”

“No, not that,” said Marius, in a supplicating tone. “We have to finish

something.”

“Still no?”

Marius assumed a grave tone:

“I assure you, Cosette, that it is impossible.”

“Ah! you put on your man’s voice, sir. That is well, I go. You, father,

have not upheld me. Monsieur my father, monsieur my husband, you are

tyrants. I shall go and tell grandpapa. If you think that I am going to

return and talk platitudes to you, you are mistaken. I am proud. I

shall wait for you now. You shall see, that it is you who are going to

be bored without me. I am going, it is well.”

And she left the room.

Two seconds later, the door opened once more, her fresh and rosy head

was again thrust between the two leaves, and she cried to them:

“I am very angry indeed.”

The door closed again, and the shadows descended once more.

It was as though a ray of sunlight should have suddenly traversed the

night, without itself being conscious of it.

Marius made sure that the door was securely closed.

“Poor Cosette!” he murmured, “when she finds out . . .”

At that word Jean Valjean trembled in every limb. He fixed on Marius a

bewildered eye.

“Cosette! oh yes, it is true, you are going to tell Cosette about this.

That is right. Stay, I had not thought of that. One has the strength

for one thing, but not for another. Sir, I conjure you, I entreat now,

sir, give me your most sacred word of honor, that you will not tell

her. Is it not enough that you should know it? I have been able to say

it myself without being forced to it, I could have told it to the

universe, to the whole world,—it was all one to me. But she, she does

not know what it is, it would terrify her. What, a convict! we should

be obliged to explain matters to her, to say to her: ‘He is a man who

has been in the galleys.’ She saw the chain-gang pass by one day. Oh!

My God!” . . . He dropped into an armchair and hid his face in his

hands.

His grief was not audible, but from the quivering of his shoulders it

was evident that he was weeping. Silent tears, terrible tears.

There is something of suffocation in the sob. He was seized with a sort

of convulsion, he threw himself against the back of the chair as though

to gain breath, letting his arms fall, and allowing Marius to see his

face inundated with tears, and Marius heard him murmur, so low that his

voice seemed to issue from fathomless depths:

“Oh! would that I could die!”

“Be at your ease,” said Marius, “I will keep your secret for myself

alone.”

And, less touched, perhaps, than he ought to have been, but forced, for

the last hour, to familiarize himself with something as unexpected as

it was dreadful, gradually beholding the convict superposed before his

very eyes, upon M. Fauchelevent, overcome, little by little, by that

lugubrious reality, and led, by the natural inclination of the

situation, to recognize the space which had just been placed between

that man and himself, Marius added:

“It is impossible that I should not speak a word to you with regard to

the deposit which you have so faithfully and honestly remitted. That is

an act of probity. It is just that some recompense should be bestowed

on you. Fix the sum yourself, it shall be counted out to you. Do not

fear to set it very high.”

“I thank you, sir,” replied Jean Valjean, gently.

He remained in thought for a moment, mechanically passing the tip of

his fore-finger across his thumb-nail, then he lifted up his voice:

“All is nearly over. But one last thing remains for me . . .”

“What is it?”

Jean Valjean struggled with what seemed a last hesitation, and, without

voice, without breath, he stammered rather than said:

“Now that you know, do you think, sir, you, who are the master, that I

ought not to see Cosette any more?”

“I think that would be better,” replied Marius coldly.

“I shall never see her more,” murmured Jean Valjean. And he directed

his steps towards the door.

He laid his hand on the knob, the latch yielded, the door opened. Jean

Valjean pushed it open far enough to pass through, stood motionless for

a second, then closed the door again and turned to Marius.

He was no longer pale, he was livid. There were no longer any tears in

his eyes, but only a sort of tragic flame. His voice had regained a

strange composure.

“Stay, sir,” he said. “If you will allow it, I will come to see her. I

assure you that I desire it greatly. If I had not cared to see Cosette,

I should not have made to you the confession that I have made, I should

have gone away; but, as I desired to remain in the place where Cosette

is, and to continue to see her, I had to tell you about it honestly.

You follow my reasoning, do you not? it is a matter easily understood.

You see, I have had her with me for more than nine years. We lived

first in that hut on the boulevard, then in the convent, then near the

Luxembourg. That was where you saw her for the first time. You remember

her blue plush hat. Then we went to the Quartier des Invalides, where

there was a railing on a garden, the Rue Plumet. I lived in a little

back court-yard, whence I could hear her piano. That was my life. We

never left each other. That lasted for nine years and some months. I

was like her own father, and she was my child. I do not know whether

you understand, Monsieur Pontmercy, but to go away now, never to see

her again, never to speak to her again, to no longer have anything,

would be hard. If you do not disapprove of it, I will come to see

Cosette from time to time. I will not come often. I will not remain

long. You shall give orders that I am to be received in the little

waiting-room. On the ground floor. I could enter perfectly well by the

back door, but that might create surprise perhaps, and it would be

better, I think, for me to enter by the usual door. Truly, sir, I

should like to see a little more of Cosette. As rarely as you please.

Put yourself in my place, I have nothing left but that. And then, we

must be cautious. If I no longer come at all, it would produce a bad

effect, it would be considered singular. What I can do, by the way, is

to come in the afternoon, when night is beginning to fall.”

“You shall come every evening,” said Marius, “and Cosette will be

waiting for you.”

“You are kind, sir,” said Jean Valjean.

Marius saluted Jean Valjean, happiness escorted despair to the door,

and these two men parted.

CHAPTER II—THE OBSCURITIES WHICH A REVELATION CAN CONTAIN

Marius was quite upset.

The sort of estrangement which he had always felt towards the man

beside whom he had seen Cosette, was now explained to him. There was

something enigmatic about that person, of which his instinct had warned

him.

This enigma was the most hideous of disgraces, the galleys. This M.

Fauchelevent was the convict Jean Valjean.

To abruptly find such a secret in the midst of one’s happiness

resembles the discovery of a scorpion in a nest of turtledoves.

Was the happiness of Marius and Cosette thenceforth condemned to such a

neighborhood? Was this an accomplished fact? Did the acceptance of that

man form a part of the marriage now consummated? Was there nothing to

be done?

Had Marius wedded the convict as well?

In vain may one be crowned with light and joy, in vain may one taste

the grand purple hour of life, happy love, such shocks would force even

the archangel in his ecstasy, even the demigod in his glory, to

shudder.

As is always the case in changes of view of this nature, Marius asked

himself whether he had nothing with which to reproach himself. Had he

been wanting in divination? Had he been wanting in prudence? Had he

involuntarily dulled his wits? A little, perhaps. Had he entered upon

this love affair, which had ended in his marriage to Cosette, without

taking sufficient precautions to throw light upon the surroundings? He

admitted,—it is thus, by a series of successive admissions of ourselves

in regard to ourselves, that life amends us, little by little,—he

admitted the chimerical and visionary side of his nature, a sort of

internal cloud peculiar to many organizations, and which, in paroxysms

of passion and sorrow, dilates as the temperature of the soul changes,

and invades the entire man, to such a degree as to render him nothing

more than a conscience bathed in a mist. We have more than once

indicated this characteristic element of Marius’ individuality.

He recalled that, in the intoxication of his love, in the Rue Plumet,

during those six or seven ecstatic weeks, he had not even spoken to

Cosette of that drama in the Gorbeau hovel, where the victim had taken

up such a singular line of silence during the struggle and the ensuing

flight. How had it happened that he had not mentioned this to Cosette?

Yet it was so near and so terrible! How had it come to pass that he had

not even named the Thénardiers, and, particularly, on the day when he

had encountered Éponine? He now found it almost difficult to explain

his silence of that time. Nevertheless, he could account for it. He

recalled his benumbed state, his intoxication with Cosette, love

absorbing everything, that catching away of each other into the ideal,

and perhaps also, like the imperceptible quantity of reason mingled

with this violent and charming state of the soul, a vague, dull

instinct impelling him to conceal and abolish in his memory that

redoubtable adventure, contact with which he dreaded, in which he did

not wish to play any part, his agency in which he had kept secret, and

in which he could be neither narrator nor witness without being an

accuser.

Moreover, these few weeks had been a flash of lightning; there had been

no time for anything except love.

In short, having weighed everything, turned everything over in his

mind, examined everything, whatever might have been the consequences if

he had told Cosette about the Gorbeau ambush, even if he had discovered

that Jean Valjean was a convict, would that have changed him, Marius?

Would that have changed her, Cosette? Would he have drawn back? Would

he have adored her any the less? Would he have refrained from marrying

her? No. Then there was nothing to regret, nothing with which he need

reproach himself. All was well. There is a deity for those drunken men

who are called lovers. Marius blind, had followed the path which he

would have chosen had he been in full possession of his sight. Love had

bandaged his eyes, in order to lead him whither? To paradise.

But this paradise was henceforth complicated with an infernal

accompaniment.

Marius’ ancient estrangement towards this man, towards this

Fauchelevent who had turned into Jean Valjean, was at present mingled

with horror.

In this horror, let us state, there was some pity, and even a certain

surprise.

This thief, this thief guilty of a second offence, had restored that

deposit. And what a deposit! Six hundred thousand francs.

He alone was in the secret of that deposit. He might have kept it all,

he had restored it all.

Moreover, he had himself revealed his situation. Nothing forced him to

this. If any one learned who he was, it was through himself. In this

avowal there was something more than acceptance of humiliation, there

was acceptance of peril. For a condemned man, a mask is not a mask, it

is a shelter. A false name is security, and he had rejected that false

name. He, the galley-slave, might have hidden himself forever in an

honest family; he had withstood this temptation. And with what motive?

Through a conscientious scruple. He himself explained this with the

irresistible accents of truth. In short, whatever this Jean Valjean

might be, he was, undoubtedly, a conscience which was awakening. There

existed some mysterious re-habilitation which had begun; and, to all

appearances, scruples had for a long time already controlled this man.

Such fits of justice and goodness are not characteristic of vulgar

natures. An awakening of conscience is grandeur of soul.

Jean Valjean was sincere. This sincerity, visible, palpable,

irrefragable, evident from the very grief that it caused him, rendered

inquiries useless, and conferred authority on all that that man had

said.

Here, for Marius, there was a strange reversal of situations. What

breathed from M. Fauchelevent? distrust. What did Jean Valjean inspire?

confidence.

In the mysterious balance of this Jean Valjean which the pensive Marius

struck, he admitted the active principle, he admitted the passive

principle, and he tried to reach a balance.

But all this went on as in a storm. Marius, while endeavoring to form a

clear idea of this man, and while pursuing Jean Valjean, so to speak,

in the depths of his thought, lost him and found him again in a fatal

mist.

The deposit honestly restored, the probity of the confession—these were

good. This produced a lightening of the cloud, then the cloud became

black once more.

Troubled as were Marius’ memories, a shadow of them returned to him.

After all, what was that adventure in the Jondrette attic? Why had that

man taken to flight on the arrival of the police, instead of entering a

complaint?

Here Marius found the answer. Because that man was a fugitive from

justice, who had broken his ban.

Another question: Why had that man come to the barricade?

For Marius now once more distinctly beheld that recollection which had

reappeared in his emotions like sympathetic ink at the application of

heat. This man had been in the barricade. He had not fought there. What

had he come there for? In the presence of this question a spectre

sprang up and replied: “Javert.”

Marius recalled perfectly now that funereal sight of Jean Valjean

dragging the pinioned Javert out of the barricade, and he still heard

behind the corner of the little Rue Mondétour that frightful pistol

shot. Obviously, there was hatred between that police spy and the

galley-slave. The one was in the other’s way. Jean Valjean had gone to

the barricade for the purpose of revenging himself. He had arrived

late. He probably knew that Javert was a prisoner there. The Corsican

vendetta has penetrated to certain lower strata and has become the law

there; it is so simple that it does not astonish souls which are but

half turned towards good; and those hearts are so constituted that a

criminal, who is in the path of repentance, may be scrupulous in the

matter of theft and unscrupulous in the matter of vengeance. Jean

Valjean had killed Javert. At least, that seemed to be evident.

This was the final question, to be sure; but to this there was no

reply. This question Marius felt like pincers. How had it come to pass

that Jean Valjean’s existence had elbowed that of Cosette for so long a

period?

What melancholy sport of Providence was that which had placed that

child in contact with that man? Are there then chains for two which are

forged on high? and does God take pleasure in coupling the angel with

the demon? So a crime and an innocence can be room-mates in the

mysterious galleys of wretchedness? In that defiling of condemned

persons which is called human destiny, can two brows pass side by side,

the one ingenuous, the other formidable, the one all bathed in the

divine whiteness of dawn, the other forever blemished by the flash of

an eternal lightning? Who could have arranged that inexplicable pairing

off? In what manner, in consequence of what prodigy, had any community

of life been established between this celestial little creature and

that old criminal?

Who could have bound the lamb to the wolf, and, what was still more

incomprehensible, have attached the wolf to the lamb? For the wolf

loved the lamb, for the fierce creature adored the feeble one, for,

during the space of nine years, the angel had had the monster as her

point of support. Cosette’s childhood and girlhood, her advent in the

daylight, her virginal growth towards life and light, had been

sheltered by that hideous devotion. Here questions exfoliated, so to

speak, into innumerable enigmas, abysses yawned at the bottoms of

abysses, and Marius could no longer bend over Jean Valjean without

becoming dizzy. What was this man-precipice?

The old symbols of Genesis are eternal; in human society, such as it

now exists, and until a broader day shall effect a change in it, there

will always be two men, the one superior, the other subterranean; the

one which is according to good is Abel; the other which is according to

evil is Cain. What was this tender Cain? What was this ruffian

religiously absorbed in the adoration of a virgin, watching over her,

rearing her, guarding her, dignifying her, and enveloping her, impure

as he was himself, with purity?

What was that cesspool which had venerated that innocence to such a

point as not to leave upon it a single spot? What was this Jean Valjean

educating Cosette? What was this figure of the shadows which had for

its only object the preservation of the rising of a star from every

shadow and from every cloud?

That was Jean Valjean’s secret; that was also God’s secret.

In the presence of this double secret, Marius recoiled. The one, in

some sort, reassured him as to the other. God was as visible in this

affair as was Jean Valjean. God has his instruments. He makes use of

the tool which he wills. He is not responsible to men. Do we know how

God sets about the work? Jean Valjean had labored over Cosette. He had,

to some extent, made that soul. That was incontestable. Well, what

then? The workman was horrible; but the work was admirable. God

produces his miracles as seems good to him. He had constructed that

charming Cosette, and he had employed Jean Valjean. It had pleased him

to choose this strange collaborator for himself. What account have we

to demand of him? Is this the first time that the dung-heap has aided

the spring to create the rose?

Marius made himself these replies, and declared to himself that they

were good. He had not dared to press Jean Valjean on all the points

which we have just indicated, but he did not confess to himself that he

did not dare to do it. He adored Cosette, he possessed Cosette, Cosette

was splendidly pure. That was sufficient for him. What enlightenment

did he need? Cosette was a light. Does light require enlightenment? He

had everything; what more could he desire? All,—is not that enough?

Jean Valjean’s personal affairs did not concern him.

And bending over the fatal shadow of that man, he clung fast,

convulsively, to the solemn declaration of that unhappy wretch: “I am

nothing to Cosette. Ten years ago I did not know that she was in

existence.”

Jean Valjean was a passer-by. He had said so himself. Well, he had

passed. Whatever he was, his part was finished.

Henceforth, there remained Marius to fulfil the part of Providence to

Cosette. Cosette had sought the azure in a person like herself, in her

lover, her husband, her celestial male. Cosette, as she took her

flight, winged and transfigured, left behind her on the earth her

hideous and empty chrysalis, Jean Valjean.

In whatever circle of ideas Marius revolved, he always returned to a

certain horror for Jean Valjean. A sacred horror, perhaps, for, as we

have just pointed out, he felt a \_quid divinum\_ in that man. But do

what he would, and seek what extenuation he would, he was certainly

forced to fall back upon this: the man was a convict; that is to say, a

being who has not even a place in the social ladder, since he is lower

than the very lowest rung. After the very last of men comes the

convict. The convict is no longer, so to speak, in the semblance of the

living. The law has deprived him of the entire quantity of humanity of

which it can deprive a man.

