VICTOR HUGO

Les Misérables

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Preface

As long as law and custom allow society to pass sentences of damnation that create man-made hells in the midst of civilization, and to add human misery to divine fate; as long as the three great problems of the age remain unsolved—the degradation of men through poverty, the corruption of women through hunger, and the stunting of children through lack of light; as long as social suffocation is possible anywhere in the world—in other words, and in an even broader sense, as long as ignorance and poverty exist on earth—books like Les Misérables will continue to have a purpose.

CHAPTER I—M. MYRIEL

In 1815, M. Charles-François-Bienvenu Myriel was the Bishop of D——. He was about seventy-five years old and had held the bishopric of D—— since 1806.

Although this detail has nothing to do with the main story we are about to tell, it is still worth mentioning, if only for the sake of accuracy, the various rumors and comments that had been circulating about him from the moment he arrived in the diocese. Whether true or false, what is said about a man often takes as important a place in his life—and especially in his fate—as what he actually does. M. Myriel was the son of a councillor in the Parliament of Aix, and so he belonged to the legal nobility. People said that his father, intending him to inherit his office, had him married very young, at eighteen or twenty, following a custom fairly common in parliamentary families. In spite of this marriage, however, it was also said that Charles Myriel gave people plenty to talk about. He was handsome, though somewhat short, elegant, charming, and intelligent. The whole first part of his life had been given over to society and romance.

Then came the Revolution. Events followed one another rapidly. The parliamentary families, decimated, persecuted, and hunted down, were scattered. M. Charles Myriel emigrated to Italy at the very beginning of the Revolution. There his wife died of a chest illness from which she had long suffered. He had no children. What happened next in M. Myriel's life? Did the destruction of old French society, the downfall of his own

family, and the tragic scenes of ’93—which may have seemed even more terrifying to emigrants watching from afar through the magnifying lens of fear—plant in him the desire for renunciation and solitude? Or, amid all the distractions and attachments that had filled his life, was he suddenly struck by one of those mysterious and terrible blows that sometimes crush a man by piercing his heart, when public disasters that ruin his position and fortune would not have shaken him at all? No one could say. 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 elderly and lived a very secluded life.

Around the time of the coronation, some minor matter connected with his parish work—exactly what is not known—brought him to Paris. Among the influential people he approached to seek help for his parishioners was Cardinal Fesch. One day, while the Emperor was visiting his uncle, the worthy curé was waiting in the anteroom and happened to be there as His Majesty passed by. Noticing that the old man was looking at him with a certain curiosity, Napoleon turned and said abruptly:

“Who is this good man staring at me?”

“Sire,” said M. Myriel, “you are looking at a good man, and I am looking at a great one. Each of us may benefit from it.”

That very evening, the Emperor asked the Cardinal for the curé's name, and some time later M. Myriel was utterly astonished to learn that he had been appointed Bishop of D——.

How much truth was there, after all, in the stories told about the early part of M. Myriel's life? No one knew. Very few families had known the Myriel family before the Revolution.

M. Myriel had to face what every newcomer faces in a small town, where many mouths talk and very few minds think. He had to endure it even though he was a bishop—and partly because he was a bishop. But in the end, the tales attached to his name were only tales: noise, gossip, words; less than words—palabres—, as the vivid language of the South calls them.

Be that as it may, after nine years as bishop and nine years living in D——, all the stories and gossip that absorb small towns and small-minded people at first had sunk into complete oblivion. No one would have dared mention them; no one would have dared bring them up again.

M. Myriel had arrived in D—— with an elderly unmarried woman, Mademoiselle Baptistine, who was his sister and ten years younger than he was.

Their only servant was a woman the same age as Mademoiselle Baptistine, named Madame Magloire, who, after serving as the servant of M. le Curé, now held the double role of maid to Mademoiselle and housekeeper to Monseigneur.

Mademoiselle Baptistine was tall, pale, thin, and gentle. She embodied what people mean by the word "respectable," since a

woman, it seems, must be a mother before she is considered truly venerable. She had never been beautiful. But a life made up entirely of holy acts had gradually given her a kind of pallor and transparency, and as she grew older she gained what can only be called the beauty of goodness. What had been mere thinness in her youth became transparency in middle age, and through that almost translucent quality, the angel within seemed visible. She was more soul than woman. Her body seemed scarcely more than a shadow, with barely enough substance to mark her sex: a little matter holding a light, large eyes always lowered—a mere excuse for a soul to remain on earth.

Madame Magloire was a short, plump, rosy-haired old woman, stout and constantly busy, always out of breath—partly because she was so active, and partly because she had asthma.

When M. Myriel arrived, he was settled into the bishop's palace with all the honors required by the Imperial decrees, which rank a bishop immediately after a major-general. The mayor and the president were the first to call on him, and he then paid the first visit to the general and the prefect.

Once the installation was complete, the town waited to see what its bishop would do.

CHAPTER II—M. MYRIEL BECOMES M. WELCOME

The bishop’s palace at D—— stands next to the hospital.

The episcopal palace was a large, beautiful stone house, built at the beginning of the last century by M. Henri Puget, Doctor of Theology of the Faculty of Paris, Abbé of Simore, who became Bishop of D—— in 1712. The palace was truly a noble residence. Everything about it was impressive: the Bishop’s apartments, the drawing rooms, the bedchambers, the main courtyard—very spacious, with walkways running around it beneath arcades in the old Florentine style—and gardens planted with magnificent trees. In the dining room, a long and splendid gallery on the ground floor that opened onto the gardens, M. Henri Puget had formally entertained, 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. Portraits of these seven reverend men adorned the room, and that memorable date, July 29, 1714, was engraved there in gold letters on a slab of white marble.

The hospital was a low, narrow, single-story building with a small garden.

Three days after his arrival, the Bishop visited the hospital. When the visit was over, he asked the director to be kind enough to come to his house.

“Monsieur the director of the hospital,” he said to him, “how many sick people do you have there at the moment?”

“Twenty-six, Monseigneur.”

“That is the number I counted,” said the Bishop.

“The beds,” the director went on, “are packed very close together.”

“I noticed that.”

“The wards are really just rooms, and it is hard to get fresh air into them.”

“That is how it seemed to me as well.”

“And then, when there is a bit of sunshine, the garden is far too small for the convalescents.”

“That is exactly what I was thinking.”

“When epidemics break out—we had typhus this year; two years ago it was the sweating sickness, and at times we had a hundred patients—we don’t know what to do.”

“That was exactly what occurred to me.”

“What would you have us do, Monseigneur?” said the director. “One must simply accept it.”

This conversation took place in the dining room off the ground-floor gallery.

The Bishop was silent for a moment. Then he turned suddenly to the hospital director.

“Monsieur,” he said, “how many beds do you think this hall alone could hold?”

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

The Bishop looked around the room, seeming to measure it and calculate with his eyes.

“It would hold a full twenty beds,” he said, as if to himself. Then he raised his voice:

“Wait, Monsieur Director of the Hospital, let me tell you something. There is clearly a mistake here. There are thirty-six of you in five or six small rooms. There are three of us here, and we have space for sixty. I tell you, there is some mistake: you have my house, and I have yours. Give me back my house; you belong here.”

The next day, the thirty-six patients were moved into the Bishop’s palace, and the Bishop took up residence in the hospital.

M. Myriel owned no property, since his family had been ruined by the Revolution. His sister received an annual income of five hundred francs, which was enough for her personal needs at the vicarage. As bishop, M. Myriel received a salary of fifteen thousand francs from the State. On the very day he moved into

the hospital, he decided once and for all how this money would be used, in the following way. We reproduce here a note written in his own hand:

NOTE ON THE ARRANGEMENT 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 in the Holy Land: 100 Charitable maternity societies: 300 Extra for the one at Arles: 50 Work for the improvement of prisons: 400 Work for the relief and release of prisoners: 500 To free fathers of families imprisoned for debt: 1,000 Additional pay for 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 free education of poor girls: 1,500 For the poor: 6,000 My personal expenses: 1,000 ——— Total: 15,000

M. Myriel never changed this arrangement during the whole time he held the bishopric of D——. As we have seen, he called it “regulating his household expenses.”

Mademoiselle Baptistine accepted this arrangement without question. This saintly woman saw Monseigneur of D—— as both her brother and her bishop, her relative by blood and her superior in the Church. She simply loved and revered him. When he spoke, she bowed her head; when he acted, she went along with him. Their only servant, Madame Magloire, grumbled a little. It should be noted that the Bishop had kept only one

thousand livres for himself, which, together with Mademoiselle Baptistine's pension, came to fifteen hundred francs a year. On those fifteen hundred francs, the two old women and the old man lived.

And when a village curé came to D——, the Bishop still managed to receive him hospitably, thanks to Madame Magloire's strict thrift and Mademoiselle Baptistine's capable management.

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

"And even so, I still feel terribly cramped by it all!"

"I should think so!" exclaimed Madame Magloire. "Monseigneur has not even asked for the allowance the department owes him for the cost of keeping a carriage in town and traveling around the diocese. Bishops used to receive it as a matter of course."

"Wait!" cried the Bishop. "You are quite right, Madame Magloire."

And he submitted the request.