Marius, on penal questions, still held to the inexorable system, though

he was a democrat and he entertained all the ideas of the law on the

subject of those whom the law strikes. He had not yet accomplished all

progress, we admit. He had not yet come to distinguish between that

which is written by man and that which is written by God, between law

and right. He had not examined and weighed the right which man takes to

dispose of the irrevocable and the irreparable. He was not shocked by

the word \_vindicte\_. He found it quite simple that certain breaches of

the written law should be followed by eternal suffering, and he

accepted, as the process of civilization, social damnation. He still

stood at this point, though safe to advance infallibly later on, since

his nature was good, and, at bottom, wholly formed of latent progress.

In this stage of his ideas, Jean Valjean appeared to him hideous and

repulsive. He was a man reproved, he was the convict. That word was for

him like the sound of the trump on the Day of Judgment; and, after

having reflected upon Jean Valjean for a long time, his final gesture

had been to turn away his head. \_Vade retro\_.

Marius, if we must recognize and even insist upon the fact, while

interrogating Jean Valjean to such a point that Jean Valjean had said:

“You are confessing me,” had not, nevertheless, put to him two or three

decisive questions.

It was not that they had not presented themselves to his mind, but that

he had been afraid of them. The Jondrette attic? The barricade? Javert?

Who knows where these revelations would have stopped? Jean Valjean did

not seem like a man who would draw back, and who knows whether Marius,

after having urged him on, would not have himself desired to hold him

back?

Has it not happened to all of us, in certain supreme conjunctures, to

stop our ears in order that we may not hear the reply, after we have

asked a question? It is especially when one loves that one gives way to

these exhibitions of cowardice. It is not wise to question sinister

situations to the last point, particularly when the indissoluble side

of our life is fatally intermingled with them. What a terrible light

might have proceeded from the despairing explanations of Jean Valjean,

and who knows whether that hideous glare would not have darted forth as

far as Cosette? Who knows whether a sort of infernal glow would not

have lingered behind it on the brow of that angel? The spattering of a

lightning-flash is of the thunder also. Fatality has points of juncture

where innocence itself is stamped with crime by the gloomy law of the

reflections which give color. The purest figures may forever preserve

the reflection of a horrible association. Rightly or wrongly, Marius

had been afraid. He already knew too much. He sought to dull his senses

rather than to gain further light.

In dismay he bore off Cosette in his arms and shut his eyes to Jean

Valjean.

That man was the night, the living and horrible night. How should he

dare to seek the bottom of it? It is a terrible thing to interrogate

the shadow. Who knows what its reply will be? The dawn may be blackened

forever by it.

In this state of mind the thought that that man would, henceforth, come

into any contact whatever with Cosette was a heartrending perplexity to

Marius.

He now almost reproached himself for not having put those formidable

questions, before which he had recoiled, and from which an implacable

and definitive decision might have sprung. He felt that he was too

good, too gentle, too weak, if we must say the word. This weakness had

led him to an imprudent concession. He had allowed himself to be

touched. He had been in the wrong. He ought to have simply and purely

rejected Jean Valjean. Jean Valjean played the part of fire, and that

is what he should have done, and have freed his house from that man.

He was vexed with himself, he was angry with that whirlwind of emotions

which had deafened, blinded, and carried him away. He was displeased

with himself.

What was he to do now? Jean Valjean’s visits were profoundly repugnant

to him. What was the use in having that man in his house? What did the

man want? Here, he became dismayed, he did not wish to dig down, he did

not wish to penetrate deeply; he did not wish to sound himself. He had

promised, he had allowed himself to be drawn into a promise; Jean

Valjean held his promise; one must keep one’s word even to a convict,

above all to a convict. Still, his first duty was to Cosette. In short,

he was carried away by the repugnance which dominated him.

Marius turned over all this confusion of ideas in his mind, passing

from one to the other, and moved by all of them. Hence arose a profound

trouble.

It was not easy for him to hide this trouble from Cosette, but love is

a talent, and Marius succeeded in doing it.

However, without any apparent object, he questioned Cosette, who was as

candid as a dove is white and who suspected nothing; he talked of her

childhood and her youth, and he became more and more convinced that

that convict had been everything good, paternal and respectable that a

man can be towards Cosette. All that Marius had caught a glimpse of and

had surmised was real. That sinister nettle had loved and protected

that lily.

BOOK EIGHTH—FADING AWAY OF THE TWILIGHT

[Illustration: The Twilight Decline]

CHAPTER I—THE LOWER CHAMBER

On the following day, at nightfall, Jean Valjean knocked at the

carriage gate of the Gillenormand house. It was Basque who received

him. Basque was in the courtyard at the appointed hour, as though he

had received his orders. It sometimes happens that one says to a

servant: “You will watch for Mr. So and So, when he arrives.”

Basque addressed Jean Valjean without waiting for the latter to

approach him:

“Monsieur le Baron has charged me to inquire whether monsieur desires

to go upstairs or to remain below?”

“I will remain below,” replied Jean Valjean.

Basque, who was perfectly respectful, opened the door of the

waiting-room and said:

“I will go and inform Madame.”

The room which Jean Valjean entered was a damp, vaulted room on the

ground floor, which served as a cellar on occasion, which opened on the

street, was paved with red squares and was badly lighted by a grated

window.

This chamber was not one of those which are harassed by the

feather-duster, the pope’s head brush, and the broom. The dust rested

tranquilly there. Persecution of the spiders was not organized there. A

fine web, which spread far and wide, and was very black and ornamented

with dead flies, formed a wheel on one of the window-panes. The room,

which was small and low-ceiled, was furnished with a heap of empty

bottles piled up in one corner.

The wall, which was daubed with an ochre yellow wash, was scaling off

in large flakes. At one end there was a chimney-piece painted in black

with a narrow shelf. A fire was burning there; which indicated that

Jean Valjean’s reply: “I will remain below,” had been foreseen.

Two armchairs were placed at the two corners of the fireplace. Between

the chairs an old bedside rug, which displayed more foundation thread

than wool, had been spread by way of a carpet.

The chamber was lighted by the fire on the hearth and the twilight

falling through the window.

Jean Valjean was fatigued. For days he had neither eaten nor slept. He

threw himself into one of the armchairs.

Basque returned, set a lighted candle on the chimney-piece and retired.

Jean Valjean, his head drooping and his chin resting on his breast,

perceived neither Basque nor the candle.

All at once, he drew himself up with a start. Cosette was standing

beside him.

He had not seen her enter, but he had felt that she was there.

He turned round. He gazed at her. She was adorably lovely. But what he

was contemplating with that profound gaze was not her beauty but her

soul.

“Well,” exclaimed Cosette, “father, I knew that you were peculiar, but

I never should have expected this. What an idea! Marius told me that

you wish me to receive you here.”

“Yes, it is my wish.”

“I expected that reply. Good. I warn you that I am going to make a

scene for you. Let us begin at the beginning. Embrace me, father.”

And she offered him her cheek.

Jean Valjean remained motionless.

“You do not stir. I take note of it. Attitude of guilt. But never mind,

I pardon you. Jesus Christ said: Offer the other cheek. Here it is.”

And she presented her other cheek.

Jean Valjean did not move. It seemed as though his feet were nailed to

the pavement.

“This is becoming serious,” said Cosette. “What have I done to you? I

declare that I am perplexed. You owe me reparation. You will dine with

us.”

“I have dined.”

“That is not true. I will get M. Gillenormand to scold you.

Grandfathers are made to reprimand fathers. Come. Go upstairs with me

to the drawing-room. Immediately.”

“Impossible.”

Here Cosette lost ground a little. She ceased to command and passed to

questioning.

“But why? and you choose the ugliest chamber in the house in which to

see me. It’s horrible here.”

“Thou knowest . . .”

Jean Valjean caught himself up.

“You know, madame, that I am peculiar, I have my freaks.”

Cosette struck her tiny hands together.

“Madame! . . . You know! . . . more novelties! What is the meaning of

this?”

Jean Valjean directed upon her that heartrending smile to which he

occasionally had recourse:

“You wished to be Madame. You are so.”

“Not for you, father.”

“Do not call me father.”

“What?”

“Call me ‘Monsieur Jean.’ ‘Jean,’ if you like.”

“You are no longer my father? I am no longer Cosette? ‘Monsieur Jean’?

What does this mean? why, these are revolutions, aren’t they? what has

taken place? come, look me in the face. And you won’t live with us! And

you won’t have my chamber! What have I done to you? Has anything

happened?”

“Nothing.”

“Well then?”

“Everything is as usual.”

“Why do you change your name?”

“You have changed yours, surely.”

He smiled again with the same smile as before and added:

“Since you are Madame Pontmercy, I certainly can be Monsieur Jean.”

“I don’t understand anything about it. All this is idiotic. I shall ask

permission of my husband for you to be ‘Monsieur Jean.’ I hope that he

will not consent to it. You cause me a great deal of pain. One does

have freaks, but one does not cause one’s little Cosette grief. That is

wrong. You have no right to be wicked, you who are so good.”

He made no reply.

She seized his hands with vivacity, and raising them to her face with

an irresistible movement, she pressed them against her neck beneath her

chin, which is a gesture of profound tenderness.

“Oh!” she said to him, “be good!”

And she went on:

“This is what I call being good: being nice and coming and living

here,—there are birds here as there are in the Rue Plumet,—living with

us, quitting that hole of a Rue de l’Homme Armé, not giving us riddles

to guess, being like all the rest of the world, dining with us,

breakfasting with us, being my father.”

He loosed her hands.

“You no longer need a father, you have a husband.”

Cosette became angry.

“I no longer need a father! One really does not know what to say to

things like that, which are not common sense!”

“If Toussaint were here,” resumed Jean Valjean, like a person who is

driven to seek authorities, and who clutches at every branch, “she

would be the first to agree that it is true that I have always had ways

of my own. There is nothing new in this. I always have loved my black

corner.”

“But it is cold here. One cannot see distinctly. It is abominable, that

it is, to wish to be Monsieur Jean! I will not have you say ‘you’ to

me.

“Just now, as I was coming hither,” replied Jean Valjean, “I saw a

piece of furniture in the Rue Saint Louis. It was at a cabinet-maker’s.

If I were a pretty woman, I would treat myself to that bit of

furniture. A very neat toilet table in the reigning style. What you

call rosewood, I think. It is inlaid. The mirror is quite large. There

are drawers. It is pretty.”

“Hou! the villainous bear!” replied Cosette.

And with supreme grace, setting her teeth and drawing back her lips,

she blew at Jean Valjean. She was a Grace copying a cat.

“I am furious,” she resumed. “Ever since yesterday, you have made me

rage, all of you. I am greatly vexed. I don’t understand. You do not

defend me against Marius. Marius will not uphold me against you. I am

all alone. I arrange a chamber prettily. If I could have put the good

God there I would have done it. My chamber is left on my hands. My

lodger sends me into bankruptcy. I order a nice little dinner of

Nicolette. We will have nothing to do with your dinner, Madame. And my

father Fauchelevent wants me to call him ‘Monsieur Jean,’ and to

receive him in a frightful, old, ugly cellar, where the walls have

beards, and where the crystal consists of empty bottles, and the

curtains are of spiders’ webs! You are singular, I admit, that is your

style, but people who get married are granted a truce. You ought not to

have begun being singular again instantly. So you are going to be

perfectly contented in your abominable Rue de l’Homme Armé. I was very

desperate indeed there, that I was. What have you against me? You cause

me a great deal of grief. Fi!”

And, becoming suddenly serious, she gazed intently at Jean Valjean and

added:

“Are you angry with me because I am happy?”

Ingenuousness sometimes unconsciously penetrates deep. This question,

which was simple for Cosette, was profound for Jean Valjean. Cosette

had meant to scratch, and she lacerated.

Jean Valjean turned pale.

He remained for a moment without replying, then, with an inexpressible

intonation, and speaking to himself, he murmured:

“Her happiness was the object of my life. Now God may sign my

dismissal. Cosette, thou art happy; my day is over.”

“Ah, you have said \_thou\_ to me!” exclaimed Cosette.

And she sprang to his neck.

Jean Valjean, in bewilderment, strained her wildly to his breast. It

almost seemed to him as though he were taking her back.

“Thanks, father!” said Cosette.

This enthusiastic impulse was on the point of becoming poignant for

Jean Valjean. He gently removed Cosette’s arms, and took his hat.

“Well?” said Cosette.

“I leave you, Madame, they are waiting for you.”

And, from the threshold, he added:

“I have said \_thou\_ to you. Tell your husband that this shall not

happen again. Pardon me.”

Jean Valjean quitted the room, leaving Cosette stupefied at this

enigmatical farewell.

CHAPTER II—ANOTHER STEP BACKWARDS

On the following day, at the same hour, Jean Valjean came.

Cosette asked him no questions, was no longer astonished, no longer

exclaimed that she was cold, no longer spoke of the drawing-room, she

avoided saying either “father” or “Monsieur Jean.” She allowed herself

to be addressed as \_you\_. She allowed herself to be called Madame.

Only, her joy had undergone a certain diminution. She would have been

sad, if sadness had been possible to her.

It is probable that she had had with Marius one of those conversations

in which the beloved man says what he pleases, explains nothing, and

satisfies the beloved woman. The curiosity of lovers does not extend

very far beyond their own love.

The lower room had made a little toilet. Basque had suppressed the

bottles, and Nicolette the spiders.

All the days which followed brought Jean Valjean at the same hour. He

came every day, because he had not the strength to take Marius’ words

otherwise than literally. Marius arranged matters so as to be absent at

the hours when Jean Valjean came. The house grew accustomed to the

novel ways of M. Fauchelevent. Toussaint helped in this direction:

“Monsieur has always been like that,” she repeated. The grandfather

issued this decree:—“He’s an original.” And all was said. Moreover, at

the age of ninety-six, no bond is any longer possible, all is merely

juxtaposition; a newcomer is in the way. There is no longer any room;

all habits are acquired. M. Fauchelevent, M. Tranchelevent, Father

Gillenormand asked nothing better than to be relieved from “that

gentleman.” He added:—“Nothing is more common than those originals.

They do all sorts of queer things. They have no reason. The Marquis de

Canaples was still worse. He bought a palace that he might lodge in the

garret. These are fantastic appearances that people affect.”

No one caught a glimpse of the sinister foundation. And moreover, who

could have guessed such a thing? There are marshes of this description

in India. The water seems extraordinary, inexplicable, rippling though

there is no wind, and agitated where it should be calm. One gazes at

the surface of these causeless ebullitions; one does not perceive the

hydra which crawls on the bottom.

Many men have a secret monster in this same manner, a dragon which

gnaws them, a despair which inhabits their night. Such a man resembles

other men, he goes and comes. No one knows that he bears within him a

frightful parasitic pain with a thousand teeth, which lives within the

unhappy man, and of which he is dying. No one knows that this man is a

gulf. He is stagnant but deep. From time to time, a trouble of which

the onlooker understands nothing appears on his surface. A mysterious

wrinkle is formed, then vanishes, then reappears; an air-bubble rises

and bursts. It is the breathing of the unknown beast.

Certain strange habits: arriving at the hour when other people are

taking their leave, keeping in the background when other people are

displaying themselves, preserving on all occasions what may be

designated as the wall-colored mantle, seeking the solitary walk,

preferring the deserted street, avoiding any share in conversation,

avoiding crowds and festivals, seeming at one’s ease and living poorly,

having one’s key in one’s pocket, and one’s candle at the porter’s

lodge, however rich one may be, entering by the side door, ascending

the private staircase,—all these insignificant singularities, fugitive

folds on the surface, often proceed from a formidable foundation.

Many weeks passed in this manner. A new life gradually took possession

of Cosette: the relations which marriage creates, visits, the care of

the house, pleasures, great matters. Cosette’s pleasures were not

costly, they consisted in one thing: being with Marius. The great

occupation of her life was to go out with him, to remain with him. It

was for them a joy that was always fresh, to go out arm in arm, in the

face of the sun, in the open street, without hiding themselves, before

the whole world, both of them completely alone.