Some time later, the General Council considered the request and voted him an annual sum of three thousand francs under the heading: Allowance to Monseigneur the Bishop for carriage expenses, posting expenses, and pastoral visits._

This caused a great uproar among the local middle class; and a senator of the Empire—a former member of the Council of the Five Hundred that had supported the 18th Brumaire, and the holder of a splendid senatorial estate near the town of

D———wrote M. Bigot de Préameneu, the minister of public worship, a very angry and confidential note on the matter, from which we quote these authentic lines:

“Carriage expenses? What could anyone do with that in a town of fewer than four thousand inhabitants? Travel expenses? To begin with, what is the point of these journeys? And besides, how is posting even possible in these mountains? There are no roads. No one travels except on horseback. Even the bridge between Durance and Château-Arnoux can hardly bear ox carts. Priests are all the same—grasping and miserly. This man acted the good priest when he first arrived. Now he is doing what the others do: he wants a carriage and a post-chaise; he wants luxuries, like the bishops of former times. Oh, this whole priesthood! Nothing will go well, Monsieur le Comte, until the Emperor has freed us from these black-capped scoundrels. Down with the Pope! [Relations with Rome were becoming strained.] As for me, I am for Cæsar alone.” Etc., etc.

On the other hand, the whole affair delighted Madame Magloire. “Good,” she said to Mademoiselle Baptistine. “Monseigneur began with everyone else, but in the end he has had to think of himself too. He has settled all his charities. And now here are three thousand francs for us! At last!”

That very evening, the Bishop wrote out a memorandum and handed it to his sister. It read as follows:

Expenses of Carriage and Circuit

For providing meat soup for the hospital patients: 1,500 livres. For the maternity charity of Aix: 250. For the maternity charity of Draguignan: 250. For foundlings: 500. For orphans: 500. Total: 3,000.

That was M. Myriel's budget.

As for the bishop's occasional extra income—the fees for marriage banns, dispensations, private baptisms, sermons, blessings of churches or chapels, marriages, and the like—he charged them to the wealthy all the more firmly because he gave the money to the poor.

Before long, money offerings began to pour in. People with means and people without them both came to M. Myriel's door—the poor to ask for alms, the rich to leave them there. In less than a year, the Bishop had become the keeper of everyone's charity and the paymaster of everyone's distress. Large sums passed through his hands, but nothing could persuade him to change his way of living in the slightest or add anything unnecessary to his basic needs.

Quite the opposite. There is always more misery below than brotherhood above, so everything was given away, so to speak, before it was even received. It was like water poured onto dry ground: no matter how much money came in, he never had any. Then he began giving away his own possessions.

It was customary for bishops to place their baptismal names at the head of their official notices and pastoral letters. But the poor people of the countryside, with a kind of affectionate instinct, chose from among their bishop's names the one that meant something to them, and they called him nothing but Monseigneur Bienvenu [Welcome]. We will follow their example and call him that whenever we need to name him. Besides, he liked the name.

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

We do not claim that the portrait presented here is likely; we only say that it resembles the original.

CHAPTER III—A DIFFICULT BISHOPRIC FOR A GOOD BISHOP

The Bishop did not stop making his pastoral visits just because he had turned his carriage into charity. The diocese of D—— was a tiring one to cover. There were very few flat stretches and a great many mountains. There were hardly any roads, as we have already seen. It included thirty-two curacies, forty-one vicarages, and two hundred and eighty-five auxiliary chapels. Visiting all of them was no small task.

The Bishop still managed to do it. He went on foot when the place was nearby, in a covered spring-cart when it lay on the plain, and on a donkey in the mountains. The two old women went with him. When the journey was too difficult for them, he went alone.

One day he arrived at Senez, an ancient episcopal city. He was riding a donkey. His purse was very empty at the time, and he could afford no other means of travel. The mayor came to meet him at the town gate and watched him climb down from the donkey with scandalized eyes. Some of the townspeople standing around were laughing. “Monsieur le Maire,” said the Bishop, “and gentlemen citizens, I can see that I offend you. You think it very presumptuous for a poor priest to ride an animal that Jesus Christ himself used. I do it out of necessity, I assure you, not out of vanity.”

On these journeys he was kind and forgiving, and he talked with people rather than preaching at them. He did not have to look far for arguments or examples. He would point the people of one district to the example of a neighboring one. In the cantons where people were harsh to the poor, he said, “Look at the people of Briançon. They give the poor, widows, and orphans the right to have their meadows cut three days before anyone else. When their houses are destroyed, they rebuild them free of charge. That is why theirs is a country blessed by God. For a whole century, there has not been a single murderer among them.”

In villages obsessed with profit and the harvest, he would say: “Look at the people of Embrun! If, at harvest time, a father has his son away serving in the army, his daughters working in town, and he himself is sick and unable to work, the curé commends him to the prayers of the congregation. Then on Sunday, after mass, all the people of the village—men, women, and children—go to the poor man’s field, harvest it for him, and carry his straw and grain to his granary.” To families torn apart by money and inheritance, he would say: “Look at the mountaineers of Devolny, a land so wild that the nightingale is not heard there once in fifty years. And yet, when the father of a family dies, the sons go off to seek their fortunes, leaving the property to the daughters so that they may find husbands.” To the cantons that loved lawsuits, where farmers ruined themselves over stamped paper, he would say: “Look at those good peasants in the valley of Queyras! There are three thousand souls there. Mon Dieu! It is like a little republic. They know neither judge nor bailiff. The mayor does everything. He

assigns the imposts, taxes each person fairly, settles quarrels for nothing, divides inheritances without charge, and gives judgment free of cost. And he is obeyed, because he is a just man among simple people." In villages where he found no schoolmaster, he would again point to the people of Queyras: "Do you know how they manage?" he said. "Since a little district of twelve or fifteen hearths cannot always support a teacher, they have schoolmasters paid by the whole valley, who travel from village to village, spending a week in one place, ten days in another, and teaching them all. These teachers go to the fairs. I have seen them there. You can recognize them by the quill pens they wear in the cord of their hats. Those who teach only reading have one pen; those who teach reading and reckoning have two; those who teach reading, reckoning, and Latin have three. But what a disgrace it is to be ignorant! Do as the people of Queyras do!"

That was how he spoke—seriously and with a fatherly spirit. When he lacked real examples, he invented parables. He went straight to the point, using few words and vivid images; that was the true source of his eloquence, like that of Jesus Christ. And because he believed deeply in what he said, he persuaded others.

CHAPTER IV—DEEDS TO MATCH WORDS

His conversation was lively and warm. He treated the two old women who had spent their lives beside him as equals. When he laughed, he laughed like a schoolboy. Madame Magloire liked to call him Your Grace [_Votre Grandeur_]. One day he got up from his armchair and went to the library to look for a book. It was on one of the top shelves. Since the bishop was rather short, he could not reach it. “Madame Magloire,” he said, “bring me a chair. My greatness [_grandeur_] does not reach as high as that shelf.”

One of his distant relatives, Madame la Comtesse de Lô, rarely missed a chance to list, in his presence, what she called “the expectations” of her three sons. She had many relatives who were very old and close to death, and her sons were their natural heirs. The youngest was to receive from a great-aunt a fine income of a hundred thousand livres; the second was to inherit the title of Duke from his uncle; the eldest was to succeed to his grandfather’s peerage. The Bishop usually listened in silence to these innocent and forgivable maternal boasts. On one occasion, however, he seemed more thoughtful than usual while Madame de Lô was once again going over all these inheritances and all these “expectations.” At last she broke off impatiently. “Mon Dieu, cousin! What are you thinking about?” “I am thinking,” replied the Bishop, “of a curious remark that I believe is found in St. Augustine: ‘Place your hopes in the man from whom you do not inherit.’”

On another occasion, he received notice of the death of a country gentleman. The notice spent a whole page listing not only the dead man's dignities, but also the feudal and noble distinctions of all his relatives. "What a strong back Death has!" he exclaimed. "What a strange load of titles people so cheerfully pile on him, and how much wit men must have to press the tomb into the service of vanity!"

He sometimes had a gentle, teasing wit that almost always carried a serious point. During one Lent, a young vicar came to D—— and preached in the cathedral. He was fairly eloquent. His sermon was about charity. He urged the rich to give to the poor so they could avoid hell, which he described in the most terrifying terms he could manage, and gain paradise, which he portrayed as delightful and desirable. In the congregation was a wealthy retired merchant named M. Géborand, a man with something of a usurer's reputation, who had made two million francs manufacturing coarse cloth, serge, and woolen braid. In all his life, M. Géborand had never given alms to a single poor soul. After that sermon, people noticed that every Sunday he gave a sou to the poor old beggar women at the cathedral door. There were six of them to share it. One day the Bishop saw him giving this charity and said to his sister with a smile, "There is M. Géborand buying paradise for a sou."

When it came to charity, he would not be put off, not even by a refusal, and at such moments he would make remarks that stayed with people. Once he was collecting money for the poor in one of the town's drawing rooms. The Marquis de Champtercier was there, a rich and miserly old man who

somehow managed to be both an ultra-royalist and an ultra-Voltairian at the same time. Such men really have existed. When the Bishop came up to him, he touched his arm. “You must give me something, M. le Marquis.” The Marquis turned and answered curtly, “I have poor people of my own, Monseigneur.” “Then give them to me,” the Bishop replied.

One day he preached the following sermon in the cathedral:

“My dear brothers, my good friends, in France there are 1,320,000 peasants’ homes with only three openings; 1,817,000 hovels with only two, a door and one window; and another 346,000 cabins with just one opening, the door. And all this comes from what is called the tax on doors and windows. Put poor families, old women, and little children into such buildings, and see what fevers and illnesses follow! Alas, God gives people air; the law sells it to them. I do not condemn the law, but I bless God. In the department of Isère, in the Var, and in the two Alpine departments, the Hautes-Alpes and the Basses-Alpes, the peasants do not even have wheelbarrows; they carry their manure on men’s backs. They have no candles, and they burn resinous sticks and scraps of rope dipped in pitch. That is the condition of the whole mountainous region of Dauphiné. They bake bread only once every six months, using dried cow dung for fuel. In winter they have to chop this bread with an axe and soak it for twenty-four hours before it can be eaten. My brothers, have pity! Look at the suffering all around you!”

Born in Provence, he quickly became familiar with the dialects of the south. He would say, _“En bé! moussu, sés sagé?”_ as they did in lower Languedoc; _“Onté anaras passa?”_ as in the

Basses-Alpes; _“Puerte un bouen moutu embe un bouen fromage grase,”_ as in upper Dauphiné. The people were delighted by this, and it did a great deal to open every mind to him. He was completely at ease both in a thatched cottage and in the mountains. He knew how to express the loftiest ideas in the plainest language. Because he spoke every tongue, he found his way into every heart.

He was the same with society people as he was with the poor. He never condemned anything hastily or without considering the circumstances. He used to say, “Look closely at the road the fault has traveled.”

Moreover, being, as he said with a smile, an _ex_-sinner_, he had none of the harshness of austerity. He stated quite clearly, and without the severe scowl of those who pride themselves on virtue, a doctrine that can be summed up as follows:

“A man carries his flesh with him, and it is both his burden and his temptation. He hauls it along and gives in to it. He must keep watch over it, restrain it, hold it down, and obey it only in the last extremity. Even in that obedience there may be some fault; but a fault committed in that way is venial. It is a fall, but a fall to one’s knees, and it may end in prayer.”

“To be a saint is the exception; to be an honest man is the rule. Make mistakes, fall, sin if you must, but be honest.”

“The law of man is to sin as little as possible. To commit no sin at all is the dream of the angel. Everything on earth is subject to sin. Sin is a kind of gravitation.”

When he saw everyone crying out so loudly and growing angry so quickly, he said with a smile, “Oh! oh! Apparently this is a great crime that the whole world commits. These are hypocrisies that have taken fright and are rushing to protest and put themselves under cover.”

He was gentle in his judgment of women and the poor, on whom the burden of human society rests. He said, “The faults of women, children, the weak, the needy, and the ignorant are the fault of husbands, fathers, masters, the strong, the rich, and the wise.”

He also said, “Teach the ignorant as much as possible; society is guilty because it does not provide instruction free of charge. It is responsible for the night it creates. This soul is full of shadow; that is where sin is committed. The guilty person is not the one who commits the sin, but the one who creates the shadow.”

It will be clear that he had a distinctive way of judging things; I suspect he learned it from the Gospel.”

One day, in a drawing room, he heard people discussing a criminal case that was being prepared and was about to go to trial. A miserable man, having reached the end of his means, had made counterfeit money for the sake of a woman he loved and the child he had had with her. At that time, counterfeiting was still punishable by death. The woman had been arrested while trying to pass the first false coin the man had made. She was in custody, but there was no evidence except against her. She alone could accuse her lover and destroy him with her

confession. She denied everything; they pressed her. She kept denying it. Then an idea came to the attorney for the crown. He invented a story that the lover had been unfaithful and, by cleverly presenting fragments of letters, managed to convince the unhappy woman that she had a rival and that the man was deceiving her. Maddened by jealousy, she then denounced her lover, confessed everything, and proved it all.

The man was ruined. He was soon to be tried at Aix along with his accomplice. As they told the story, everyone praised the magistrate's cleverness. By stirring up jealousy, he had made the truth burst out in anger; he had drawn justice from revenge. The Bishop listened in silence. When they had finished, he asked,

“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 took place at D——. A man was sentenced to death for murder. He was a miserable fellow, neither truly educated nor truly ignorant, who had worked as a fairground performer and as a public writer. The town followed the trial with great interest. On the day before the execution, the prison chaplain fell ill. A priest was needed to attend the condemned man in his final moments. They sent for the curé. It seems he refused to come, saying, “That is none of my business. I have nothing to do with that unpleasant duty, or with that mountebank. I am ill as well, 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 straight to the prison, down to the cell of the “mountebank.” He called the man by name, took his hand, and spoke with him. He stayed with him all day, forgetting food and sleep, praying to God for the condemned man’s soul and asking the condemned man to pray for his own. He told him the deepest truths, which are also the simplest. He was a father, a brother, a friend; he was a bishop only when it came time to bless. He taught him, encouraged him, and comforted him in every way. The man had been close to dying in despair. Death was an abyss before him. Standing there, trembling on its bleak edge, he shrank back in horror. He was not ignorant enough to feel nothing at all. His sentence, which had struck him to the core, had in some way broken open, here and there, that wall which separates us from the mystery of things and which we call life. Through those fatal cracks he kept staring beyond this world, and he saw nothing but darkness. The Bishop made him see light.

The next day, when they came to take the unhappy man away, the Bishop was still there. He went with him and appeared before the crowd in his purple camail, with his bishop’s cross on his chest, walking beside the criminal bound with ropes.

He climbed into the tumbril with him, and he went up the scaffold with him. The man who had been so dark and crushed the day before now shone with joy. He felt that his soul had been reconciled, and he placed his hope in God. The Bishop embraced him, and just as the blade was about to fall, he said:

“God raises up the man whom men kill; the one his brothers rejected finds his Father again. Pray, believe, enter into life: the Father is there.” When the Bishop came down from the scaffold, there was something in his face that made the people step aside and let him pass. They did not know what to admire more, his paleness or his serenity. When he returned to the modest house that he smilingly called _his palace_, he said to his sister, _“I have just officiated pontifically.”_

Because the most sublime acts are often the least understood, some people in the town said, when they spoke of the Bishop’s conduct, _“It is affectation.”_

That remark, however, was heard only in drawing rooms. The common people, who see nothing laughable in holy acts, were moved and admired him.

As for the Bishop, seeing the guillotine was a terrible shock, and it took him a long time to recover from it.

In fact, when the scaffold stands there, fully built and ready, it has something about it that brings on a kind of hallucination. A person may feel some indifference toward the death penalty, and may avoid judging it, refusing to say yes or no, as long as they have never seen a guillotine with their own eyes. But if they come face to face with one, the shock is overwhelming. They are forced to choose, and to take a side for or against it. Some admire it, like de Maistre; others condemn it, like Beccaria. The guillotine is the law made solid. It is called _vindicate_; it is not neutral, and it does not allow you to remain neutral. Anyone who sees it trembles with the strangest kind of fear. Every social

question seems to gather around this blade like a great question mark. The scaffold is a vision. It is not merely a piece of carpentry. It is not merely a machine. It is not some lifeless mechanism made of wood, iron, and ropes.

It seems almost like a living being, possessed of some dark impulse I cannot name. You would think this piece of carpentry could see, that this machine could hear, that this mechanism could understand, that this wood, this iron, and these ropes had a will of their own. In the dreadful meditation its presence forces on the soul, the scaffold takes on a terrifying form, as if it were taking part in what is happening. The scaffold is the executioner's accomplice. It devours. It eats flesh. It drinks blood. The scaffold is a kind of monster made by the judge and the carpenter, a specter that seems to live with a horrible vitality drawn from all the death it has inflicted.

The effect was terrible and deep. The day after the execution, and for many days afterward, the Bishop seemed crushed by it. The almost fierce calm he had shown at the funeral moment was gone. The specter of social justice haunted him. He, who usually came away from every good deed with a shining sense of peace, now seemed to blame himself. At times he spoke to himself, murmuring mournful, broken monologues under his breath. His sister overheard one of them one evening and remembered it: "I did not think it was so monstrous. It is wrong to become so absorbed in divine law that one no longer sees human law. Death belongs to God alone. By what right do men lay hands on that unknown thing?"

As time passed, these feelings faded and probably disappeared. Even so, people noticed that from then on the Bishop avoided going past the place of execution.

M. Myriel could be called at any hour to the bedside of the sick and dying. He knew that this was his greatest duty and his hardest work. Families left widowed or orphaned did not need to send for him; he came on his own. He knew how to sit quietly for long hours beside a man who had lost the wife he loved, or a mother who had lost her child. Just as he knew when to be silent, he also knew when to speak. Oh, admirable comforter! He did not try to erase sorrow through forgetfulness. He tried to enlarge and ennoble it through hope. He would say:

“Be careful how you turn toward the dead. Do not think of what decays. Look steadily. In the depths of heaven, you will see the living light of your beloved dead.” He knew that faith is healing. He tried to guide and calm the despairing by showing them the resigned, and to change the grief that stares at a grave into the grief that lifts its eyes to a star.