Cosette had one vexation. Toussaint could not get on with Nicolette,

the soldering of two elderly maids being impossible, and she went away.

The grandfather was well; Marius argued a case here and there; Aunt

Gillenormand peacefully led that life aside which sufficed for her,

beside the new household. Jean Valjean came every day.

The address as \_thou\_ disappeared, the \_you\_, the “Madame,” the

“Monsieur Jean,” rendered him another person to Cosette. The care which

he had himself taken to detach her from him was succeeding. She became

more and more gay and less and less tender. Yet she still loved him

sincerely, and he felt it.

One day she said to him suddenly: “You used to be my father, you are no

longer my father, you were my uncle, you are no longer my uncle, you

were Monsieur Fauchelevent, you are Jean. Who are you then? I don’t

like all this. If I did not know how good you are, I should be afraid

of you.”

He still lived in the Rue de l’Homme Armé, because he could not make up

his mind to remove to a distance from the quarter where Cosette dwelt.

At first, he only remained a few minutes with Cosette, and then went

away.

Little by little he acquired the habit of making his visits less brief.

One would have said that he was taking advantage of the authorization

of the days which were lengthening, he arrived earlier and departed

later.

One day Cosette chanced to say “father” to him. A flash of joy

illuminated Jean Valjean’s melancholy old countenance. He caught her

up: “Say Jean.”—“Ah! truly,” she replied with a burst of laughter,

“Monsieur Jean.”—“That is right,” said he. And he turned aside so that

she might not see him wipe his eyes.

CHAPTER III—THEY RECALL THE GARDEN OF THE RUE PLUMET

This was the last time. After that last flash of light, complete

extinction ensued. No more familiarity, no more good-morning with a

kiss, never more that word so profoundly sweet: “My father!” He was at

his own request and through his own complicity driven out of all his

happinesses one after the other; and he had this sorrow, that after

having lost Cosette wholly in one day, he was afterwards obliged to

lose her again in detail.

The eye eventually becomes accustomed to the light of a cellar. In

short, it sufficed for him to have an apparition of Cosette every day.

His whole life was concentrated in that one hour.

He seated himself close to her, he gazed at her in silence, or he

talked to her of years gone by, of her childhood, of the convent, of

her little friends of those bygone days.

One afternoon,—it was on one of those early days in April, already warm

and fresh, the moment of the sun’s great gayety, the gardens which

surrounded the windows of Marius and Cosette felt the emotion of

waking, the hawthorn was on the point of budding, a jewelled garniture

of gillyflowers spread over the ancient walls, snapdragons yawned

through the crevices of the stones, amid the grass there was a charming

beginning of daisies, and buttercups, the white butterflies of the year

were making their first appearance, the wind, that minstrel of the

eternal wedding, was trying in the trees the first notes of that grand,

auroral symphony which the old poets called the springtide,—Marius said

to Cosette:—“We said that we would go back to take a look at our garden

in the Rue Plumet. Let us go thither. We must not be ungrateful.”—And

away they flitted, like two swallows towards the spring. This garden of

the Rue Plumet produced on them the effect of the dawn. They already

had behind them in life something which was like the springtime of

their love. The house in the Rue Plumet being held on a lease, still

belonged to Cosette. They went to that garden and that house. There

they found themselves again, there they forgot themselves. That

evening, at the usual hour, Jean Valjean came to the Rue des

Filles-du-Calvaire.—“Madame went out with Monsieur and has not yet

returned,” Basque said to him. He seated himself in silence, and waited

an hour. Cosette did not return. He departed with drooping head.

Cosette was so intoxicated with her walk to “their garden,” and so

joyous at having “lived a whole day in her past,” that she talked of

nothing else on the morrow. She did not notice that she had not seen

Jean Valjean.

“In what way did you go thither?” Jean Valjean asked her.”

“On foot.”

“And how did you return?”

“In a hackney carriage.”

For some time, Jean Valjean had noticed the economical life led by the

young people. He was troubled by it. Marius’ economy was severe, and

that word had its absolute meaning for Jean Valjean. He hazarded a

query:

“Why do you not have a carriage of your own? A pretty coupé would only

cost you five hundred francs a month. You are rich.”

“I don’t know,” replied Cosette.

“It is like Toussaint,” resumed Jean Valjean. “She is gone. You have

not replaced her. Why?”

“Nicolette suffices.”

“But you ought to have a maid.”

“Have I not Marius?”

“You ought to have a house of your own, your own servants, a carriage,

a box at the theatre. There is nothing too fine for you. Why not profit

by your riches? Wealth adds to happiness.”

Cosette made no reply.

Jean Valjean’s visits were not abridged. Far from it. When it is the

heart which is slipping, one does not halt on the downward slope.

When Jean Valjean wished to prolong his visit and to induce

forgetfulness of the hour, he sang the praises of Marius; he pronounced

him handsome, noble, courageous, witty, eloquent, good. Cosette outdid

him. Jean Valjean began again. They were never weary. Marius—that word

was inexhaustible; those six letters contained volumes. In this manner,

Jean Valjean contrived to remain a long time.

It was so sweet to see Cosette, to forget by her side! It alleviated

his wounds. It frequently happened that Basque came twice to announce:

“M. Gillenormand sends me to remind Madame la Baronne that dinner is

served.”

On those days, Jean Valjean was very thoughtful on his return home.

Was there, then, any truth in that comparison of the chrysalis which

had presented itself to the mind of Marius? Was Jean Valjean really a

chrysalis who would persist, and who would come to visit his butterfly?

One day he remained still longer than usual. On the following day he

observed that there was no fire on the hearth.—“Hello!” he thought. “No

fire.”—And he furnished the explanation for himself.—“It is perfectly

simple. It is April. The cold weather has ceased.”

“Heavens! how cold it is here!” exclaimed Cosette when she entered.

“Why, no,” said Jean Valjean.

“Was it you who told Basque not to make a fire then?”

“Yes, since we are now in the month of May.”

“But we have a fire until June. One is needed all the year in this

cellar.”

“I thought that a fire was unnecessary.”

“That is exactly like one of your ideas!” retorted Cosette.

On the following day there was a fire. But the two armchairs were

arranged at the other end of the room near the door. “—What is the

meaning of this?” thought Jean Valjean.

He went for the armchairs and restored them to their ordinary place

near the hearth.

This fire lighted once more encouraged him, however. He prolonged the

conversation even beyond its customary limits. As he rose to take his

leave, Cosette said to him:

“My husband said a queer thing to me yesterday.”

“What was it?”

“He said to me: ‘Cosette, we have an income of thirty thousand livres.

Twenty-seven that you own, and three that my grandfather gives me.’ I

replied: ‘That makes thirty.’ He went on: ‘Would you have the courage

to live on the three thousand?’ I answered: ‘Yes, on nothing. Provided

that it was with you.’ And then I asked: ‘Why do you say that to me?’

He replied: ‘I wanted to know.’”

Jean Valjean found not a word to answer. Cosette probably expected some

explanation from him; he listened in gloomy silence. He went back to

the Rue de l’Homme Armé; he was so deeply absorbed that he mistook the

door and instead of entering his own house, he entered the adjoining

dwelling. It was only after having ascended nearly two stories that he

perceived his error and went down again.

His mind was swarming with conjectures. It was evident that Marius had

his doubts as to the origin of the six hundred thousand francs, that he

feared some source that was not pure, who knows? that he had even,

perhaps, discovered that the money came from him, Jean Valjean, that he

hesitated before this suspicious fortune, and was disinclined to take

it as his own,—preferring that both he and Cosette should remain poor,

rather than that they should be rich with wealth that was not clean.

Moreover, Jean Valjean began vaguely to surmise that he was being shown

the door.

On the following day, he underwent something like a shock on entering

the ground-floor room. The armchairs had disappeared. There was not a

single chair of any sort.

“Ah, what’s this!” exclaimed Cosette as she entered, “no chairs! Where

are the armchairs?”

“They are no longer here,” replied Jean Valjean.

“This is too much!”

Jean Valjean stammered:

“It was I who told Basque to remove them.”

“And your reason?”

“I have only a few minutes to stay to-day.”

“A brief stay is no reason for remaining standing.”

“I think that Basque needed the chairs for the drawing-room.”

“Why?”

“You have company this evening, no doubt.”

“We expect no one.”

Jean Valjean had not another word to say.

Cosette shrugged her shoulders.

“To have the chairs carried off! The other day you had the fire put

out. How odd you are!”

“Adieu!” murmured Jean Valjean.

He did not say: “Adieu, Cosette.” But he had not the strength to say:

“Adieu, Madame.”

He went away utterly overwhelmed.

This time he had understood.

On the following day he did not come. Cosette only observed the fact in

the evening.

“Why,” said she, “Monsieur Jean has not been here today.”

And she felt a slight twinge at her heart, but she hardly perceived it,

being immediately diverted by a kiss from Marius.

On the following day he did not come.

Cosette paid no heed to this, passed her evening and slept well that

night, as usual, and thought of it only when she woke. She was so

happy! She speedily despatched Nicolette to M. Jean’s house to inquire

whether he were ill, and why he had not come on the previous evening.

Nicolette brought back the reply of M. Jean that he was not ill. He was

busy. He would come soon. As soon as he was able. Moreover, he was on

the point of taking a little journey. Madame must remember that it was

his custom to take trips from time to time. They were not to worry

about him. They were not to think of him.

Nicolette on entering M. Jean’s had repeated to him her mistress’ very

words. That Madame had sent her to inquire why M. Jean had not come on

the preceding evening. ”—It is two days since I have been there,” said

Jean Valjean gently.

But the remark passed unnoticed by Nicolette, who did not report it to

Cosette.

CHAPTER IV—ATTRACTION AND EXTINCTION

During the last months of spring and the first months of summer in

1833, the rare passers-by in the Marais, the petty shopkeepers, the

loungers on thresholds, noticed an old man neatly clad in black, who

emerged every day at the same hour, towards nightfall, from the Rue de

l’Homme Armé, on the side of the Rue Sainte-Croix-de-la-Bretonnerie,

passed in front of the Blancs Manteaux, gained the Rue

Culture-Sainte-Catherine, and, on arriving at the Rue de l’Écharpe,

turned to the left, and entered the Rue Saint-Louis.

There he walked at a slow pace, with his head strained forward, seeing

nothing, hearing nothing, his eye immovably fixed on a point which

seemed to be a star to him, which never varied, and which was no other

than the corner of the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire. The nearer he

approached the corner of the street the more his eye lighted up; a sort

of joy illuminated his pupils like an inward aurora, he had a

fascinated and much affected air, his lips indulged in obscure

movements, as though he were talking to some one whom he did not see,

he smiled vaguely and advanced as slowly as possible. One would have

said that, while desirous of reaching his destination, he feared the

moment when he should be close at hand. When only a few houses remained

between him and that street which appeared to attract him his pace

slackened, to such a degree that, at times, one might have thought that

he was no longer advancing at all. The vacillation of his head and the

fixity of his eyeballs suggested the thought of the magnetic needle

seeking the pole. Whatever time he spent on arriving, he was obliged to

arrive at last; he reached the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire; then he

halted, he trembled, he thrust his head with a sort of melancholy

timidity round the corner of the last house, and gazed into that

street, and there was in that tragic look something which resembled the

dazzling light of the impossible, and the reflection from a paradise

that was closed to him. Then a tear, which had slowly gathered in the

corner of his lids, and had become large enough to fall, trickled down

his cheek, and sometimes stopped at his mouth. The old man tasted its

bitter flavor. Thus he remained for several minutes as though made of

stone, then he returned by the same road and with the same step, and,

in proportion as he retreated, his glance died out.

Little by little, this old man ceased to go as far as the corner of the

Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire; he halted half way in the Rue Saint-Louis;

sometimes a little further off, sometimes a little nearer.

One day he stopped at the corner of the Rue Culture-Sainte-Catherine

and looked at the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire from a distance. Then he

shook his head slowly from right to left, as though refusing himself

something, and retraced his steps.

Soon he no longer came as far as the Rue Saint-Louis. He got as far as

the Rue Pavée, shook his head and turned back; then he went no further

than the Rue des Trois-Pavillons; then he did not overstep the

Blancs-Manteaux. One would have said that he was a pendulum which was

no longer wound up, and whose oscillations were growing shorter before

ceasing altogether.

Every day he emerged from his house at the same hour, he undertook the

same trip, but he no longer completed it, and, perhaps without himself

being aware of the fact, he constantly shortened it. His whole

countenance expressed this single idea: What is the use?—His eye was

dim; no more radiance. His tears were also exhausted; they no longer

collected in the corner of his eye-lid; that thoughtful eye was dry.

The old man’s head was still craned forward; his chin moved at times;

the folds in his gaunt neck were painful to behold. Sometimes, when the

weather was bad, he had an umbrella under his arm, but he never opened

it.

The good women of the quarter said: “He is an innocent.” The children

followed him and laughed.

BOOK NINTH—SUPREME SHADOW, SUPREME DAWN

CHAPTER I—PITY FOR THE UNHAPPY, BUT INDULGENCE FOR THE HAPPY

It is a terrible thing to be happy! How content one is! How

all-sufficient one finds it! How, being in possession of the false

object of life, happiness, one forgets the true object, duty!

Let us say, however, that the reader would do wrong were he to blame

Marius.

Marius, as we have explained, before his marriage, had put no questions

to M. Fauchelevent, and, since that time, he had feared to put any to

Jean Valjean. He had regretted the promise into which he had allowed

himself to be drawn. He had often said to himself that he had done

wrong in making that concession to despair. He had confined himself to

gradually estranging Jean Valjean from his house and to effacing him,

as much as possible, from Cosette’s mind. He had, in a manner, always

placed himself between Cosette and Jean Valjean, sure that, in this

way, she would not perceive nor think of the latter. It was more than

effacement, it was an eclipse.

Marius did what he considered necessary and just. He thought that he

had serious reasons which the reader has already seen, and others which

will be seen later on, for getting rid of Jean Valjean without

harshness, but without weakness.

Chance having ordained that he should encounter, in a case which he had

argued, a former employee of the Laffitte establishment, he had

acquired mysterious information, without seeking it, which he had not

been able, it is true, to probe, out of respect for the secret which he

had promised to guard, and out of consideration for Jean Valjean’s

perilous position. He believed at that moment that he had a grave duty

to perform: the restitution of the six hundred thousand francs to some

one whom he sought with all possible discretion. In the meanwhile, he

abstained from touching that money.

As for Cosette, she had not been initiated into any of these secrets;

but it would be harsh to condemn her also.

There existed between Marius and her an all-powerful magnetism, which

caused her to do, instinctively and almost mechanically, what Marius

wished. She was conscious of Marius’ will in the direction of “Monsieur

Jean,” she conformed to it. Her husband had not been obliged to say

anything to her; she yielded to the vague but clear pressure of his

tacit intentions, and obeyed blindly. Her obedience in this instance

consisted in not remembering what Marius forgot. She was not obliged to

make any effort to accomplish this. Without her knowing why herself,

and without his having any cause to accuse her of it, her soul had

become so wholly her husband’s that that which was shrouded in gloom in

Marius’ mind became overcast in hers.

Let us not go too far, however; in what concerns Jean Valjean, this

forgetfulness and obliteration were merely superficial. She was rather

heedless than forgetful. At bottom, she was sincerely attached to the

man whom she had so long called her father; but she loved her husband

still more dearly. This was what had somewhat disturbed the balance of

her heart, which leaned to one side only.

It sometimes happened that Cosette spoke of Jean Valjean and expressed

her surprise. Then Marius calmed her: “He is absent, I think. Did not

he say that he was setting out on a journey?”—“That is true,” thought

Cosette. “He had a habit of disappearing in this fashion. But not for

so long.” Two or three times she despatched Nicolette to inquire in the

Rue de l’Homme Armé whether M. Jean had returned from his journey. Jean

Valjean caused the answer “no” to be given.

Cosette asked nothing more, since she had but one need on earth,

Marius.