CHAPTER V—MONSEIGNEUR BIENVENU WORE HIS CASSOCKS FAR TOO LONG

M. Myriel's private life was shaped by the same thoughts as his public life. The willing poverty in which the Bishop of D—— lived would have been a grave and beautiful sight to anyone who could have seen it up close.

Like all old men, and like most people who think deeply, he slept very little. But when he did sleep, he slept soundly. In the morning, he spent an hour in meditation, then said Mass, either at the cathedral or in his own house. After Mass, he ate a simple breakfast of rye bread dipped in milk from his own cows. Then he began his work.

A bishop is a very busy man. Every day he must meet with the secretary of the bishopric, who is usually a canon, and almost every day with his vicars-general. He has congregations to correct, privileges to grant, and a whole church library to review—prayer books, diocesan catechisms, books of hours, and the like. He must write pastoral charges, approve sermons, reconcile curés and mayors, and keep up both clerical and administrative correspondence. On one side is the State; on the other, the Holy See. And beyond all that, there are a thousand other matters to attend to.

Whatever time remained after these countless duties, along with his religious offices and his breviary, he gave first to the needy, the sick, and the suffering. Whatever time the needy, the sick,

and the suffering left him, he gave to work. Sometimes he dug in his garden; at other times he read or wrote. He had only one word for both kinds of labor: _gardening_. "The mind is a garden," he said.

Around midday, when the weather was fine, he went out for a walk in the country or through the town, often stopping in humble homes. People saw him walking alone, deep in thought, his eyes lowered, leaning on his long cane. He wore his warm, padded purple silk robe, purple stockings inside his rough shoes, and a flat hat from whose three corners hung three large golden tassels.

Wherever he appeared, it felt like a celebration. It was as though his presence brought warmth and light with it. Children and old people came out onto their doorsteps for the Bishop as they would for the sun. He gave them his blessing, and they blessed him in return. If anyone was in need of something, people pointed them toward his house.

[Illustration: The Comforter]

Now and then he stopped, spoke to the little boys and girls, and smiled at their mothers. He visited the poor as long as he had any money. When he had none left, he visited the rich.

Because he made his cassocks last as long as possible and did not want anyone to notice, he never went out into town without his padded purple cloak. In summer, this was somewhat uncomfortable.

When he returned, he ate dinner. It was much the same as his breakfast.

At half past eight in the evening, he ate supper with his sister, while Madame Magloire stood behind them and served at the table. Nothing could have been more frugal than this meal. If, however, the Bishop had one of his curés to supper, Madame Magloire used the occasion to serve Monseigneur some excellent fish from the lake or fine game from the mountains. Any curé provided an excuse for a good meal, and the Bishop did not object. Aside from that exception, his usual food consisted only of vegetables boiled in water and soup made with oil. So people in the town used to say, _when the Bishop does not dine like a curé, he dines like a trappist_.

After supper, he talked for half an hour with Mademoiselle Baptistine and Madame Magloire. Then he withdrew to his room and began to write, sometimes on loose sheets and sometimes in the margins of a folio. He was a literary man and fairly learned. He left behind five or six very curious manuscripts. Among them was a dissertation on this verse from Genesis, _In the beginning, the spirit of God floated upon the waters_. He compares this verse with three texts: the Arabic verse that 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 argues that this bishop should be credited with the various short

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

Sometimes, in the middle of reading, whatever book he happened to have in his hands, he would suddenly sink into deep thought. He would come out of it only long enough to write a few lines on the pages of the book itself. These lines often had no connection at all to the book that contained them. We now have before us a note he wrote in the margin of a quarto titled _Correspondence of Lord Germain with Generals Clinton, Cornwallis, and the Admirals on the American station. Versailles, Poinçot, bookseller; and Paris, Pissot, bookseller, Quai des Augustins._

Here is the note:

“Oh, you who are!

“Ecclesiastes calls you the Almighty; 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 calls you Sanctity; Esdras calls you Justice; 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 withdrew to their rooms on the first floor, leaving him alone on the ground floor until morning.

At this point, we need to give a precise picture of the Bishop of D——’s house.

CHAPTER VI—WHO KEPT WATCH OVER HIS HOUSE

The house he lived in consisted, as we have said, of a ground floor, one floor above it, and an attic. There were three rooms on the ground floor and three bedrooms on the first floor. Behind the house was a garden covering a quarter of an acre. The two women occupied the first floor; the Bishop lived below. The first room, which opened onto the street, served as his dining room. The second was his bedroom, and the third his oratory. The only way out of the oratory was through the bedroom, and the only way out of the bedroom was through the dining room. At the end of the suite, in the oratory, there was a separate alcove with a bed for guests. The Bishop offered this bed to country curates whose business or parish duties brought them to D——.

The hospital pharmacy, a small building added to the house and opening onto the garden, had been turned into a kitchen and cellar. There was also a stable in the garden that had once been the hospital kitchen, and the Bishop kept two cows there. No matter how much milk they gave, he always sent half of it every morning to the sick people in the hospital.

“I am paying my tithes,” he said.

His bedroom was fairly large and hard to heat in bad weather. Since wood was very expensive at D——, he came up with the idea of having a wooden partition built in the cow-shed. He spent his evenings there during the coldest part of winter and

called it his _winter salon_.

Like the dining room, this winter salon contained only a square white wooden table and four straw-seated chairs. The dining room also had an old sideboard painted pink in watercolor. Using a similar sideboard, draped neatly with white linen and imitation lace, the Bishop had made the altar that stood in his oratory.

His wealthy penitents and the devout women of D—— had more than once taken up a collection to pay for a new altar for Monseigneur's oratory. Each time, he accepted the money and gave 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 in his bedroom there was an armchair, also made of straw. When he happened to receive seven or eight people at once—the prefect, the general, the officers of the regiment stationed there, or several students from the little seminary—they had to bring in the chairs from the winter salon in the stable, the prie-Dieu from the oratory, and the armchair from the bedroom. In this way they could gather as many as eleven seats for the visitors. A room had to be stripped of its furniture for every new guest.

Sometimes there were twelve people. Then the Bishop solved the difficulty by standing in front of the fireplace in winter, or by walking in the garden in summer.

There was one more chair in the separate alcove, but half its straw seat was gone and it had only three legs, so it was useful

only if it was braced against the wall. Mademoiselle Baptistine also had, in her own room, a very large wooden easy chair that had once been gilded and was upholstered in flowered pekin. But they had been forced to haul this bergère up to the first floor through the window because the staircase was too narrow. So it could not really be counted among the household's usable furniture.

Mademoiselle Baptistine's great wish had been to buy a drawing-room set upholstered in yellow Utrecht velvet, embossed with a rose pattern, with mahogany frames in the swan-neck style, and a sofa to match. But it would have cost at least five hundred francs, and since in five years she had managed to save only forty-two francs and ten sous for it, she finally gave up the dream. After all, who ever fully reaches their ideal?

Nothing is easier to picture than the Bishop's bedroom. A glass door opened onto the garden. Opposite it stood the bed: an iron hospital bed with a canopy of green serge. In the shadow behind the bed, hidden by a curtain, were the toilet articles, still showing the refined habits of the former man of society. There were two doors: one near the fireplace, opening into the oratory; the other near the bookcase, opening into the dining room. The bookcase was a large glass-fronted cabinet filled with books. The fireplace was wood painted to look like marble, and there was usually no fire in it. Inside the fireplace stood a pair of iron andirons, decorated at the top with two garlanded vases and fluted details that had once been silvered with silver leaf—a kind of episcopal luxury. Above the mantel hung a

copper crucifix with its silver worn away, mounted on faded velvet in a wooden frame whose gilding had flaked off. Near the glass door stood a large table with an inkstand, piled with a jumble of papers and huge books. In front of the table was a straw armchair. At the foot of the bed was a prie-Dieu borrowed from the oratory.

Two oval-framed portraits hung on the wall, one on each side of the bed. Small gilt labels on the plain cloth beside them said that one portrait was of the Abbé of Chaliot, Bishop of Saint Claude, and the other of Abbé Tourteau, vicar-general of Agde, abbé of Grand-Champ, of the order of Cîteaux, in the diocese of Chartres. When the Bishop took over this room after it had been used for hospital patients, he found the portraits already there and left them in place. They were priests, and probably benefactors as well—two good reasons to treat them with respect. All he knew about the two men was that the king had appointed them, one to his bishopric and the other to his benefice, on the same day, April 27, 1785. When Madame Magloire took the pictures down to dust them, the Bishop discovered these details written in faded white ink on a small square of paper, yellowed with age and fastened to the back of the portrait of the Abbé of Grand-Champ with four wafers.

At his window hung an old curtain made of coarse wool. In time it became so worn out that, to avoid the cost of replacing it, Madame Magloire had to sew a large seam straight down the middle. The seam formed a cross. The Bishop often pointed it out. “How lovely that is!” he would say.

Every room in the house, without exception—upstairs and downstairs alike—had whitewashed walls, as was common in barracks and hospitals.