Let us also say that, on their side, Cosette and Marius had also been

absent. They had been to Vernon. Marius had taken Cosette to his

father’s grave.

Marius gradually won Cosette away from Jean Valjean. Cosette allowed

it.

Moreover that which is called, far too harshly in certain cases, the

ingratitude of children, is not always a thing so deserving of reproach

as it is supposed. It is the ingratitude of nature. Nature, as we have

elsewhere said, “looks before her.” Nature divides living beings into

those who are arriving and those who are departing. Those who are

departing are turned towards the shadows, those who are arriving

towards the light. Hence a gulf which is fatal on the part of the old,

and involuntary on the part of the young. This breach, at first

insensible, increases slowly, like all separations of branches. The

boughs, without becoming detached from the trunk, grow away from it. It

is no fault of theirs. Youth goes where there is joy, festivals, vivid

lights, love. Old age goes towards the end. They do not lose sight of

each other, but there is no longer a close connection. Young people

feel the cooling off of life; old people, that of the tomb. Let us not

blame these poor children.

CHAPTER II—LAST FLICKERINGS OF A LAMP WITHOUT OIL

One day, Jean Valjean descended his staircase, took three steps in the

street, seated himself on a post, on that same stone post where

Gavroche had found him meditating on the night between the 5th and the

6th of June; he remained there a few moments, then went upstairs again.

This was the last oscillation of the pendulum. On the following day he

did not leave his apartment. On the day after that, he did not leave

his bed.

His portress, who prepared his scanty repasts, a few cabbages or

potatoes with bacon, glanced at the brown earthenware plate and

exclaimed:

“But you ate nothing yesterday, poor, dear man!”

“Certainly I did,” replied Jean Valjean.

“The plate is quite full.”

“Look at the water jug. It is empty.”

“That proves that you have drunk; it does not prove that you have

eaten.”

“Well,” said Jean Valjean, “what if I felt hungry only for water?”

“That is called thirst, and, when one does not eat at the same time, it

is called fever.”

“I will eat to-morrow.”

“Or at Trinity day. Why not to-day? Is it the thing to say: ‘I will eat

to-morrow’? The idea of leaving my platter without even touching it! My

lady-finger potatoes were so good!”

Jean Valjean took the old woman’s hand:

“I promise you that I will eat them,” he said, in his benevolent voice.

“I am not pleased with you,” replied the portress.

Jean Valjean saw no other human creature than this good woman. There

are streets in Paris through which no one ever passes, and houses to

which no one ever comes. He was in one of those streets and one of

those houses.

While he still went out, he had purchased of a coppersmith, for a few

sous, a little copper crucifix which he had hung up on a nail opposite

his bed. That gibbet is always good to look at.

A week passed, and Jean Valjean had not taken a step in his room. He

still remained in bed. The portress said to her husband:—“The good man

upstairs yonder does not get up, he no longer eats, he will not last

long. That man has his sorrows, that he has. You won’t get it out of my

head that his daughter has made a bad marriage.”

The porter replied, with the tone of marital sovereignty:

“If he’s rich, let him have a doctor. If he is not rich, let him go

without. If he has no doctor he will die.”

“And if he has one?”

“He will die,” said the porter.

The portress set to scraping away the grass from what she called her

pavement, with an old knife, and, as she tore out the blades, she

grumbled:

“It’s a shame. Such a neat old man! He’s as white as a chicken.”

She caught sight of the doctor of the quarter as he passed the end of

the street; she took it upon herself to request him to come upstairs.

“It’s on the second floor,” said she. “You have only to enter. As the

good man no longer stirs from his bed, the door is always unlocked.”

The doctor saw Jean Valjean and spoke with him.

When he came down again the portress interrogated him:

“Well, doctor?”

“Your sick man is very ill indeed.”

“What is the matter with him?”

“Everything and nothing. He is a man who, to all appearances, has lost

some person who is dear to him. People die of that.”

“What did he say to you?”

“He told me that he was in good health.”

“Shall you come again, doctor?”

“Yes,” replied the doctor. “But some one else besides must come.”

CHAPTER III—A PEN IS HEAVY TO THE MAN WHO LIFTED THE FAUCHELEVENT’S

CART

One evening Jean Valjean found difficulty in raising himself on his

elbow; he felt of his wrist and could not find his pulse; his breath

was short and halted at times; he recognized the fact that he was

weaker than he had ever been before. Then, no doubt under the pressure

of some supreme preoccupation, he made an effort, drew himself up into

a sitting posture and dressed himself. He put on his old workingman’s

clothes. As he no longer went out, he had returned to them and

preferred them. He was obliged to pause many times while dressing

himself; merely putting his arms through his waistcoat made the

perspiration trickle from his forehead.

Since he had been alone, he had placed his bed in the antechamber, in

order to inhabit that deserted apartment as little as possible.

He opened the valise and drew from it Cosette’s outfit.

He spread it out on his bed.

The Bishop’s candlesticks were in their place on the chimney-piece. He

took from a drawer two wax candles and put them in the candlesticks.

Then, although it was still broad daylight,—it was summer,—he lighted

them. In the same way candles are to be seen lighted in broad daylight

in chambers where there is a corpse.

Every step that he took in going from one piece of furniture to another

exhausted him, and he was obliged to sit down. It was not ordinary

fatigue which expends the strength only to renew it; it was the remnant

of all movement possible to him, it was life drained which flows away

drop by drop in overwhelming efforts and which will never be renewed.

The chair into which he allowed himself to fall was placed in front of

that mirror, so fatal for him, so providential for Marius, in which he

had read Cosette’s reversed writing on the blotting book. He caught

sight of himself in this mirror, and did not recognize himself. He was

eighty years old; before Marius’ marriage, he would have hardly been

taken for fifty; that year had counted for thirty. What he bore on his

brow was no longer the wrinkles of age, it was the mysterious mark of

death. The hollowing of that pitiless nail could be felt there. His

cheeks were pendulous; the skin of his face had the color which would

lead one to think that it already had earth upon it; the corners of his

mouth drooped as in the mask which the ancients sculptured on tombs. He

gazed into space with an air of reproach; one would have said that he

was one of those grand tragic beings who have cause to complain of some

one.

He was in that condition, the last phase of dejection, in which sorrow

no longer flows; it is coagulated, so to speak; there is something on

the soul like a clot of despair.

Night had come. He laboriously dragged a table and the old armchair to

the fireside, and placed upon the table a pen, some ink and some paper.

That done, he had a fainting fit. When he recovered consciousness, he

was thirsty. As he could not lift the jug, he tipped it over painfully

towards his mouth, and swallowed a draught.

As neither the pen nor the ink had been used for a long time, the point

of the pen had curled up, the ink had dried away, he was forced to rise

and put a few drops of water in the ink, which he did not accomplish

without pausing and sitting down two or three times, and he was

compelled to write with the back of the pen. He wiped his brow from

time to time.

Then he turned towards the bed, and, still seated, for he could not

stand, he gazed at the little black gown and all those beloved objects.

These contemplations lasted for hours which seemed minutes.

All at once he shivered, he felt that a child was taking possession of

him; he rested his elbows on the table, which was illuminated by the

Bishop’s candles and took up the pen. His hand trembled. He wrote

slowly the few following lines:

“Cosette, I bless thee. I am going to explain to thee. Thy husband was

right in giving me to understand that I ought to go away; but there is

a little error in what he believed, though he was in the right. He is

excellent. Love him well even after I am dead. Monsieur Pontmercy, love

my darling child well. Cosette, this paper will be found; this is what

I wish to say to thee, thou wilt see the figures, if I have the

strength to recall them, listen well, this money is really thine. Here

is the whole matter: White jet comes from Norway, black jet comes from

England, black glass jewellery comes from Germany. Jet is the lightest,

the most precious, the most costly. Imitations can be made in France as

well as in Germany. What is needed is a little anvil two inches square,

and a lamp burning spirits of wine to soften the wax. The wax was

formerly made with resin and lampblack, and cost four livres the pound.

I invented a way of making it with gum shellac and turpentine. It does

not cost more than thirty sous, and is much better. Buckles are made

with a violet glass which is stuck fast, by means of this wax, to a

little framework of black iron. The glass must be violet for iron

jewellery, and black for gold jewellery. Spain buys a great deal of it.

It is the country of jet . . .”

Here he paused, the pen fell from his fingers, he was seized by one of

those sobs which at times welled up from the very depths of his being;

the poor man clasped his head in both hands, and meditated.

“Oh!” he exclaimed within himself [lamentable cries, heard by God

alone], “all is over. I shall never see her more. She is a smile which

passed over me. I am about to plunge into the night without even seeing

her again. Oh! one minute, one instant, to hear her voice, to touch her

dress, to gaze upon her, upon her, the angel! and then to die! It is

nothing to die, what is frightful is to die without seeing her. She

would smile on me, she would say a word to me, would that do any harm

to any one? No, all is over, and forever. Here I am all alone. My God!

My God! I shall never see her again!” At that moment there came a knock

at the door.

CHAPTER IV—A BOTTLE OF INK WHICH ONLY SUCCEEDED IN WHITENING

That same day, or to speak more accurately, that same evening, as

Marius left the table, and was on the point of withdrawing to his

study, having a case to look over, Basque handed him a letter saying:

“The person who wrote the letter is in the antechamber.”

Cosette had taken the grandfather’s arm and was strolling in the

garden.

A letter, like a man, may have an unprepossessing exterior. Coarse

paper, coarsely folded—the very sight of certain missives is

displeasing.

The letter which Basque had brought was of this sort.

Marius took it. It smelled of tobacco. Nothing evokes a memory like an

odor. Marius recognized that tobacco. He looked at the superscription:

“To Monsieur, Monsieur le Baron Pommerci. At his hotel.” The

recognition of the tobacco caused him to recognize the writing as well.

It may be said that amazement has its lightning flashes.

Marius was, as it were, illuminated by one of these flashes.

The sense of smell, that mysterious aid to memory, had just revived a

whole world within him. This was certainly the paper, the fashion of

folding, the dull tint of ink; it was certainly the well-known

handwriting, especially was it the same tobacco.

The Jondrette garret rose before his mind.

Thus, strange freak of chance! one of the two scents which he had so

diligently sought, the one in connection with which he had lately again

exerted so many efforts and which he supposed to be forever lost, had

come and presented itself to him of its own accord.

He eagerly broke the seal, and read:

“Monsieur le Baron:—If the Supreme Being had given me the talents, I

might have been baron Thénard, member of the Institute [acadenmy of

ciences], but I am not. I only bear the same as him, happy if this

memory recommends me to the eccellence of your kindnesses. The benefit

with which you will honor me will be reciprocle. I am in possession of

a secret concerning an individual. This individual concerns you. I

hold the secret at your disposal desiring to have the honor to be

huseful to you. I will furnish you with the simple means of driving

from your honorabel family that individual who has no right there,

madame la baronne being of lofty birth. The sanctuary of virtue cannot

cohabit longer with crime without abdicating.

“I awate in the entichamber the orders of monsieur le baron.

“With respect.”

The letter was signed “Thénard.”

This signature was not false. It was merely a trifle abridged.

Moreover, the rigmarole and the orthography completed the revelation.

The certificate of origin was complete.

Marius’ emotion was profound. After a start of surprise, he underwent a

feeling of happiness. If he could now but find that other man of whom

he was in search, the man who had saved him, Marius, there would be

nothing left for him to desire.

He opened the drawer of his secretary, took out several bank-notes, put

them in his pocket, closed the secretary again, and rang the bell.

Basque half opened the door.

“Show the man in,” said Marius.

Basque announced:

“Monsieur Thénard.”

A man entered.

A fresh surprise for Marius. The man who entered was an utter stranger

to him.

This man, who was old, moreover, had a thick nose, his chin swathed in

a cravat, green spectacles with a double screen of green taffeta over

his eyes, and his hair was plastered and flattened down on his brow on

a level with his eyebrows like the wigs of English coachmen in “high

life.” His hair was gray. He was dressed in black from head to foot, in

garments that were very threadbare but clean; a bunch of seals

depending from his fob suggested the idea of a watch. He held in his

hand an old hat! He walked in a bent attitude, and the curve in his

spine augmented the profundity of his bow.

The first thing that struck the observer was, that this personage’s

coat, which was too ample although carefully buttoned, had not been

made for him.

Here a short digression becomes necessary.

There was in Paris at that epoch, in a low-lived old lodging in the Rue

Beautreillis, near the Arsenal, an ingenious Jew whose profession was

to change villains into honest men. Not for too long, which might have

proved embarrassing for the villain. The change was on sight, for a day

or two, at the rate of thirty sous a day, by means of a costume which

resembled the honesty of the world in general as nearly as possible.

This costumer was called “the Changer”; the pickpockets of Paris had

given him this name and knew him by no other. He had a tolerably

complete wardrobe. The rags with which he tricked out people were

almost probable. He had specialties and categories; on each nail of his

shop hung a social status, threadbare and worn; here the suit of a

magistrate, there the outfit of a Curé, beyond the outfit of a banker,

in one corner the costume of a retired military man, elsewhere the

habiliments of a man of letters, and further on the dress of a

statesman.

This creature was the costumer of the immense drama which knavery plays

in Paris. His lair was the green-room whence theft emerged, and into

which roguery retreated. A tattered knave arrived at this

dressing-room, deposited his thirty sous and selected, according to the

part which he wished to play, the costume which suited him, and on

descending the stairs once more, the knave was a somebody. On the

following day, the clothes were faithfully returned, and the Changer,

who trusted the thieves with everything, was never robbed. There was

one inconvenience about these clothes, they “did not fit”; not having

been made for those who wore them, they were too tight for one, too

loose for another and did not adjust themselves to any one. Every

pickpocket who exceeded or fell short of the human average was ill at

his ease in the Changer’s costumes. It was necessary that one should

not be either too fat or too lean. The Changer had foreseen only

ordinary men. He had taken the measure of the species from the first

rascal who came to hand, who is neither stout nor thin, neither tall

nor short. Hence adaptations which were sometimes difficult and from

which the Changer’s clients extricated themselves as best they might.

So much the worse for the exceptions! The suit of the statesman, for

instance, black from head to foot, and consequently proper, would have

been too large for Pitt and too small for Castelcicala. The costume of

a statesman was designated as follows in the Changer’s catalogue; we

copy:

“A coat of black cloth, trowsers of black wool, a silk waistcoat, boots

and linen.” On the margin there stood: \_ex-ambassador\_, and a note

which we also copy: “In a separate box, a neatly frizzed peruke, green

glasses, seals, and two small quills an inch long, wrapped in cotton.”

All this belonged to the statesman, the ex-ambassador. This whole

costume was, if we may so express ourselves, debilitated; the seams

were white, a vague button-hole yawned at one of the elbows; moreover,

one of the coat buttons was missing on the breast; but this was only

detail; as the hand of the statesman should always be thrust into his

coat and laid upon his heart, its function was to conceal the absent

button.

If Marius had been familiar with the occult institutions of Paris, he

would instantly have recognized upon the back of the visitor whom

Basque had just shown in, the statesman’s suit borrowed from the

pick-me-down-that shop of the Changer.

Marius’ disappointment on beholding another man than the one whom he

expected to see turned to the newcomer’s disadvantage.

He surveyed him from head to foot, while that personage made

exaggerated bows, and demanded in a curt tone:

“What do you want?”

The man replied with an amiable grin of which the caressing smile of a

crocodile will furnish some idea:

“It seems to me impossible that I should not have already had the honor

of seeing Monsieur le Baron in society. I think I actually did meet

monsieur personally, several years ago, at the house of Madame la

Princesse Bagration and in the drawing-rooms of his Lordship the

Vicomte Dambray, peer of France.”

It is always a good bit of tactics in knavery to pretend to recognize

some one whom one does not know.

Marius paid attention to the manner of this man’s speech. He spied on

his accent and gesture, but his disappointment increased; the

pronunciation was nasal and absolutely unlike the dry, shrill tone

which he had expected.

He was utterly routed.

“I know neither Madame Bagration nor M. Dambray,” said he. “I have

never set foot in the house of either of them in my life.”