Still, in later years, Madame Magloire discovered paintings underneath the paper that had been whitewashed over, decorating Mademoiselle Baptistine's room, as we shall see later. Before it became a hospital, the house had been the old parliament house of the Bourgeois. That was why it had this decoration. The rooms were paved with red bricks, scrubbed every week, and straw mats lay in front of all the beds. Thanks to the care of the two women, the whole house was kept exquisitely clean from top to bottom. This was the only luxury the Bishop allowed himself. He said, "That takes nothing from the poor."

It must be admitted, however, that he had kept from his former wealth six silver knives and forks and a soup ladle. Every day, Madame Magloire looked at them with delight as they shone on the coarse linen tablecloth. And since we are describing the Bishop of D—— as he truly was, we should also mention that he had said more than once, "I find it hard to give up eating from silver."

Along with this silverware, there were also two large solid silver candlesticks, which he had inherited from a great-aunt. They held two wax candles and usually stood on the Bishop's mantelpiece. Whenever he had guests for dinner, Madame Magloire lit the candles and placed the candlesticks on the table.

In the Bishop's own room, at the head of his bed, there was a small cupboard where Madame Magloire locked away the six silver knives and forks and the large spoon every night. But it should be added that the key was never taken out.

The garden, somewhat spoiled by the ugly buildings already mentioned, was laid out in four cross-shaped paths spreading out from a water tank. Another path ran around the edge of the garden, along the white wall that enclosed it. These paths divided the space into four square beds bordered with box. In three of them, Madame Magloire grew vegetables; in the fourth, the Bishop had planted flowers. A few fruit trees stood here and there. Madame Magloire once said, with gentle teasing, "Monseigneur, you make use of everything, and yet you have one plot that serves no purpose. It would be better to grow salads there than bouquets." "Madame Magloire," the Bishop replied, "you are mistaken. Beauty is as useful as usefulness." After a pause, he added, "Perhaps more so."

This little garden, with its three or four beds, took up nearly as much of the Bishop's attention as his books did. He liked to spend an hour or two there, pruning, hoeing, and poking holes in the soil to drop in seeds. He was not nearly as hard on insects as a gardener might have liked. He also made no claim to know botany. He paid no attention to classifications or systems, and made no effort at all to settle the question between Tournefort and the natural method. He sided neither with the buds against the cotyledons nor with Jussieu against Linnaeus. He did not study plants; he loved flowers. He had great respect for learned people, and even greater respect for the unlearned. And, while

never failing in either kind of respect, he watered his flowerbeds every summer evening with a green-painted tin watering can.

There was not a single door in the house that could be locked. The dining-room door, which, as we have said, opened directly onto the cathedral square, had once been fitted with locks and bolts like a prison door. The Bishop had all that ironwork removed, and the door was never secured, day or night, by anything but the latch. Anyone passing by, at any hour, had only to push it open. At first, the two women were deeply troubled by this door that was never fastened, but Monsieur de D—— said to them, "Have bolts put on your own rooms, if that will make you feel better." In the end, they came to share his confidence, or at least behaved as if they did. Only Madame Magloire still had moments of fear. As for the Bishop, his thinking is explained, or at least suggested, by three lines he wrote in the margin of a Bible: "This is the slight difference: the doctor's door should never be closed; the priest's door should always be open."

In another book, titled _Philosophy of the Medical Science_, he wrote this note: "Am I not a physician as they are? I too have my patients, and I also have some whom I call my unfortunates."

He also wrote: "Do not ask the name of the man who asks you for shelter. The very person who is troubled by his name is the one who most needs shelter."

One day, a good curé—I do not know whether it was the curé of Couloubroux or of Pompierry—asked him, probably at Madame

Magloire's urging, whether he was quite sure he was not being somewhat imprudent in leaving his door unlocked day and night, open to anyone who wished to come in, and whether, in short, he was not afraid that some misfortune might happen in a house so poorly protected. The Bishop gently laid a hand on his shoulder and said with calm seriousness, _"Nisi Dominus custodierit domum, in vanum vigilant qui custodiunt eam," Unless the Lord guards the house, those who guard it watch in vain._

Then he changed the subject.

He liked to say, "A priest has his own kind of courage, just as a colonel of dragoons has his—only," he added, "ours must be calm."

CHAPTER VII—CRAVATTE

At this point, a certain incident naturally belongs in the story, and we must not leave it out, because few things show more clearly what kind of man the Bishop of D—— was.

After Gaspard Bès's band, which had terrorized the gorges of Ollioules, was broken up, one of his lieutenants, Cravatte, fled to the mountains. For a time he hid there with his bandits, the remains of Gaspard Bès's troop, in the county of Nice. Then he made his way into Piedmont and suddenly reappeared in France, near Barcelonette. He was first seen at Jauziers, then at Tuiles. He hid in the caves of the Joug-de-l'Aigle, and from there came down toward the hamlets and villages through the ravines of the Ubaye and the Ubayette.

He even went as far as Embrun, entered the cathedral one night, and robbed the sacristy. His acts of highway robbery devastated the countryside. The gendarmes were sent after him, but to no effect. He always got away; sometimes he fought them off by force. He was a daring villain. In the middle of all this fear, the Bishop arrived. He was making his round to Chastelar. The mayor came to meet him and urged him to turn back. Cravatte controlled the mountains as far as Arche, and beyond. There was danger even with an escort; it would only expose three or four poor gendarmes for no reason.

"Then," said the Bishop, "I shall go without an escort."

"You can't really mean that, Monseigneur!" the mayor exclaimed.

“I mean it completely. I absolutely refuse any gendarmes, and I shall leave in an hour.”

“Leave?”

“Leave.”

“Alone?”

“Alone.”

“Monseigneur, you cannot do that!”

“Up there in the mountains,” said the Bishop, “there is a tiny community, no bigger than that, which I have not seen for three years. They are my good friends, those gentle, honest shepherds. Out of every thirty goats they tend, one belongs to them. They make very pretty woolen cords in many colors, and they play mountain tunes on little six-holed flutes. From time to time, they need to hear about the good God. What would they say to a bishop who was afraid? What would they say if I did not go?”

“But the brigands, Monseigneur?”

“Wait,” said the Bishop. “I must think about that. You are right. I may meet them. They too need to hear about the good God.”

“But, Monseigneur, there is a whole band of them! A pack of wolves!”

“Monsieur le maire, perhaps it is this very pack of wolves that Jesus has made me shepherd over. Who knows the ways of Providence?”

“They will rob you, Monseigneur.”

“I have nothing.”

“They will kill you.”

“An old priest, harmless and kindly, passing by and mumbling his prayers? Bah! What would be the point?”

“Oh, mon Dieu! What if you meet them!”

“I would ask them for alms for my poor.”

“Do not go, Monseigneur. In Heaven’s name! You are risking your life!”

“Monsieur le maire,” said the Bishop, “is that really all? I am not in this world to protect my own life, but to protect souls.”

In the end, they had to let him do as he wished. He set out with no one but a child who had offered to guide him. News of his stubborn decision spread through the countryside and caused great alarm.

He took neither his sister nor Madame Magloire with him. He crossed the mountain on muleback, met no one, and arrived safely at the home of his “good friends,” the shepherds. He stayed there for two weeks, preaching, giving the sacraments, teaching, and encouraging the people. As the time came for him to leave, he decided to sing a _Te Deum_ in full pontifical form. He spoke of it to the curé. But what could they do? There were no bishop’s vestments. All they could offer him was the poor village sacristy, with a few old chasubles of worn damask trimmed with imitation lace.

“Bah!” said the Bishop. “Let us announce our _Te Deum_ from the pulpit anyway, Monsieur le Curé. Things will work themselves out.”

They began searching the churches in the surrounding area. Even if they had gathered together all the splendor of those humble parishes, it still would not have been enough to dress a cathedral chorister properly.

While they were in this difficulty, two unknown horsemen brought a large chest to the presbytery for the Bishop and set it down there, then left at once. The chest was opened. Inside were a cope of cloth of gold, a mitre set with diamonds, an archbishop’s cross, a magnificent crosier—in short, all the pontifical vestments that had been stolen a month earlier from the treasury of Notre Dame d’Embrun. In the chest was a paper bearing these words: _“From Cravatte to Monseigneur Bienvenu.”_

“Didn’t I say that things would come right on their own?” said the Bishop. Then he added with a smile, “To the man who is content with a curate’s surplice, God sends an archbishop’s cope.”

“Monseigneur,” murmured the curé, tipping back his head with a smile, “God—or the Devil.”

The Bishop looked steadily at the curé and repeated firmly, “God!”

When he returned to Chastelar, people came out all along the road to stare at him as though he were a curiosity. At the

priest's house in Chastelar, he rejoined Mademoiselle Baptistine and Madame Magloire, who had been waiting for him, and he said to his sister: "Well, was I right? The poor priest went to his poor mountaineers empty-handed, and he comes back from them with his hands full. I set out carrying nothing but my trust in God; I have brought back the treasure of a cathedral."

That evening, before going to bed, he said again: "Let us never fear robbers or murderers. Those are dangers from outside, small dangers. Let us fear ourselves. Prejudices are the real robbers; vices are the real murderers. The greatest dangers are within us. What does it matter what threatens our head or our purse? Let us think only of what threatens our soul."