The reply was ungracious. The personage, determined to be gracious at

any cost, insisted.

“Then it must have been at Chateaubriand’s that I have seen Monsieur! I

know Chateaubriand very well. He is very affable. He sometimes says to

me: ‘Thénard, my friend . . . won’t you drink a glass of wine with

me?’”

Marius’ brow grew more and more severe:

“I have never had the honor of being received by M. de Chateaubriand.

Let us cut it short. What do you want?”

The man bowed lower at that harsh voice.

“Monsieur le Baron, deign to listen to me. There is in America, in a

district near Panama, a village called la Joya. That village is

composed of a single house, a large, square house of three stories,

built of bricks dried in the sun, each side of the square five hundred

feet in length, each story retreating twelve feet back of the story

below, in such a manner as to leave in front a terrace which makes the

circuit of the edifice, in the centre an inner court where the

provisions and munitions are kept; no windows, loopholes, no doors,

ladders, ladders to mount from the ground to the first terrace, and

from the first to the second, and from the second to the third, ladders

to descend into the inner court, no doors to the chambers, trap-doors,

no staircases to the chambers, ladders; in the evening the traps are

closed, the ladders are withdrawn, carbines and blunderbusses trained

from the loopholes; no means of entering, a house by day, a citadel by

night, eight hundred inhabitants,—that is the village. Why so many

precautions? because the country is dangerous; it is full of cannibals.

Then why do people go there? because the country is marvellous; gold is

found there.”

“What are you driving at?” interrupted Marius, who had passed from

disappointment to impatience.

“At this, Monsieur le Baron. I am an old and weary diplomat. Ancient

civilization has thrown me on my own devices. I want to try savages.”

“Well?”

“Monsieur le Baron, egotism is the law of the world. The proletarian

peasant woman, who toils by the day, turns round when the diligence

passes by, the peasant proprietress, who toils in her field, does not

turn round. The dog of the poor man barks at the rich man, the dog of

the rich man barks at the poor man. Each one for himself.

Self-interest—that’s the object of men. Gold, that’s the loadstone.”

“What then? Finish.”

“I should like to go and establish myself at la Joya. There are three

of us. I have my spouse and my young lady; a very beautiful girl. The

journey is long and costly. I need a little money.”

“What concern is that of mine?” demanded Marius.

The stranger stretched his neck out of his cravat, a gesture

characteristic of the vulture, and replied with an augmented smile.

“Has not Monsieur le Baron perused my letter?”

There was some truth in this. The fact is, that the contents of the

epistle had slipped Marius’ mind. He had seen the writing rather than

read the letter. He could hardly recall it. But a moment ago a fresh

start had been given him. He had noted that detail: “my spouse and my

young lady.”

He fixed a penetrating glance on the stranger. An examining judge could

not have done the look better. He almost lay in wait for him.

He confined himself to replying:

“State the case precisely.”

The stranger inserted his two hands in both his fobs, drew himself up

without straightening his dorsal column, but scrutinizing Marius in his

turn, with the green gaze of his spectacles.

“So be it, Monsieur le Baron. I will be precise. I have a secret to

sell to you.”

“A secret?”

“A secret.”

“Which concerns me?”

“Somewhat.”

“What is the secret?”

Marius scrutinized the man more and more as he listened to him.

“I commence gratis,” said the stranger. “You will see that I am

interesting.”

“Speak.”

“Monsieur le Baron, you have in your house a thief and an assassin.”

Marius shuddered.

“In my house? no,” said he.

The imperturbable stranger brushed his hat with his elbow and went on:

“An assassin and a thief. Remark, Monsieur le Baron, that I do not here

speak of ancient deeds, deeds of the past which have lapsed, which can

be effaced by limitation before the law and by repentance before God. I

speak of recent deeds, of actual facts as still unknown to justice at

this hour. I continue. This man has insinuated himself into your

confidence, and almost into your family under a false name. I am about

to tell you his real name. And to tell it to you for nothing.”

“I am listening.”

“His name is Jean Valjean.”

“I know it.”

“I am going to tell you, equally for nothing, who he is.”

“Say on.”

“He is an ex-convict.”

“I know it.”

“You know it since I have had the honor of telling you.”

“No. I knew it before.”

Marius’ cold tone, that double reply of “I know it,” his laconicism,

which was not favorable to dialogue, stirred up some smouldering wrath

in the stranger. He launched a furious glance on the sly at Marius,

which was instantly extinguished. Rapid as it was, this glance was of

the kind which a man recognizes when he has once beheld it; it did not

escape Marius. Certain flashes can only proceed from certain souls; the

eye, that vent-hole of the thought, glows with it; spectacles hide

nothing; try putting a pane of glass over hell!

The stranger resumed with a smile:

“I will not permit myself to contradict Monsieur le Baron. In any case,

you ought to perceive that I am well informed. Now what I have to tell

you is known to myself alone. This concerns the fortune of Madame la

Baronne. It is an extraordinary secret. It is for sale—I make you the

first offer of it. Cheap. Twenty thousand francs.”

“I know that secret as well as the others,” said Marius.

The personage felt the necessity of lowering his price a trifle.

“Monsieur le Baron, say ten thousand francs and I will speak.”

“I repeat to you that there is nothing which you can tell me. I know

what you wish to say to me.”

A fresh flash gleamed in the man’s eye. He exclaimed:

“But I must dine to-day, nevertheless. It is an extraordinary secret, I

tell you. Monsieur le Baron, I will speak. I speak. Give me twenty

francs.”

Marius gazed intently at him:

“I know your extraordinary secret, just as I knew Jean Valjean’s name,

just as I know your name.”

“My name?”

“Yes.”

“That is not difficult, Monsieur le Baron. I had the honor to write to

you and to tell it to you. Thénard.”

“—Dier.”

“Hey?”

“Thénardier.”

“Who’s that?”

In danger the porcupine bristles up, the beetle feigns death, the old

guard forms in a square; this man burst into laughter.

Then he flicked a grain of dust from the sleeve of his coat with a

fillip.

Marius continued:

“You are also Jondrette the workman, Fabantou the comedian, Genflot the

poet, Don Alvarès the Spaniard, and Mistress Balizard.”

“Mistress what?”

“And you kept a pot-house at Montfermeil.”

“A pot-house! Never.”

“And I tell you that your name is Thénardier.”

“I deny it.”

“And that you are a rascal. Here.”

And Marius drew a bank-note from his pocket and flung it in his face.

“Thanks! Pardon me! five hundred francs! Monsieur le Baron!”

And the man, overcome, bowed, seized the note and examined it.

“Five hundred francs!” he began again, taken aback. And he stammered in

a low voice: “An honest rustler.”69

Then brusquely:

“Well, so be it!” he exclaimed. “Let us put ourselves at our ease.”

And with the agility of a monkey, flinging back his hair, tearing off

his spectacles, and withdrawing from his nose by sleight of hand the

two quills of which mention was recently made, and which the reader has

also met with on another page of this book, he took off his face as the

man takes off his hat.

His eye lighted up; his uneven brow, with hollows in some places and

bumps in others, hideously wrinkled at the top, was laid bare, his nose

had become as sharp as a beak; the fierce and sagacious profile of the

man of prey reappeared.

“Monsieur le Baron is infallible,” he said in a clear voice whence all

nasal twang had disappeared, “I am Thénardier.”

And he straightened up his crooked back.

Thénardier, for it was really he, was strangely surprised; he would

have been troubled, had he been capable of such a thing. He had come to

bring astonishment, and it was he who had received it. This humiliation

had been worth five hundred francs to him, and, taking it all in all,

he accepted it; but he was nonetheless bewildered.

He beheld this Baron Pontmercy for the first time, and, in spite of his

disguise, this Baron Pontmercy recognized him, and recognized him

thoroughly. And not only was this Baron perfectly informed as to

Thénardier, but he seemed well posted as to Jean Valjean. Who was this

almost beardless young man, who was so glacial and so generous, who

knew people’s names, who knew all their names, and who opened his purse

to them, who bullied rascals like a judge, and who paid them like a

dupe?

Thénardier, the reader will remember, although he had been Marius’

neighbor, had never seen him, which is not unusual in Paris; he had

formerly, in a vague way, heard his daughters talk of a very poor young

man named Marius who lived in the house. He had written to him, without

knowing him, the letter with which the reader is acquainted.

No connection between that Marius and M. le Baron Pontmercy was

possible in his mind.

As for the name Pontmercy, it will be recalled that, on the battlefield

of Waterloo, he had only heard the last two syllables, for which he

always entertained the legitimate scorn which one owes to what is

merely an expression of thanks.

However, through his daughter Azelma, who had started on the scent of

the married pair on the 16th of February, and through his own personal

researches, he had succeeded in learning many things, and, from the

depths of his own gloom, he had contrived to grasp more than one

mysterious clew. He had discovered, by dint of industry, or, at least,

by dint of induction, he had guessed who the man was whom he had

encountered on a certain day in the Grand Sewer. From the man he had

easily reached the name. He knew that Madame la Baronne Pontmercy was

Cosette. But he meant to be discreet in that quarter.

Who was Cosette? He did not know exactly himself. He did, indeed, catch

an inkling of illegitimacy, the history of Fantine had always seemed to

him equivocal; but what was the use of talking about that? in order to

cause himself to be paid for his silence? He had, or thought he had,

better wares than that for sale. And, according to all appearances, if

he were to come and make to the Baron Pontmercy this revelation—and

without proof: “Your wife is a bastard,” the only result would be to

attract the boot of the husband towards the loins of the revealer.

From Thénardier’s point of view, the conversation with Marius had not

yet begun. He ought to have drawn back, to have modified his strategy,

to have abandoned his position, to have changed his front; but nothing

essential had been compromised as yet, and he had five hundred francs

in his pocket. Moreover, he had something decisive to say, and, even

against this very well-informed and well-armed Baron Pontmercy, he felt

himself strong. For men of Thénardier’s nature, every dialogue is a

combat. In the one in which he was about to engage, what was his

situation? He did not know to whom he was speaking, but he did know of

what he was speaking, he made this rapid review of his inner forces,

and after having said: “I am Thénardier,” he waited.

Marius had become thoughtful. So he had hold of Thénardier at last.

That man whom he had so greatly desired to find was before him. He

could honor Colonel Pontmercy’s recommendation.

He felt humiliated that that hero should have owned anything to this

villain, and that the letter of change drawn from the depths of the

tomb by his father upon him, Marius, had been protested up to that day.

It also seemed to him, in the complex state of his mind towards

Thénardier, that there was occasion to avenge the Colonel for the

misfortune of having been saved by such a rascal. In any case, he was

content. He was about to deliver the Colonel’s shade from this unworthy

creditor at last, and it seemed to him that he was on the point of

rescuing his father’s memory from the debtors’ prison. By the side of

this duty there was another—to elucidate, if possible, the source of

Cosette’s fortune. The opportunity appeared to present itself. Perhaps

Thénardier knew something. It might prove useful to see the bottom of

this man.

He commenced with this.

Thénardier had caused the “honest rustler” to disappear in his fob, and

was gazing at Marius with a gentleness that was almost tender.

Marius broke the silence.

“Thénardier, I have told you your name. Now, would you like to have me

tell you your secret—the one that you came here to reveal to me? I have

information of my own, also. You shall see that I know more about it

than you do. Jean Valjean, as you have said, is an assassin and a

thief. A thief, because he robbed a wealthy manufacturer, whose ruin he

brought about. An assassin, because he assassinated police-agent

Javert.”

“I don’t understand, sir,” ejaculated Thénardier.

“I will make myself intelligible. In a certain arrondissement of the

Pas de Calais, there was, in 1822, a man who had fallen out with

justice, and who, under the name of M. Madeleine, had regained his

status and rehabilitated himself. This man had become a just man in the

full force of the term. In a trade, the manufacture of black glass

goods, he made the fortune of an entire city. As far as his personal

fortune was concerned he made that also, but as a secondary matter, and

in some sort, by accident. He was the foster-father of the poor. He

founded hospitals, opened schools, visited the sick, dowered young

girls, supported widows, and adopted orphans; he was like the guardian

angel of the country. He refused the cross, he was appointed Mayor. A

liberated convict knew the secret of a penalty incurred by this man in

former days; he denounced him, and had him arrested, and profited by

the arrest to come to Paris and cause the banker Laffitte,—I have the

fact from the cashier himself,—by means of a false signature, to hand

over to him the sum of over half a million which belonged to M.

Madeleine. This convict who robbed M. Madeleine was Jean Valjean. As

for the other fact, you have nothing to tell me about it either. Jean

Valjean killed the agent Javert; he shot him with a pistol. I, the

person who is speaking to you, was present.”

Thénardier cast upon Marius the sovereign glance of a conquered man who

lays his hand once more upon the victory, and who has just regained, in

one instant, all the ground which he has lost. But the smile returned

instantly. The inferior’s triumph in the presence of his superior must

be wheedling.

Thénardier contented himself with saying to Marius:

“Monsieur le Baron, we are on the wrong track.”

And he emphasized this phrase by making his bunch of seals execute an

expressive whirl.

“What!” broke forth Marius, “do you dispute that? These are facts.”

“They are chimæras. The confidence with which Monsieur le Baron honors

me renders it my duty to tell him so. Truth and justice before all

things. I do not like to see folks accused unjustly. Monsieur le Baron,

Jean Valjean did not rob M. Madeleine and Jean Valjean did not kill

Javert.”

“This is too much! How is this?”

“For two reasons.”

“What are they? Speak.”

“This is the first: he did not rob M. Madeleine, because it is Jean

Valjean himself who was M. Madeleine.”

“What tale are you telling me?”

“And this is the second: he did not assassinate Javert, because the

person who killed Javert was Javert.”

“What do you mean to say?”

“That Javert committed suicide.”

“Prove it! prove it!” cried Marius beside himself.

Thénardier resumed, scanning his phrase after the manner of the ancient

Alexandrine measure:

“Police-agent-Ja-vert-was-found-drowned-un-der-a-boat-of-the-Pont-au-

Change.”

“But prove it!”

Thénardier drew from his pocket a large envelope of gray paper, which

seemed to contain sheets folded in different sizes.

“I have my papers,” he said calmly.

And he added:

“Monsieur le Baron, in your interests I desired to know Jean Valjean

thoroughly. I say that Jean Valjean and M. Madeleine are one and the

same man, and I say that Javert had no other assassin than Javert. If I

speak, it is because I have proofs. Not manuscript proofs—writing is

suspicious, handwriting is complaisant,—but printed proofs.”

As he spoke, Thénardier extracted from the envelope two copies of

newspapers, yellow, faded, and strongly saturated with tobacco. One of

these two newspapers, broken at every fold and falling into rags,

seemed much older than the other.

“Two facts, two proofs,” remarked Thénardier. And he offered the two

newspapers, unfolded, to Marius.

The reader is acquainted with these two papers. One, the most ancient,

a number of the \_Drapeau Blanc\_ of the 25th of July, 1823, the text of

which can be seen in the first volume, established the identity of M.

Madeleine and Jean Valjean.

The other, a \_Moniteur\_ of the 15th of June, 1832, announced the

suicide of Javert, adding that it appeared from a verbal report of

Javert to the prefect that, having been taken prisoner in the barricade

of the Rue de la Chanvrerie, he had owed his life to the magnanimity of

an insurgent who, holding him under his pistol, had fired into the air,

instead of blowing out his brains.

Marius read. He had evidence, a certain date, irrefragable proof, these

two newspapers had not been printed expressly for the purpose of

backing up Thénardier’s statements; the note printed in the \_Moniteur\_

had been an administrative communication from the Prefecture of Police.

Marius could not doubt.

The information of the cashier-clerk had been false, and he himself had

been deceived.

Jean Valjean, who had suddenly grown grand, emerged from his cloud.

Marius could not repress a cry of joy.

“Well, then this unhappy wretch is an admirable man! the whole of that

fortune really belonged to him! he is Madeleine, the providence of a

whole countryside! he is Jean Valjean, Javert’s savior! he is a hero!

he is a saint!”

“He’s not a saint, and he’s not a hero!” said Thénardier. “He’s an

assassin and a robber.”

And he added, in the tone of a man who begins to feel that he possesses

some authority:

“Let us be calm.”

Robber, assassin—those words which Marius thought had disappeared and

which returned, fell upon him like an ice-cold shower-bath.

“Again!” said he.

“Always,” ejaculated Thénardier. “Jean Valjean did not rob Madeleine,

but he is a thief. He did not kill Javert, but he is a murderer.”

“Will you speak,” retorted Marius, “of that miserable theft, committed

forty years ago, and expiated, as your own newspapers prove, by a whole

life of repentance, of self-abnegation and of virtue?”

“I say assassination and theft, Monsieur le Baron, and I repeat that I

am speaking of actual facts. What I have to reveal to you is absolutely

unknown. It belongs to unpublished matter. And perhaps you will find in

it the source of the fortune so skilfully presented to Madame la

Baronne by Jean Valjean. I say skilfully, because, by a gift of that

nature it would not be so very unskilful to slip into an honorable

house whose comforts one would then share, and, at the same stroke, to

conceal one’s crime, and to enjoy one’s theft, to bury one’s name and

to create for oneself a family.”

“I might interrupt you at this point,” said Marius, “but go on.”

“Monsieur le Baron, I will tell you all, leaving the recompense to your

generosity. This secret is worth massive gold. You will say to me: ‘Why

do not you apply to Jean Valjean?’ For a very simple reason; I know

that he has stripped himself, and stripped himself in your favor, and I

consider the combination ingenious; but he has no longer a son, he

would show me his empty hands, and, since I am in need of some money

for my trip to la Joya, I prefer you, you who have it all, to him who

has nothing. I am a little fatigued, permit me to take a chair.”

Marius seated himself and motioned to him to do the same.

Thénardier installed himself on a tufted chair, picked up his two

newspapers, thrust them back into their envelope, and murmured as he

pecked at the \_Drapeau Blanc\_ with his nail: “It cost me a good deal of

trouble to get this one.”

That done he crossed his legs and stretched himself out on the back of

the chair, an attitude characteristic of people who are sure of what

they are saying, then he entered upon his subject gravely, emphasizing

his words:

“Monsieur le Baron, on the 6th of June, 1832, about a year ago, on the

day of the insurrection, a man was in the Grand Sewer of Paris, at the

point where the sewer enters the Seine, between the Pont des Invalides

and the Pont de Jéna.”

Marius abruptly drew his chair closer to that of Thénardier. Thénardier

noticed this movement and continued with the deliberation of an orator

who holds his interlocutor and who feels his adversary palpitating

under his words:

“This man, forced to conceal himself, and for reasons, moreover, which

are foreign to politics, had adopted the sewer as his domicile and had

a key to it. It was, I repeat, on the 6th of June; it might have been

eight o’clock in the evening. The man hears a noise in the sewer.

Greatly surprised, he hides himself and lies in wait. It was the sound

of footsteps, some one was walking in the dark, and coming in his

direction. Strange to say, there was another man in the sewer besides

himself. The grating of the outlet from the sewer was not far off. A

little light which fell through it permitted him to recognize the

newcomer, and to see that the man was carrying something on his back.

He was walking in a bent attitude. The man who was walking in a bent

attitude was an ex-convict, and what he was dragging on his shoulders

was a corpse. Assassination caught in the very act, if ever there was

such a thing. As for the theft, that is understood; one does not kill a

man gratis. This convict was on his way to fling the body into the

river. One fact is to be noticed, that before reaching the exit

grating, this convict, who had come a long distance in the sewer, must,

necessarily, have encountered a frightful quagmire where it seems as

though he might have left the body, but the sewermen would have found

the assassinated man the very next day, while at work on the quagmire,

and that did not suit the assassin’s plans. He had preferred to

traverse that quagmire with his burden, and his exertions must have

been terrible, for it is impossible to risk one’s life more completely;

I don’t understand how he could have come out of that alive.”

Marius’ chair approached still nearer. Thénardier took advantage of

this to draw a long breath. He went on:

“Monsieur le Baron, a sewer is not the Champ de Mars. One lacks

everything there, even room. When two men are there, they must meet.

That is what happened. The man domiciled there and the passer-by were

forced to bid each other good-day, greatly to the regret of both. The

passer-by said to the inhabitant:—“You see what I have on my back, I

must get out, you have the key, give it to me.” That convict was a man

of terrible strength. There was no way of refusing. Nevertheless, the

man who had the key parleyed, simply to gain time. He examined the dead

man, but he could see nothing, except that the latter was young, well

dressed, with the air of being rich, and all disfigured with blood.

While talking, the man contrived to tear and pull off behind, without

the assassin perceiving it, a bit of the assassinated man’s coat. A

document for conviction, you understand; a means of recovering the

trace of things and of bringing home the crime to the criminal. He put

this document for conviction in his pocket. After which he opened the

grating, made the man go out with his embarrassment on his back, closed

the grating again, and ran off, not caring to be mixed up with the

remainder of the adventure and above all, not wishing to be present

when the assassin threw the assassinated man into the river. Now you

comprehend. The man who was carrying the corpse was Jean Valjean; the

one who had the key is speaking to you at this moment; and the piece of

the coat . . .”

Thénardier completed his phrase by drawing from his pocket, and

holding, on a level with his eyes, nipped between his two thumbs and

his two forefingers, a strip of torn black cloth, all covered with dark

spots.

Marius had sprung to his feet, pale, hardly able to draw his breath,

with his eyes riveted on the fragment of black cloth, and, without

uttering a word, without taking his eyes from that fragment, he

retreated to the wall and fumbled with his right hand along the wall

for a key which was in the lock of a cupboard near the chimney.

He found the key, opened the cupboard, plunged his arm into it without

looking, and without his frightened gaze quitting the rag which

Thénardier still held outspread.

But Thénardier continued:

“Monsieur le Baron, I have the strongest of reasons for believing that

the assassinated young man was an opulent stranger lured into a trap by

Jean Valjean, and the bearer of an enormous sum of money.”

“The young man was myself, and here is the coat!” cried Marius, and he

flung upon the floor an old black coat all covered with blood.

Then, snatching the fragment from the hands of Thénardier, he crouched

down over the coat, and laid the torn morsel against the tattered

skirt. The rent fitted exactly, and the strip completed the coat.

Thénardier was petrified.

This is what he thought: “I’m struck all of a heap.”

Marius rose to his feet trembling, despairing, radiant.

He fumbled in his pocket and stalked furiously to Thénardier,

presenting to him and almost thrusting in his face his fist filled with

bank-notes for five hundred and a thousand francs.

“You are an infamous wretch! you are a liar, a calumniator, a villain.

You came to accuse that man, you have only justified him; you wanted to

ruin him, you have only succeeded in glorifying him. And it is you who

are the thief! And it is you who are the assassin! I saw you,

Thénardier Jondrette, in that lair on the Rue de l’Hôpital. I know

enough about you to send you to the galleys and even further if I

choose. Here are a thousand francs, bully that you are!”

And he flung a thousand franc note at Thénardier.

“Ah! Jondrette Thénardier, vile rascal! Let this serve you as a lesson,

you dealer in second-hand secrets, merchant of mysteries, rummager of

the shadows, wretch! Take these five hundred francs and get out of

here! Waterloo protects you.”

“Waterloo!” growled Thénardier, pocketing the five hundred francs along

with the thousand.

“Yes, assassin! You there saved the life of a Colonel. . .”

“Of a General,” said Thénardier, elevating his head.

“Of a Colonel!” repeated Marius in a rage. “I wouldn’t give a ha’penny

for a general. And you come here to commit infamies! I tell you that

you have committed all crimes. Go! disappear! Only be happy, that is

all that I desire. Ah! monster! here are three thousand francs more.

Take them. You will depart to-morrow, for America, with your daughter;

for your wife is dead, you abominable liar. I shall watch over your

departure, you ruffian, and at that moment I will count out to you

twenty thousand francs. Go get yourself hung elsewhere!”

“Monsieur le Baron!” replied Thénardier, bowing to the very earth,

“eternal gratitude.” And Thénardier left the room, understanding

nothing, stupefied and delighted with this sweet crushing beneath sacks

of gold, and with that thunder which had burst forth over his head in

bank-bills.

Struck by lightning he was, but he was also content; and he would have

been greatly angered had he had a lightning rod to ward off such

lightning as that.

Let us finish with this man at once.

Two days after the events which we are at this moment narrating, he set

out, thanks to Marius’ care, for America under a false name, with his

daughter Azelma, furnished with a draft on New York for twenty thousand

francs.

The moral wretchedness of Thénardier, the bourgeois who had missed his

vocation, was irremediable. He was in America what he had been in

Europe. Contact with an evil man sometimes suffices to corrupt a good

action and to cause evil things to spring from it. With Marius’ money,

Thénardier set up as a slave-dealer.

As soon as Thénardier had left the house, Marius rushed to the garden,

where Cosette was still walking.

“Cosette! Cosette!” he cried. “Come! come quick! Let us go. Basque, a

carriage! Cosette, come. Ah! My God! It was he who saved my life! Let

us not lose a minute! Put on your shawl.”

Cosette thought him mad and obeyed.

He could not breathe, he laid his hand on his heart to restrain its

throbbing. He paced back and forth with huge strides, he embraced

Cosette:

“Ah! Cosette! I am an unhappy wretch!” said he.

Marius was bewildered. He began to catch a glimpse in Jean Valjean of

some indescribably lofty and melancholy figure. An unheard-of virtue,

supreme and sweet, humble in its immensity, appeared to him. The

convict was transfigured into Christ.

Marius was dazzled by this prodigy. He did not know precisely what he

beheld, but it was grand.

In an instant, a hackney-carriage stood in front of the door.

Marius helped Cosette in and darted in himself.

“Driver,” said he, “Rue de l’Homme Armé, Number 7.”

The carriage drove off.

“Ah! what happiness!” ejaculated Cosette. “Rue de l’Homme Armé, I did

not dare to speak to you of that. We are going to see M. Jean.”

“Thy father! Cosette, thy father more than ever. Cosette, I guess it.

You told me that you had never received the letter that I sent you by

Gavroche. It must have fallen into his hands. Cosette, he went to the

barricade to save me. As it is a necessity with him to be an angel, he

saved others also; he saved Javert. He rescued me from that gulf to

give me to you. He carried me on his back through that frightful sewer.

Ah! I am a monster of ingratitude. Cosette, after having been your

providence, he became mine. Just imagine, there was a terrible quagmire

enough to drown one a hundred times over, to drown one in mire.

Cosette! he made me traverse it. I was unconscious; I saw nothing, I

heard nothing, I could know nothing of my own adventure. We are going

to bring him back, to take him with us, whether he is willing or not,

he shall never leave us again. If only he is at home! Provided only

that we can find him, I will pass the rest of my life in venerating

him. Yes, that is how it should be, do you see, Cosette? Gavroche must

have delivered my letter to him. All is explained. You understand.”

Cosette did not understand a word.

“You are right,” she said to him.

Meanwhile the carriage rolled on.

CHAPTER V—A NIGHT BEHIND WHICH THERE IS DAY

Jean Valjean turned round at the knock which he heard on his door.

“Come in,” he said feebly.

The door opened.

Cosette and Marius made their appearance.

Cosette rushed into the room.

Marius remained on the threshold, leaning against the jamb of the door.

“Cosette!” said Jean Valjean.

And he sat erect in his chair, his arms outstretched and trembling,

haggard, livid, gloomy, an immense joy in his eyes.

Cosette, stifling with emotion, fell upon Jean Valjean’s breast.

“Father!” said she.

Jean Valjean, overcome, stammered:

“Cosette! she! you! Madame! it is thou! Ah! my God!”

And, pressed close in Cosette’s arms, he exclaimed:

“It is thou! thou art here! Thou dost pardon me then!”

Marius, lowering his eyelids, in order to keep his tears from flowing,

took a step forward and murmured between lips convulsively contracted

to repress his sobs:

“My father!”

“And you also, you pardon me!” Jean Valjean said to him.

Marius could find no words, and Jean Valjean added:

“Thanks.”

Cosette tore off her shawl and tossed her hat on the bed.

“It embarrasses me,” said she.

And, seating herself on the old man’s knees, she put aside his white

locks with an adorable movement, and kissed his brow.

Jean Valjean, bewildered, let her have her own way.

Cosette, who only understood in a very confused manner, redoubled her

caresses, as though she desired to pay Marius’ debt.

Jean Valjean stammered:

“How stupid people are! I thought that I should never see her again.

Imagine, Monsieur Pontmercy, at the very moment when you entered, I was

saying to myself: ‘All is over. Here is her little gown, I am a

miserable man, I shall never see Cosette again,’ and I was saying that

at the very moment when you were mounting the stairs. Was not I an

idiot? Just see how idiotic one can be! One reckons without the good

God. The good God says:

“‘You fancy that you are about to be abandoned, stupid! No. No, things

will not go so. Come, there is a good man yonder who is in need of an

angel.’ And the angel comes, and one sees one’s Cosette again! and one

sees one’s little Cosette once more! Ah! I was very unhappy.”

For a moment he could not speak, then he went on:

“I really needed to see Cosette a little bit now and then. A heart

needs a bone to gnaw. But I was perfectly conscious that I was in the

way. I gave myself reasons: ‘They do not want you, keep in your own

course, one has not the right to cling eternally.’ Ah! God be praised,

I see her once more! Dost thou know, Cosette, thy husband is very

handsome? Ah! what a pretty embroidered collar thou hast on, luckily. I

am fond of that pattern. It was thy husband who chose it, was it not?

And then, thou shouldst have some cashmere shawls. Let me call her

thou, Monsieur Pontmercy. It will not be for long.”

And Cosette began again:

“How wicked of you to have left us like that! Where did you go? Why

have you stayed away so long? Formerly your journeys only lasted three

or four days. I sent Nicolette, the answer always was: ‘He is absent.’

How long have you been back? Why did you not let us know? Do you know

that you are very much changed? Ah! what a naughty father! he has been

ill, and we have not known it! Stay, Marius, feel how cold his hand

is!”

“So you are here! Monsieur Pontmercy, you pardon me!” repeated Jean

Valjean.

At that word which Jean Valjean had just uttered once more, all that

was swelling Marius’ heart found vent.

He burst forth:

“Cosette, do you hear? he has come to that! he asks my forgiveness! And

do you know what he has done for me, Cosette? He has saved my life. He

has done more—he has given you to me. And after having saved me, and

after having given you to me, Cosette, what has he done with himself?

He has sacrificed himself. Behold the man. And he says to me the

ingrate, to me the forgetful, to me the pitiless, to me the guilty one:

Thanks! Cosette, my whole life passed at the feet of this man would be

too little. That barricade, that sewer, that furnace, that

cesspool,—all that he traversed for me, for thee, Cosette! He carried

me away through all the deaths which he put aside before me, and

accepted for himself. Every courage, every virtue, every heroism, every

sanctity he possesses! Cosette, that man is an angel!”

“Hush! hush!” said Jean Valjean in a low voice. “Why tell all that?”

“But you!” cried Marius with a wrath in which there was veneration,

“why did you not tell it to me? It is your own fault, too. You save

people’s lives, and you conceal it from them! You do more, under the

pretext of unmasking yourself, you calumniate yourself. It is

frightful.”

“I told the truth,” replied Jean Valjean.

“No,” retorted Marius, “the truth is the whole truth; and that you did

not tell. You were Monsieur Madeleine, why not have said so? You saved

Javert, why not have said so? I owed my life to you, why not have said

so?”

“Because I thought as you do. I thought that you were in the right. It

was necessary that I should go away. If you had known about that

affair, of the sewer, you would have made me remain near you. I was

therefore forced to hold my peace. If I had spoken, it would have

caused embarrassment in every way.”

“It would have embarrassed what? embarrassed whom?” retorted Marius.

“Do you think that you are going to stay here? We shall carry you off.

Ah! good heavens! when I reflect that it was by an accident that I have

learned all this. You form a part of ourselves. You are her father, and

mine. You shall not pass another day in this dreadful house. Do not

imagine that you will be here to-morrow.”