Then he turned to his sister: "Sister, a priest should never take precautions against his fellow man. Whatever his fellow man does, God allows. When we think danger is coming, let us limit ourselves to prayer. Let us pray, not for ourselves, but that our brother may not fall into sin because of us."

Still, such incidents were rare in his life. We tell the ones we know about; but in general, he lived by doing the same things at the same times. One month of his year was like one hour of his day.

As for what became of the cathedral of Embrun's "treasure," we would be hard-pressed to answer any questions about it. It consisted of very beautiful things, very tempting things, and things especially easy to steal for the benefit of the unfortunate. They had already been stolen elsewhere. Half the business was done; all that remained was to redirect the theft and send it on a

short journey toward the poor. Still, we make no claims on this point. Only, a rather obscure note was found among the Bishop’s papers that may have some connection to the matter, and it was written 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 mentioned above was a clever man who had risen by his own efforts, brushing aside the things that get in the way and are called conscience, sworn faith, justice, and duty. He had gone straight toward his goal, never once wavering whenever his advancement or his interests were concerned. He was an old lawyer, mellowed by success. He was not a bad man at all. He did every small favor he could for his sons, his sons-in-law, his relatives, and even his friends, having sensibly taken advantage in life of the good side of things, good opportunities, and lucky breaks. Everything else struck him as very foolish. He was intelligent, and just educated enough to imagine himself a disciple of Epicurus, when in truth he was only a product of Pigault-Lebrun. He readily and cheerfully laughed at infinite and eternal things, and at the "fancies of that good old fellow the Bishop." He even sometimes laughed at him with a kindly air of authority in M. Myriel's own presence, while M. Myriel listened.

On some semi-official occasion—I no longer remember which—Count [this senator] and M. Myriel were to dine with the prefect. At dessert, the senator, a little warmed with wine though still perfectly dignified, cried out:

“Come, Bishop, let’s have a discussion. It is hard for a senator and a bishop to look at each other without a wink. We are two augurs. I am going to make a confession to you. I have a philosophy of my own.”

“And you are quite right,” replied the Bishop. “As a man makes his philosophy, so he lies upon it. You are lying on a bed of purple, senator.”

The senator, encouraged, went on:

“Let us be good fellows.”

“Good devils, even,” said the Bishop.

“I assure you,” continued the senator, “that the Marquis d’Argens, Pyrrhon, Hobbes, and M. Naigeon are not scoundrels. I have all the philosophers in my library with gilded edges.”

“Like yourself, Count,” the Bishop put in.

The senator continued:

“I hate Diderot. He is an ideologue, a ranter, and a revolutionary; deep down he believes in God, and he is more narrow-minded than Voltaire. Voltaire mocked Needham, and he was wrong, because Needham’s eels prove that God is unnecessary. A drop of vinegar in a spoonful of flour paste provides the $_{\text{fiat}}$ lux_. Make the drop larger and the spoonful bigger, and you have the world. Man is the eel. So what use is the Eternal Father? The Jehovah theory wearies me, Bishop. It serves no purpose except to produce shallow people with empty reasoning. Down with that great All that torments me! Hurrah for Zero, which leaves me in peace! Between ourselves, and to empty my bag

and confess to my pastor, as I ought, I will admit that I have common sense. I am not enthusiastic about your Jesus, who preaches renunciation and sacrifice to the utmost limit. That is advice a miser gives to beggars. Renunciation—why? Sacrifice—to what end? I do not see one wolf giving itself up for the happiness of another wolf. So let us stay with nature. We are at the top; let us have a philosophy worthy of that. What is the use of being at the top if one can see no farther than the end of other people's noses? Let us live cheerfully. Life is everything. That man has another future somewhere else—above, below, anywhere—I do not believe a single word of it. Ah yes, sacrifice and renunciation are recommended to me; I am supposed to watch everything I do; I must rack my brains over good and evil, the just and the unjust, the _fas_– and the _nefas_–. Why? Because I shall have to give an account of my actions. When? After death. What a splendid dream! After my death, it will take a very clever person to catch me. Try seizing a handful of dust with a shadow-hand, if you can. Let us speak plainly, we who are initiated and have lifted the veil of Isis: there is no such thing as good or evil; there is only vegetation. Let us look for what is real. Let us get to the bottom of it. Let us go into it completely. What the devil, let us get to the bottom of it! We must sniff out the truth, dig it out of the earth, and seize it. Then it gives you exquisite pleasures. Then you become strong, and you laugh. I am planted squarely on the bottom, I am. Immortality, Bishop, is a gamble, a matter of waiting for dead men's shoes. Ah, what a charming promise! Trust it if you like. What a fine destiny Adam has! We are souls, and we shall be angels, with blue wings on our shoulder blades. Help me out

here: is it not Tertullian who says that the blessed will travel from star to star? Very well. We shall be the grasshoppers of the stars. And then, on top of that, we shall see God. Ta, ta, ta! What nonsense all these paradises are! God is an absurd monster. I would not say that in the _Moniteur_, by God, but I may whisper it among friends. _Inter pocula_. To sacrifice the world for paradise is to let the prey go for the sake of the shadow. Be fooled by the infinite? I am not such an idiot. I am a nothing. I call myself Monsieur le Comte Nothing, senator. Did I exist before my birth? No. Shall I exist after death? No. What am I? A little dust gathered into an organism. What am I to do on this earth? The choice is mine: suffer or enjoy. Where will suffering lead me? To nothingness—but I shall have suffered. Where 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. Better to be the tooth than the grass. That is my wisdom. After that, go wherever I send you; the gravedigger is there, and for some of us the Pantheon. Everything falls into the great hole. End. _Finis_. Total liquidation. That is the vanishing point. Death is death, believe me. I laugh at the idea that anyone has anything to tell me about it. Nurses' tales; bogeys for children; Jehovah for men. No, our tomorrow is night. Beyond the tomb there is nothing but the same nothingness for all. You may have been Sardanapalus or Vincent de Paul—it makes no difference. That is the truth. So above all, live your life. Make use of your _l_ while you have it. Truly, Bishop, I tell you that I have a philosophy of my own, and I have my philosophers. I do not let myself be taken in by that nonsense. Of course, there must be something for those who are down and out—for barefoot beggars,

knife-grinders, and miserable wretches. Legends, chimæras, the soul, immortality, paradise, the stars—these are provided for them to swallow. They gulp 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 do not object to that; but I reserve Monsieur Naigeon for myself. The good God is good for the populace."

The Bishop clapped his hands.

"Now that is real talk!" he exclaimed. "What an excellent, truly marvelous thing materialism is! Not everyone who wants it can get it. Ah, but once a man has it, he is no longer anyone's fool. He does not stupidly let himself be exiled like Cato, or stoned like Stephen, or burned alive like Jeanne d'Arc. Those who manage to acquire this admirable materialism enjoy feeling that they are beyond responsibility. They can tell themselves they may swallow everything without a qualm—positions, sinecures, honors, power, whether honestly or dishonestly gained, profitable recantations, useful betrayals, delicious surrenders of conscience—and then go down to the grave with their digestion complete. How pleasant that must be! I do not say this with you in mind, senator. Even so, I cannot help congratulating you. You great lords, so you say, have a philosophy of your own, made for yourselves alone—exquisite, refined, available only to the rich, suited to every occasion, and wonderfully fitted to season the pleasures of life. This philosophy has been drawn up from the depths and dug out by special searchers. But you are kindly princes, and you do not think it a bad arrangement that belief in the good God should serve as the philosophy of the people, much as a goose stuffed with chestnuts is the poor man's

truffled turkey.”

CHAPTER IX—THE BROTHER AS SEEN BY THE SISTER

To give some idea of the Bishop of D——’s household, and of the way those two saintly women made their actions, their thoughts, and even their easily alarmed feminine instincts conform to the Bishop’s habits and aims—without his ever needing to explain himself—we can do no better than quote here a letter from Mademoiselle Baptistine to Madame la Vicomtesse de Boischevron, her childhood friend. We have this letter in our possession.

D——, Dec. 16, 18—. MY DEAR MADAM: Not a day goes by without our talking about you. That has become our regular habit, but now there is another reason as well. Just imagine: while washing and dusting the ceilings and walls, Madame Magloire made some discoveries. Our two rooms, with their old wallpaper covered over in whitewash, would not look out of place in a château like yours. Madame Magloire has stripped off all the paper, and there were all sorts of things underneath. My drawing room has no furniture, and we use it to spread out the laundry after washing. It is fifteen feet high and eighteen feet square, with a ceiling that was once painted and gilded, and with beams like yours. All of that had been covered with cloth when this house was used as the hospital. The woodwork, too, dates from our grandmothers' time. But my own room is the one you really should see. Under at least ten layers of pasted paper, Madame Magloire discovered some paintings. They are not exactly fine, but they are quite respectable. The subject is

Telemachus being made a knight by Minerva in certain gardens whose name I cannot recall—in short, the place where the Roman ladies went one particular night. What can I tell you? I have Romans, Roman ladies [here occurs an illegible word], and the whole procession. Madame Magloire has cleaned everything. This summer she plans to have the small damaged places repaired and the whole thing revarnished, and then my room will be a true museum. She also found, in a corner of the attic, two old-fashioned wooden pier tables. We were asked two crowns of six francs each to regild them, but it is far better to give that money to the poor. Besides, they are very ugly, and I would much rather have a round mahogany table.

I am always very happy. My brother is so good. He gives everything he has to the poor and the sick. We are very cramped here. The winter is hard in this country, and we truly must do something for those who are in need. We are almost comfortably supplied with light and heat. As you see, those are great luxuries for us.

My brother has his own ways. When he speaks of it, he says that this is how a bishop ought to be. Just imagine—the door of our house is never locked. Anyone who wishes to come in finds himself at once in my brother's room. He is afraid of nothing, not even at night. That, he says, is his kind of courage.

He does not want Madame Magloire or me to feel any fear for him. He puts himself in all kinds of danger, and he does not even like us to seem to notice it. You have to know how to understand him.

He goes out in the rain, walks through flooded roads, and travels in winter. He is afraid of neither dangerous roads, risky encounters, nor the night.

Last year he went completely alone into a region full of robbers. He would not let us go with him. He was gone for two weeks. When he came back, nothing had happened to him. People had thought he was dead, but he was perfectly well. He said, “This is how I was robbed!” Then he opened a trunk full of jewels—the entire treasure of the cathedral of Embrun—which the thieves had given him.

When he came back that time, I could not help scolding him a little. Still, I was careful to speak only when the carriage was making noise, so that no one could hear me.

At first I used to say to myself, “There is no danger that will stop him; he is formidable.” Now I have grown used to it. I signal to Madam Magloire not to oppose him. He puts himself at risk as he thinks best. I lead Madam Magloire away, go to my room, pray for him, and fall asleep. I am at peace, because I know that if anything happened to him, it would be the end of me as well. I would go to the good God with my brother and my bishop. It was harder for Madam Magloire than for me to get used to what she calls his recklessness. But now she has grown accustomed to it too. We pray together, tremble together, and fall asleep. If the devil came into this house, he would be allowed to enter. After all, what do we have to fear here? There is always someone with us who is stronger than we are. The devil may pass through, but the good God lives here.

That is enough for me. My brother no longer needs to say a word. I understand him without his speaking, and we leave ourselves in the care of Providence. That is how one must live with a man of such greatness of soul.

I questioned my brother about the information you wanted concerning the Faux family. You know that he knows everything about such matters and remembers them well, since he is still a devoted royalist. They are indeed a very old Norman family from the district of Caen. Five hundred years ago there were a Raoul de Faux, a Jean de Faux, and a Thomas de Faux, all gentlemen, and one of them was seigneur de Rochefort. The last was Guy-Étienne-Alexandre, who commanded a regiment and held some post in the light horse of Bretagne. His daughter, Marie-Louise, married Adrien-Charles de Gramont, son of Duke Louis de Gramont, peer of France, colonel of the French Guards, and lieutenant-general of the army. The name is written Faux, Fauq, and Faoucq.

Dear Madame, commend us to the prayers of your saintly relative, Monsieur the Cardinal. As for your dear Sylvanie, she was right not to spend the little time she has with you writing to me. She is well, works as you would want her to, and loves me.

That is all I ask. The keepsake she sent through you arrived safely, and it makes me very happy. My health is not too bad, and yet I grow thinner every day. Farewell; I have come to the end of my paper, so I must leave you. A thousand good wishes.

Baptistine.

P.S. Your grandnephew is delightful. Do you realize that he will soon be five years old? Yesterday he saw someone riding past on horseback wearing knee-caps, and he said, “What has he got on his knees?” He is a delightful child! His little brother is dragging an old broom around the room as if it were a carriage, saying, “Hu!”

As this letter shows, these two women knew how to adapt themselves to the Bishop’s ways with that particular feminine insight that understands a man better than he understands himself. The Bishop of D——, despite the gentle, open expression he always wore, sometimes did things that were great, daring, and magnificent without seeming in the least aware of it. They were frightened, but they left him alone. Sometimes Madame Magloire tried to object beforehand, but never during the act or afterward. Once he had begun something, they never interfered with so much as a word or a gesture. At certain moments, without his needing to say anything, and probably without even realizing it himself, so complete was his simplicity, they dimly sensed that he was acting as a bishop; then they became no more than two shadows in the house. They served him quietly. And if obedience meant disappearing, they disappeared. With admirable instinct and delicacy, they understood that some kinds of care can become a burden. So even when they believed he was in danger, they understood—not exactly his thoughts, but his nature—so well that they stopped watching

over him. They entrusted him to God.

Moreover, Baptistine said, as we have just seen, that her brother’s death would mean her own. Madame Magloire did not say so, but she knew it.

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

A little later than the date of the letter quoted in the preceding pages, he did something which, if the whole town was to be believed, was even more dangerous than his journey across the bandit-infested mountains.

In the countryside near D——, a man lived entirely alone. We should say at once that this man had once been a member of the Convention. His name was G——

A former member of the Convention, G—— was spoken of with a kind of horror in the small circle of D——. A member of the Convention—imagine that! It belonged to a time when people addressed each other as thou– and said "citizen." To them, this man was almost a monster. He had not voted for the king's execution, but he had come close. He was practically a regicide. He had been a dreadful man. How was it, people asked, that when the legitimate princes returned, a man like that had not been brought before a provost's court? They need not have beheaded him, of course; mercy should be shown, certainly. But at least he might have been exiled for life. An example should have been made of him, in short, and so on. Besides, he was an atheist, like all the rest of those people. It was geese gossiping about a vulture.

But was G—— really a vulture? Yes, if he was judged by the fierce side of the solitary life he lived. Since he had not voted for the king's death, he had not been included in the decrees of exile, and so he had been able to remain in France.

He lived three-quarters of an hour from the town, far from any village and far from any road, in some hidden bend of a very wild valley. No one knew exactly where. People said he had some sort of patch of land there—a hole, a den, a lair. He had no neighbors, and not even passers-by. Since he had settled in that valley, the path leading to it had vanished under the grass. People spoke of the place as if it were the home of an executioner.

Even so, the Bishop kept thinking about him. From time to time he would look toward the horizon, at the spot where a cluster of trees marked the valley of the former member of the Convention, and say, "There is a lonely soul over there."

And deep within himself he added, "I owe him a visit."

But, to be honest, this idea, which had seemed natural at first, began after a moment's thought to strike him as strange, impossible, and almost repellent. Deep down, he shared the general feeling, and the old member of the Convention inspired in him—without his clearly realizing it—that emotion which comes close to hatred and is so well captured by the word estrangement.

Still, should a shepherd shrink back because one of his sheep has the scab? No. But what a sheep this was!

The good Bishop was troubled. Sometimes he started out in that direction, only to turn back.

At last, a rumor spread through the town one day: a young shepherd who served the member of the Convention in his hut had come looking for a doctor. The old wretch was said to be dying. Paralysis was getting worse, and he was not expected to live through the night. “Thank God!” some people added.

The Bishop took his staff and put on his cloak because, as we have said, his cassock was far too worn thin, and because the evening breeze was sure to rise soon. Then he set out.

The sun was setting and had almost reached the horizon when the Bishop arrived at the excommunicated place. His heart beat a little faster as he realized he was near the lair. He crossed a ditch, jumped a hedge, pushed through a fence of dead branches, and entered a neglected paddock. He took a few bold steps, and then suddenly, at the far edge of the wasteland behind some tall brambles, he saw the hut.

It was a very low hut, poor, small, and clean, with a vine fastened to the outside wall.

Near the door, in an old wheelchair—the peasants’ armchair—sat a white-haired man, smiling at the sun.

A young boy, the shepherd lad, stood beside him. He was offering the old man a jar of milk.

As the Bishop watched, the old man said, “Thank you. I need nothing.” And his smile left the sun and came to rest on the child.

The Bishop stepped forward. At the sound of his footsteps, the old man turned his head, and his face showed all the surprise a man can still feel after a long life.

“This is the first time since I have been here,” he said, “that anyone has come in. Who are you, sir?”

The Bishop answered:

“My name is Bienvenu Myriel.”

“Bienvenu Myriel? I have heard that name. Are you the man the people call Monseigneur Welcome?”

“I am.”

The old man went on with a half-smile:

“Then you are my bishop?”

“Something like that.”

“Come in, sir.”

The Convention member held out his hand to the Bishop, but the Bishop did not take it. He only said:

“I am glad to see I was misinformed. You certainly do not seem ill to me.”

“Monsieur,” the old man replied, “I am about to recover.”

He paused, then said:

“I shall die in three hours.”

Then he went on:

“I know a little about medicine; I know how the last hour approaches. Yesterday only my feet were cold. Today the chill has risen to my knees. Now I can feel it climbing to my waist. When it reaches my heart, I shall stop. The sun is beautiful, is it not? I had them wheel me out here so I could take one last look at everything. You may talk to me; it does not tire me. You did well to come and see a man who is about to die. It is good to have witnesses at such a moment. We all have our whims; I would have liked to last until dawn, but I know I shall scarcely live three more hours. By then it will be night. What does it matter, after all? Dying is a simple thing. One does not need light for that. So be it. I shall die by starlight.”

The old man turned to the shepherd boy:

“Go to bed; you were awake all last night, and you are tired.”

The child went into the hut.