“To-morrow,” said Jean Valjean, “I shall not be here, but I shall not

be with you.”

“What do you mean?” replied Marius. “Ah! come now, we are not going to

permit any more journeys. You shall never leave us again. You belong to

us. We shall not loose our hold of you.”

“This time it is for good,” added Cosette. “We have a carriage at the

door. I shall run away with you. If necessary, I shall employ force.”

And she laughingly made a movement to lift the old man in her arms.

“Your chamber still stands ready in our house,” she went on. “If you

only knew how pretty the garden is now! The azaleas are doing very well

there. The walks are sanded with river sand; there are tiny violet

shells. You shall eat my strawberries. I water them myself. And no more

‘madame,’ no more ‘Monsieur Jean,’ we are living under a Republic,

everybody says \_thou\_, don’t they, Marius? The programme is changed. If

you only knew, father, I have had a sorrow, there was a robin redbreast

which had made her nest in a hole in the wall, and a horrible cat ate

her. My poor, pretty, little robin red-breast which used to put her

head out of her window and look at me! I cried over it. I should have

liked to kill the cat. But now nobody cries any more. Everybody laughs,

everybody is happy. You are going to come with us. How delighted

grandfather will be! You shall have your plot in the garden, you shall

cultivate it, and we shall see whether your strawberries are as fine as

mine. And, then, I shall do everything that you wish, and then, you

will obey me prettily.”

Jean Valjean listened to her without hearing her. He heard the music of

her voice rather than the sense of her words; one of those large tears

which are the sombre pearls of the soul welled up slowly in his eyes.

He murmured:

“The proof that God is good is that she is here.”

“Father!” said Cosette.

Jean Valjean continued:

“It is quite true that it would be charming for us to live together.

Their trees are full of birds. I would walk with Cosette. It is sweet

to be among living people who bid each other ‘good-day,’ who call to

each other in the garden. People see each other from early morning. We

should each cultivate our own little corner. She would make me eat her

strawberries. I would make her gather my roses. That would be charming.

Only . . .”

He paused and said gently:

“It is a pity.”

The tear did not fall, it retreated, and Jean Valjean replaced it with

a smile.

Cosette took both the old man’s hands in hers.

“My God!” said she, “your hands are still colder than before. Are you

ill? Do you suffer?”

“I? No,” replied Jean Valjean. “I am very well. Only . . .”

He paused.

“Only what?”

“I am going to die presently.”

Cosette and Marius shuddered.

“To die!” exclaimed Marius.

“Yes, but that is nothing,” said Jean Valjean.

He took breath, smiled and resumed:

“Cosette, thou wert talking to me, go on, so thy little robin

red-breast is dead? Speak, so that I may hear thy voice.”

Marius gazed at the old man in amazement.

Cosette uttered a heartrending cry.

“Father! my father! you will live. You are going to live. I insist upon

your living, do you hear?”

Jean Valjean raised his head towards her with adoration.

“Oh! yes, forbid me to die. Who knows? Perhaps I shall obey. I was on

the verge of dying when you came. That stopped me, it seemed to me that

I was born again.”

“You are full of strength and life,” cried Marius. “Do you imagine that

a person can die like this? You have had sorrow, you shall have no

more. It is I who ask your forgiveness, and on my knees! You are going

to live, and to live with us, and to live a long time. We take

possession of you once more. There are two of us here who will

henceforth have no other thought than your happiness.”

“You see,” resumed Cosette, all bathed in tears, “that Marius says that

you shall not die.”

Jean Valjean continued to smile.

“Even if you were to take possession of me, Monsieur Pontmercy, would

that make me other than I am? No, God has thought like you and myself,

and he does not change his mind; it is useful for me to go. Death is a

good arrangement. God knows better than we what we need. May you be

happy, may Monsieur Pontmercy have Cosette, may youth wed the morning,

may there be around you, my children, lilacs and nightingales; may your

life be a beautiful, sunny lawn, may all the enchantments of heaven

fill your souls, and now let me, who am good for nothing, die; it is

certain that all this is right. Come, be reasonable, nothing is

possible now, I am fully conscious that all is over. And then, last

night, I drank that whole jug of water. How good thy husband is,

Cosette! Thou art much better off with him than with me.”

A noise became audible at the door.

It was the doctor entering.

“Good-day, and farewell, doctor,” said Jean Valjean. “Here are my poor

children.”

Marius stepped up to the doctor. He addressed to him only this single

word: “Monsieur? . . .” But his manner of pronouncing it contained a

complete question.

The doctor replied to the question by an expressive glance.

“Because things are not agreeable,” said Jean Valjean, “that is no

reason for being unjust towards God.”

A silence ensued.

All breasts were oppressed.

Jean Valjean turned to Cosette. He began to gaze at her as though he

wished to retain her features for eternity.

In the depths of the shadow into which he had already descended,

ecstasy was still possible to him when gazing at Cosette. The

reflection of that sweet face lighted up his pale visage.

The doctor felt of his pulse.

“Ah! it was you that he wanted!” he murmured, looking at Cosette and

Marius.

And bending down to Marius’ ear, he added in a very low voice:

“Too late.”

Jean Valjean surveyed the doctor and Marius serenely, almost without

ceasing to gaze at Cosette.

These barely articulate words were heard to issue from his mouth:

“It is nothing to die; it is dreadful not to live.”

All at once he rose to his feet. These accesses of strength are

sometimes the sign of the death agony. He walked with a firm step to

the wall, thrusting aside Marius and the doctor who tried to help him,

detached from the wall a little copper crucifix which was suspended

there, and returned to his seat with all the freedom of movement of

perfect health, and said in a loud voice, as he laid the crucifix on

the table:

“Behold the great martyr.”

Then his chest sank in, his head wavered, as though the intoxication of

the tomb were seizing hold upon him.

His hands, which rested on his knees, began to press their nails into

the stuff of his trousers.

Cosette supported his shoulders, and sobbed, and tried to speak to him,

but could not.

Among the words mingled with that mournful saliva which accompanies

tears, they distinguished words like the following:

“Father, do not leave us. Is it possible that we have found you only to

lose you again?”

It might be said that agony writhes. It goes, comes, advances towards

the sepulchre, and returns towards life. There is groping in the action

of dying.

Jean Valjean rallied after this semi-swoon, shook his brow as though to

make the shadows fall away from it and became almost perfectly lucid

once more.

He took a fold of Cosette’s sleeve and kissed it.

“He is coming back! doctor, he is coming back,” cried Marius.

“You are good, both of you,” said Jean Valjean. “I am going to tell you

what has caused me pain. What has pained me, Monsieur Pontmercy, is

that you have not been willing to touch that money. That money really

belongs to your wife. I will explain to you, my children, and for that

reason, also, I am glad to see you. Black jet comes from England, white

jet comes from Norway. All this is in this paper, which you will read.

For bracelets, I invented a way of substituting for slides of soldered

sheet iron, slides of iron laid together. It is prettier, better and

less costly. You will understand how much money can be made in that

way. So Cosette’s fortune is really hers. I give you these details, in

order that your mind may be set at rest.”

The portress had come upstairs and was gazing in at the half-open door.

The doctor dismissed her.

But he could not prevent this zealous woman from exclaiming to the

dying man before she disappeared: “Would you like a priest?”

“I have had one,” replied Jean Valjean.

And with his finger he seemed to indicate a point above his head where

one would have said that he saw some one.

It is probable, in fact, that the Bishop was present at this death

agony.

Cosette gently slipped a pillow under his loins.

Jean Valjean resumed:

“Have no fear, Monsieur Pontmercy, I adjure you. The six hundred

thousand francs really belong to Cosette. My life will have been wasted

if you do not enjoy them! We managed to do very well with those glass

goods. We rivalled what is called Berlin jewellery. However, we could

not equal the black glass of England. A gross, which contains twelve

hundred very well cut grains, only costs three francs.”

When a being who is dear to us is on the point of death, we gaze upon

him with a look which clings convulsively to him and which would fain

hold him back.

Cosette gave her hand to Marius, and both, mute with anguish, not

knowing what to say to the dying man, stood trembling and despairing

before him.

Jean Valjean sank moment by moment. He was failing; he was drawing near

to the gloomy horizon.

His breath had become intermittent; a little rattling interrupted it.

He found some difficulty in moving his forearm, his feet had lost all

movement, and in proportion as the wretchedness of limb and feebleness

of body increased, all the majesty of his soul was displayed and spread

over his brow. The light of the unknown world was already visible in

his eyes.

His face paled and smiled. Life was no longer there, it was something

else.

His breath sank, his glance grew grander. He was a corpse on which the

wings could be felt.

He made a sign to Cosette to draw near, then to Marius; the last minute

of the last hour had, evidently, arrived.

He began to speak to them in a voice so feeble that it seemed to come

from a distance, and one would have said that a wall now rose between

them and him.

“Draw near, draw near, both of you. I love you dearly. Oh! how good it

is to die like this! And thou lovest me also, my Cosette. I knew well

that thou still felt friendly towards thy poor old man. How kind it was

of thee to place that pillow under my loins! Thou wilt weep for me a

little, wilt thou not? Not too much. I do not wish thee to have any

real griefs. You must enjoy yourselves a great deal, my children. I

forgot to tell you that the profit was greater still on the buckles

without tongues than on all the rest. A gross of a dozen dozens cost

ten francs and sold for sixty. It really was a good business. So there

is no occasion for surprise at the six hundred thousand francs,

Monsieur Pontmercy. It is honest money. You may be rich with a tranquil

mind. Thou must have a carriage, a box at the theatres now and then,

and handsome ball dresses, my Cosette, and then, thou must give good

dinners to thy friends, and be very happy. I was writing to Cosette a

while ago. She will find my letter. I bequeath to her the two

candlesticks which stand on the chimney-piece. They are of silver, but

to me they are gold, they are diamonds; they change candles which are

placed in them into wax-tapers. I do not know whether the person who

gave them to me is pleased with me yonder on high. I have done what I

could. My children, you will not forget that I am a poor man, you will

have me buried in the first plot of earth that you find, under a stone

to mark the spot. This is my wish. No name on the stone. If Cosette

cares to come for a little while now and then, it will give me

pleasure. And you too, Monsieur Pontmercy. I must admit that I have not

always loved you. I ask your pardon for that. Now she and you form but

one for me. I feel very grateful to you. I am sure that you make

Cosette happy. If you only knew, Monsieur Pontmercy, her pretty rosy

cheeks were my delight; when I saw her in the least pale, I was sad. In

the chest of drawers, there is a bank-bill for five hundred francs. I

have not touched it. It is for the poor. Cosette, dost thou see thy

little gown yonder on the bed? dost thou recognize it? That was ten

years ago, however. How time flies! We have been very happy. All is

over. Do not weep, my children, I am not going very far, I shall see

you from there, you will only have to look at night, and you will see

me smile. Cosette, dost thou remember Montfermeil? Thou wert in the

forest, thou wert greatly terrified; dost thou remember how I took hold

of the handle of the water-bucket? That was the first time that I

touched thy poor, little hand. It was so cold! Ah! your hands were red

then, mademoiselle, they are very white now. And the big doll! dost

thou remember? Thou didst call her Catherine. Thou regrettedest not

having taken her to the convent! How thou didst make me laugh

sometimes, my sweet angel! When it had been raining, thou didst float

bits of straw on the gutters, and watch them pass away. One day I gave

thee a willow battledore and a shuttlecock with yellow, blue and green

feathers. Thou hast forgotten it. Thou wert roguish so young! Thou

didst play. Thou didst put cherries in thy ears. Those are things of

the past. The forests through which one has passed with one’s child,

the trees under which one has strolled, the convents where one has

concealed oneself, the games, the hearty laughs of childhood, are

shadows. I imagined that all that belonged to me. In that lay my

stupidity. Those Thénardiers were wicked. Thou must forgive them.

Cosette, the moment has come to tell thee the name of thy mother. She

was called Fantine. Remember that name—Fantine. Kneel whenever thou

utterest it. She suffered much. She loved thee dearly. She had as much

unhappiness as thou hast had happiness. That is the way God apportions

things. He is there on high, he sees us all, and he knows what he does

in the midst of his great stars. I am on the verge of departure, my

children. Love each other well and always. There is nothing else but

that in the world: love for each other. You will think sometimes of the

poor old man who died here. Oh my Cosette, it is not my fault, indeed,

that I have not seen thee all this time, it cut me to the heart; I went

as far as the corner of the street, I must have produced a queer effect

on the people who saw me pass, I was like a madman, I once went out

without my hat. I no longer see clearly, my children, I had still other

things to say, but never mind. Think a little of me. Come still nearer.

I die happy. Give me your dear and well-beloved heads, so that I may

lay my hands upon them.”

Cosette and Marius fell on their knees, in despair, suffocating with

tears, each beneath one of Jean Valjean’s hands. Those august hands no

longer moved.

He had fallen backwards, the light of the candles illuminated him.

His white face looked up to heaven, he allowed Cosette and Marius to

cover his hands with kisses.

He was dead.

The night was starless and extremely dark. No doubt, in the gloom, some

immense angel stood erect with wings outspread, awaiting that soul.

[Illustration: Darkness]

CHAPTER VI—THE GRASS COVERS AND THE RAIN EFFACES

In the cemetery of Père-Lachaise, in the vicinity of the common grave,

far from the elegant quarter of that city of sepulchres, far from all

the tombs of fancy which display in the presence of eternity all the

hideous fashions of death, in a deserted corner, beside an old wall,

beneath a great yew tree over which climbs the wild convolvulus, amid

dandelions and mosses, there lies a stone. That stone is no more exempt

than others from the leprosy of time, of dampness, of the lichens and

from the defilement of the birds. The water turns it green, the air

blackens it. It is not near any path, and people are not fond of

walking in that direction, because the grass is high and their feet are

immediately wet. When there is a little sunshine, the lizards come

thither. All around there is a quivering of weeds. In the spring,

linnets warble in the trees.

This stone is perfectly plain. In cutting it the only thought was the

requirements of the tomb, and no other care was taken than to make the

stone long enough and narrow enough to cover a man.

No name is to be read there.

Only, many years ago, a hand wrote upon it in pencil these four lines,

which have become gradually illegible beneath the rain and the dust,

and which are, to-day, probably effaced:

Il dort. Quoique le sort fût pour lui bien étrange,

Il vivait. Il mourut quand il n’eut plus son ange.

La chose simplement d’elle-même arriva,

Comme la nuit se fait lorsque le jour s’en va.70

LETTER TO M. DAELLI

Publisher of the Italian translation of \_Les Misérables\_ in Milan.

HAUTEVILLE-HOUSE, October 18, 1862.

You are right, sir, when you tell me that \_Les Misérables\_ is written

for all nations. I do not know whether it will be read by all, but I

wrote it for all. It is addressed to England as well as to Spain, to

Italy as well as to France, to Germany as well as to Ireland, to

Republics which have slaves as well as to Empires which have serfs.

Social problems overstep frontiers. The sores of the human race, those

great sores which cover the globe, do not halt at the red or blue lines

traced upon the map. In every place where man is ignorant and

despairing, in every place where woman is sold for bread, wherever the

child suffers for lack of the book which should instruct him and of the

hearth which should warm him, the book of \_Les Misérables\_ knocks at

the door and says: “Open to me, I come for you.”

At the hour of civilization through which we are now passing, and which

is still so sombre, the \_miserable’s\_ name is Man; he is agonizing in

all climes, and he is groaning in all languages.

Your Italy is no more exempt from the evil than is our France. Your

admirable Italy has all miseries on the face of it. Does not banditism,

that raging form of pauperism, inhabit your mountains? Few nations are

more deeply eaten by that ulcer of convents which I have endeavored to

fathom. In spite of your possessing Rome, Milan, Naples, Palermo,

Turin, Florence, Sienna, Pisa, Mantua, Bologna, Ferrara, Genoa, Venice,

a heroic history, sublime ruins, magnificent ruins, and superb cities,

you are, like ourselves, poor. You are covered with marvels and vermin.

Assuredly, the sun of Italy is splendid, but, alas, azure in the sky

does not prevent rags on man.

Like us, you have prejudices, superstitions, tyrannies, fanaticisms,

blind laws lending assistance to ignorant customs. You taste nothing of

the present nor of the future without a flavor of the past being

mingled with it. You have a barbarian, the monk, and a savage, the

lazzarone. The social question is the same for you as for us. There are

a few less deaths from hunger with you, and a few more from fever; your

social hygiene is not much better than ours; shadows, which are

Protestant in England, are Catholic in Italy; but, under different

names, the \_vescovo\_ is identical with the \_bishop\_, and it always

means night, and of pretty nearly the same quality. To explain the

Bible badly amounts to the same thing as to understand the Gospel

badly.

Is it necessary to emphasize this? Must this melancholy parallelism be

yet more completely verified? Have you not indigent persons? Glance

below. Have you not parasites? Glance up. Does not that hideous

balance, whose two scales, pauperism and parasitism, so mournfully

preserve their mutual equilibrium, oscillate before you as it does

before us? Where is your army of schoolmasters, the only army which

civilization acknowledges?

Where are your free and compulsory schools? Does every one know how to

read in the land of Dante and of Michael Angelo? Have you made public

schools of your barracks? Have you not, like ourselves, an opulent

war-budget and a paltry budget of education? Have not you also that

passive obedience which is so easily converted into soldierly

obedience? military establishment which pushes the regulations to the

extreme of firing upon Garibaldi; that is to say, upon the living honor

of Italy? Let us subject your social order to examination, let us take

it where it stands and as it stands, let us view its flagrant offences,

show me the woman and the child. It is by the amount of protection with

which these two feeble creatures are surrounded that the degree of

civilization is to be measured. Is prostitution less heartrending in

Naples than in Paris? What is the amount of truth that springs from

your laws, and what amount of justice springs from your tribunals? Do

you chance to be so fortunate as to be ignorant of the meaning of those

gloomy words: public prosecution, legal infamy, prison, the scaffold,

the executioner, the death penalty? Italians, with you as with us,

Beccaria is dead and Farinace is alive. And then, let us scrutinize

your state reasons. Have you a government which comprehends the

identity of morality and politics? You have reached the point where you

grant amnesty to heroes! Something very similar has been done in

France. Stay, let us pass miseries in review, let each one contribute

his pile, you are as rich as we. Have you not, like ourselves, two

condemnations, religious condemnation pronounced by the priest, and

social condemnation decreed by the judge? Oh, great nation of Italy,

thou resemblest the great nation of France! Alas! our brothers, you

are, like ourselves, \_Miserables\_.

From the depths of the gloom wherein you dwell, you do not see much

more distinctly than we the radiant and distant portals of Eden. Only,

the priests are mistaken. These holy portals are before and not behind

us.

I resume. This book, \_Les Misérables\_, is no less your mirror than

ours. Certain men, certain castes, rise in revolt against this book,—I

understand that. Mirrors, those revealers of the truth, are hated; that

does not prevent them from being of use.

As for myself, I have written for all, with a profound love for my own

country, but without being engrossed by France more than by any other

nation. In proportion as I advance in life, I grow more simple, and I

become more and more patriotic for humanity.

This is, moreover, the tendency of our age, and the law of radiance of

the French Revolution; books must cease to be exclusively French,

Italian, German, Spanish, or English, and become European, I say more,

human, if they are to correspond to the enlargement of civilization.

Hence a new logic of art, and of certain requirements of composition

which modify everything, even the conditions, formerly narrow, of taste

and language, which must grow broader like all the rest.

In France, certain critics have reproached me, to my great delight,

with having transgressed the bounds of what they call “French taste”; I

should be glad if this eulogium were merited.

In short, I am doing what I can, I suffer with the same universal

suffering, and I try to assuage it, I possess only the puny forces of a

man, and I cry to all: “Help me!”

This, sir, is what your letter prompts me to say; I say it for you and

for your country. If I have insisted so strongly, it is because of one

phrase in your letter. You write:—

“There are Italians, and they are numerous, who say: ‘This book, \_Les

Misérables\_, is a French book. It does not concern us. Let the French

read it as a history, we read it as a romance.’”—Alas! I repeat,

whether we be Italians or Frenchmen, misery concerns us all. Ever since

history has been written, ever since philosophy has meditated, misery

has been the garment of the human race; the moment has at length

arrived for tearing off that rag, and for replacing, upon the naked

limbs of the Man-People, the sinister fragment of the past with the

grand purple robe of the dawn.

If this letter seems to you of service in enlightening some minds and

in dissipating some prejudices, you are at liberty to publish it, sir.

Accept, I pray you, a renewed assurance of my very distinguished

sentiments.

VICTOR HUGO.

FOOTNOTES:

1 (return) [ Patois of the French Alps: \_chat de maraude\_, rascally

marauder.]

2 (return) [ Liège: a cork-tree. Pau: a jest on \_peau\_, skin.]

3 (return) [ She belonged to that circle where cuckoos and carriages

share the same fate; and a jade herself, she lived, as jades live, for

the space of a morning (or jade).]

4 (return) [ An ex-convict.]

5 (return) [ This parenthesis is due to Jean Valjean.]

6 (return) [ A bullet as large as an egg.]

7 (return) [ Walter Scott, Lamartine, Vaulabelle, Charras, Quinet,

Thiers.]

8 (return) [ This is the inscription:—D. O. M. CY A ETE ÉCRASÉ PAR

MALHEUR SOUS UN CHARIOT, MONSIEUR BERNARD DE BRYE MARCHAND A BRUXELLE

LE [illegible] FEVRIER 1637.]

9 (return) [ A heavy rifled gun.]

10 (return) [ “A battle terminated, a day finished, false measures

repaired, greater successes assured for the morrow,—all was lost by a

moment of panic, terror.”—Napoleon, Dictées de Sainte Hélène.]

11 (return) [ Five winning numbers in a lottery]

12 (return) [ Literally “made cuirs”; \_i. e.\_, pronounced a \_t\_ or an

\_s\_ at the end of words where the opposite letter should occur, or used

either one of them where neither exists.]

13 (return) [ Lawyer Corbeau, perched on a docket, held in his beak a

writ of execution; Lawyer Renard, attracted by the smell, addressed him

nearly as follows, etc.]

14 (return) [ This is the factory of Goblet Junior: Come choose your

jugs and crocks, Flower-pots, pipes, bricks. The Heart sells Diamonds

to every comer.]

15 (return) [ On the boughs hang three bodies of unequal merits: Dismas

and Gesmas, between is the divine power. Dismas seeks the heights,

Gesmas, unhappy man, the lowest regions; the highest power will

preserve us and our effects. If you repeat this verse, you will not

lose your things by theft.]

16 (return) [ Instead of \_porte cochère\_ and \_porte bàtarde\_.]

17 (return) [ Jesus-my-God-bandy-leg—down with the moon!]

18 (return) [ \_Chicken: \_ slang allusion to the noise made in calling

poultry.]

19 (return) [ Louis XVIII. is represented in comic pictures of that day

as having a pear-shaped head.]

20 (return) [ Tuck into your trousers the shirt-tail that is hanging

out. Let it not be said that patriots have hoisted the white flag.]

21 (return) [ In order to re-establish the shaken throne firmly on its

base, soil (Des solles), greenhouse and house (Decazes) must be

changed.]

22 (return) [ \_Suspendu\_, suspended; \_pendu\_, hung.]

23 (return) [ \_L’Aile\_, wing.]

24 (return) [ The slang term for a painter’s assistant.]

25 (return) [ If Cæsar had given me glory and war, and I were obliged

to quit my mother’s love, I would say to great Cæsar, “Take back thy

sceptre and thy chariot; I prefer the love of my mother.”]

26 (return) [ Whether the sun shines brightly or dim, the bear returns

to his cave.]

27 (return) [ The peep-hole is a \_Judas\_ in French. Hence the

half-punning allusion.]

28 (return) [ Our love has lasted a whole week, but how short are the

instants of happiness! To adore each other for eight days was hardly

worth the while! The time of love should last forever.]

29 (return) [ You leave me to go to glory; my sad heart will follow you

everywhere.]

30 (return) [ A democrat.]

31 (return) [ King Bootkick went a-hunting after crows, mounted on two

stilts. When one passed beneath them, one paid him two sous.]

32 (return) [ In olden times, fouriers were the officials who preceded

the Court and allotted the lodgings.]

33 (return) [ A game of ninepins, in which one side of the ball is

smaller than the other, so that it does not roll straight, but

describes a curve on the ground.]

34 (return) [ From April 19 to May 20.]

35 (return) [ \_Merlan:\_ a sobriquet given to hairdressers because they

are white with powder.]

36 (return) [ The scaffold.]

37 (return) [ Argot of the Temple.]

38 (return) [ Argot of the barriers.]

39 (return) [ The Last Day of a Condemned Man.]

40 (return) [ “Vous trouverez dans ces potains-là, une foultitude de

raisons pour que je me libertise.”]

41 (return) [ It must be observed, however, that \_mac\_ in Celtic means

\_son\_.]

42 (return) [ Smoke puffed in the face of a person asleep.]

43 (return) [ Je n’entrave que le dail comment meck, le daron des

orgues, peut atiger ses mômes et ses momignards et les locher criblant

sans être agité lui-meme.]

44 (return) [ At night one sees nothing, by day one sees very well; the

bourgeois gets flurried over an apocryphal scrawl, practice virtue,

tutu, pointed hat!]

45 (return) [ \_Chien\_, dog, trigger.]

46 (return) [ Here is the morn appearing. When shall we go to the

forest, Charlot asked Charlotte. Tou, tou, tou, for Chatou, I have but

one God, one King, one half-farthing, and one boot. And these two poor

little wolves were as tipsy as sparrows from having drunk dew and thyme

very early in the morning. And these two poor little things were as

drunk as thrushes in a vineyard; a tiger laughed at them in his cave.

The one cursed, the other swore. When shall we go to the forest?

Charlot asked Charlotte.]

47 (return) [ There swings the horrible skeleton of a poor lover who

hung himself.]

48 (return) [ She astounds at ten paces, she frightens at two, a wart

inhabits her hazardous nose; you tremble every instant lest she should

blow it at you, and lest, some fine day, her nose should tumble into

her mouth.]

49 (return) [ \_Matelote:\_ a culinary preparation of various fishes.

\_Gibelotte:\_ stewed rabbits.]

50 (return) [ Treat if you can, and eat if you dare.]

51 (return) [ \_Bipède sans plume:\_ biped without feathers—pen.]

52 (return) [ Municipal officer of Toulouse.]

53 (return) [ Do you remember our sweet life, when we were both so

young, and when we had no other desire in our hearts than to be well

dressed and in love? When, by adding your age to my age, we could not

count forty years between us, and when, in our humble and tiny

household, everything was spring to us even in winter. Fair days!

Manuel was proud and wise, Paris sat at sacred banquets, Foy launched

thunderbolts, and your corsage had a pin on which I pricked myself.

Everything gazed upon you. A briefless lawyer, when I took you to the

Prado to dine, you were so beautiful that the roses seemed to me to

turn round, and I heard them say: Is she not beautiful! How good she

smells! What billowing hair! Beneath her mantle she hides a wing. Her

charming bonnet is hardly unfolded. I wandered with thee, pressing thy

supple arm. The passers-by thought that love bewitched had wedded, in

our happy couple, the gentle month of April to the fair month of May.

We lived concealed, content, with closed doors, devouring love, that

sweet forbidden fruit. My mouth had not uttered a thing when thy heart

had already responded. The Sorbonne was the bucolic spot where I adored

thee from eve till morn. ’Tis thus that an amorous soul applies the

chart of the Tender to the Latin country. O Place Maubert! O Place

Dauphine! When in the fresh spring-like hut thou didst draw thy

stocking on thy delicate leg, I saw a star in the depths of the garret.

I have read a great deal of Plato, but nothing of it remains by me;

better than Malebranche and then Lamennais thou didst demonstrate to me

celestial goodness with a flower which thou gavest to me, I obeyed

thee, thou didst submit to me; oh gilded garret! to lace thee! to

behold thee going and coming from dawn in thy chemise, gazing at thy

young brow in thine ancient mirror! And who, then, would forego the

memory of those days of aurora and the firmament, of flowers, of gauze

and of moire, when love stammers a charming slang? Our gardens

consisted of a pot of tulips; thou didst mask the window with thy

petticoat; I took the earthenware bowl and I gave thee the Japanese

cup. And those great misfortunes which made us laugh! Thy cuff

scorched, thy boa lost! And that dear portrait of the divine

Shakespeare which we sold one evening that we might sup! I was a beggar

and thou wert charitable. I kissed thy fresh round arms in haste. A

folio Dante served us as a table on which to eat merrily a centime’s

worth of chestnuts. The first time that, in my joyous den, I snatched a

kiss from thy fiery lip, when thou wentest forth, dishevelled and

blushing, I turned deathly pale and I believed in God. Dost thou recall

our innumerable joys, and all those fichus changed to rags? Oh! what

sighs from our hearts full of gloom fluttered forth to the heavenly

depths!]

54 (return) [ My nose is in tears, my friend Bugeaud, lend me thy

gendarmes that I may say a word to them. With a blue capote and a

chicken in his shako, here’s the banlieue, co-cocorico.]

55 (return) [ Love letters.]

56 (return) [

“The bird slanders in the elms,

And pretends that yesterday, Atala

Went off with a Russian,

Where fair maids go.

Lon la.

My friend Pierrot, thou pratest, because Mila knocked at her pane the

other day and called me. The jades are very charming, their poison

which bewitched me would intoxicate Monsieur Orfila. I’m fond of love

and its bickerings, I love Agnes, I love Pamela, Lise burned herself in

setting me aflame. In former days when I saw the mantillas of Suzette

and of Zéila, my soul mingled with their folds. Love, when thou

gleamest in the dark thou crownest Lola with roses, I would lose my

soul for that. Jeanne, at thy mirror thou deckest thyself! One fine

day, my heart flew forth. I think that it is Jeanne who has it. At

night, when I come from the quadrilles, I show Stella to the stars, and

I say to them: “Behold her.” Where fair maids go, lon la.]

57 (return) [ But some prisons still remain, and I am going to put a

stop to this sort of public order. Does any one wish to play at

skittles? The whole ancient world fell in ruin, when the big ball

rolled. Good old folks, let us smash with our crutches that Louvre

where the monarchy displayed itself in furbelows. We have forced its

gates. On that day, King Charles X. did not stick well and came

unglued.]

58 (return) [ Steps on the Aventine Hill, leading to the Tiber, to

which the bodies of executed criminals were dragged by hooks to be

thrown into the Tiber.]

59 (return) [ Mustards.]

60 (return) [ From \_casser\_, to break: break-necks.]

61 (return) [ “Jeanne was born at Fougère, a true shepherd’s nest; I

adore her petticoat, the rogue.” “Love, thou dwellest in her; For ’tis

in her eyes that thou placest thy quiver, sly scamp!” “As for me, I

sing her, and I love, more than Diana herself, Jeanne and her firm

Breton breasts.”]

62 (return) [ In allusion to the expression, \_coiffer

Sainte-Catherine\_, “to remain unmarried.”]

63 (return) [ “Thus, hemming in the course of thy musings, Alcippus, it

is true that thou wilt wed ere long.”]

64 (return) [ \_Tirer le diable par la queue\_, “to live from hand to

mouth.”]

65 (return) [ “Triton trotted on before, and drew from his conch-shell

sounds so ravishing that he delighted everyone!”]

66 (return) [ “A Shrove-Tuesday marriage will have no ungrateful

children.”]

67 (return) [ A short mask.]

68 (return) [ In allusion to the story of Prometheus.]

69 (return) [ \_Un fafiot sérieux. Fafiot\_ is the slang term for a

bank-bill, derived from its rustling noise.]

70 (return) [ He sleeps. Although his fate was very strange, he lived.

He died when he had no longer his angel. The thing came to pass simply,

of itself, as the night comes when day is gone.]

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