The old man watched him with his eyes and added, as if speaking to himself:

“I shall die while he sleeps. The two kinds of sleep may be good neighbors.”

The Bishop was not moved as one might have expected. He did not feel that he saw God in this way of dying. Let us say everything plainly, for the small contradictions of great hearts must be noted along with the rest: he, who at times so enjoyed laughing at “His Grace,” was somewhat offended that he had not been addressed as Monseigneur, and he was almost tempted to reply with “citizen.” He felt a sudden urge toward a

touchy kind of familiarity, common enough among doctors and priests, though not natural to him. After all, this man—this member of the Convention, this representative of the people—had once been one of the powerful men of the earth. For the first time in his life, perhaps, the Bishop felt inclined to be severe.

Meanwhile, the member of the Convention had been watching him with quiet warmth and modest friendliness. If one looked closely, one might even have seen in it that humility so natural in a man who is close to returning to dust.

For his part, the Bishop, though he usually kept his curiosity in check because he considered it almost a fault, could not help studying the member of the Convention with close attention. Since that attention did not come from sympathy, his conscience would have reproached him for it in the case of any other man. To him, a member of the Convention seemed almost outside the law, even outside the law of charity. G—— was calm, his body nearly upright, his voice still resonant. He was one of those men in their eighties who leave physiologists astonished. The Revolution produced many such men, as if they belonged to that age. In this old man, one felt the presence of someone who had been thoroughly tested. Though he was so near death, he still had all the movements of a healthy man. In his clear gaze, his steady voice, and the strong set of his shoulders, there was something that seemed to unsettle death itself. Azrael, the Mohammedan angel of the tomb, would have turned away, thinking he had come to the wrong door. G—— seemed to be dying only because he chose to. There was

freedom even in his suffering. Only his legs were still. There the shadows held him fast. His feet were cold and lifeless, but his head still lived with all the force of life and seemed filled with light. At that solemn moment, G—— resembled the king in the Eastern tale who was flesh above and marble below.

There was a stone nearby, and the Bishop sat down on it. He began abruptly.

“I congratulate you,” he said, in a tone meant more for rebuke than praise. “So, after all, you did not vote for the king’s death.”

The old member of the Convention seemed not to notice the bitterness in the words “after all.” He answered. The smile had completely vanished from his face.

“Do not congratulate me too much, sir. I did vote for the death of the tyrant.”

It was austerity answering severity.

“What do you mean?” the Bishop went on.

“What I mean is that man has a tyrant—ignorance. I voted for the death of that tyrant. That tyrant gave birth to royalty, which is authority wrongly understood, while science is authority rightly understood. Man should be governed only by science.”

“And conscience,” the Bishop added.

“It is the same thing. Conscience is the measure of the inborn science we carry within us.”

Monseigneur Bienvenu listened with some astonishment to this way of speaking, which was entirely new to him.

The member of the Convention went on:

“As for Louis XVI, I said no. I did not think I had the right to kill a man; but I felt it was my duty to destroy evil. I voted for the end of the tyrant—that is, the end of prostitution for women, the end of slavery for men, the end of night for the child. In voting for the Republic, I voted for all that. I voted for fraternity, harmony, and dawn. I helped bring down prejudice and error. When prejudice and error crumble away, light appears. We brought about the fall of the old world, and that old world, that vessel of miseries, by overturning itself upon the human race, became an urn of joy.”

“A mixed joy,” said the Bishop.

“You may call it troubled joy, and today, after that fatal return of the past called 1814, a joy that has vanished. Alas, the work was incomplete, I admit it. We destroyed the ancient regime in fact, but we could not wipe it out completely from people’s minds. It is not enough to destroy abuses; customs must also change. The mill is gone, but the wind is still there.”

“You have destroyed. Destruction may sometimes be useful, but I distrust destruction when it is mixed with wrath.”

“Right has its wrath, Bishop, and the wrath of right is one element of progress. In any case, whatever people may say, the French Revolution is the greatest step forward of the human race since the coming of Christ. It may have been incomplete,

but it was sublime. It released all the unknown forces of society; it softened hearts, calmed, soothed, and enlightened. It sent the waves of civilization across the earth. It was a good thing. The French Revolution is the consecration of humanity."

The Bishop could not help murmuring:

"Yes? '93!"

The member of the Convention straightened in his chair with a grim, almost mournful solemnity and cried out—as much as a dying man could cry out:

"Ah, there it is—'93! I was waiting for that word. A storm had been gathering for fifteen hundred years, and at the end of those fifteen hundred years, it broke. You are putting the lightning on trial."

The Bishop felt, though he may not have admitted it even to himself, that something inside him had gone out. Even so, he kept up appearances. He replied:

"The judge speaks in the name of justice; the priest speaks in the name of mercy, which is only a higher form of justice. A thunderbolt must not strike by mistake." Then, looking steadily at the member of the Convention, he added, "Louis XVII?"

The conventionary reached out and gripped the Bishop's arm.

"Louis XVII! Let us consider that. Whom are you mourning? The innocent child? Very well; then I mourn with you. The royal child? On that, I ask time to think. To me, the brother of Cartouche—an innocent child hanged by the armpits in the Place de Grève until he died, for no crime except being

Cartouche's brother—is no less tragic than the grandson of Louis XV., an innocent child tortured in the Tower of the Temple for no crime except being the grandson of Louis XV."

"Monsieur," said the Bishop, "I do not like those names being joined together."

"Cartouche? Louis XV.? Which of the two do you object to?"

A brief silence followed. The Bishop almost regretted coming, and yet he felt, in some vague and unsettling way, deeply shaken.

The conventionary went on:

"Ah, Monsieur Priest, you do not like the bluntness of truth. Christ did. He took up a rod and drove the merchants out of the Temple. His whip, crackling with lightning, spoke harsh truths. When he cried, _'Sinite parvulos,'_ he made no distinction among children. He would not have hesitated to place the Dauphin of Barabbas beside the Dauphin of Herod. Innocence, Monsieur, is its own crown. Innocence does not need to be a highness. It is just as sacred in rags as in fleurs-de-lis."

"That is true," said the Bishop softly.

"I still insist," continued Conventionary G——. "You mentioned Louis XVII to me. Let's be clear about this. Should we mourn all innocents, all martyrs, all children—the humble as well as the great? I agree. But if that is so, then, as I told you, we must go back earlier than '93, and our tears must begin before Louis XVII. I will weep with you for the children of kings, if you will weep with me for the children of the people."

“I weep for all of them,” said the Bishop.

“Equally!” exclaimed Conventionary G——. “And if the balance must tip, let it tip toward the people. They have suffered longer.”

Another silence followed. The Conventionary broke it first. He pushed himself up on one elbow and absently pinched his cheek between thumb and forefinger, as people do when they are questioning and judging. Then he fixed the Bishop with a look charged with all the force of a dying man. It was almost an outburst.

"Yes, sir, the people have suffered for a long time. And wait—that is not all. Why have you just been questioning me and speaking to me about Louis XVII? I do not know you. Ever since I came to this region, I have lived alone inside this enclosure. I have never stepped outside, and I have seen no one except the child who helps me. I have heard your name, it is true, but only vaguely, and very badly pronounced, I must say. But that proves nothing. Clever men have so many ways of deceiving that honest fellow, the people. By the way, I did not hear your carriage. No doubt you left it over there, behind the copse where the roads divide. I tell you, I do not know you. You have told me that you are the Bishop, but that tells me nothing about your moral character. So I ask again: who are you? You are a bishop—that is, a prince of the Church, one of those gilded men with coats of arms and incomes, with great prebends—the bishopric of D——, fifteen thousand francs in fixed income, ten thousand in extras; twenty-five thousand francs in all. You have kitchens, liveries, and fine meals. You eat moor-hens on Friday.

You parade about with a lackey in front and a lackey behind, in a grand coach, and you have palaces, and you ride in carriages in the name of Jesus Christ, who went barefoot! You are a prelate—with income, palace, horses, servants, a good table, all the pleasures of life. You have all this like the others, and like the others, you enjoy it. Very well. But that tells me either too much or too little. It does not enlighten me about the true and essential worth of the man who has come here, probably intending to bring me wisdom. To whom am I speaking? Who are you?"

The Bishop lowered his head and replied, "Vermis sum—I am a worm."

"A worm of the earth in a carriage?" the conventionary growled.

Now it was the conventionary's turn to be arrogant, and the Bishop's turn to be humble.

The Bishop went on gently:

"Very well, sir. But explain to me how my carriage, standing a few paces away behind those trees, how my good table and the moor-hens I eat on Friday, how my income of twenty-five thousand francs, 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 if brushing away a cloud.

"Before I answer you," he said, "I beg your pardon. I have just done you a wrong, sir. You are in my house; you are my guest, and I owe you courtesy. You are challenging my ideas, and I

should limit myself to answering your arguments. My wealth and my pleasures give me an advantage over you in this discussion, but good taste requires that I not use them. I promise that I will not do so again."

"Thank you," said the Bishop.

G—— went on.

"Let us go back to the explanation you asked me for. Where were we? What were you saying to me? That '93 was merciless?"

"Merciless, yes," said the Bishop. "What do you think of Marat applauding the guillotine?"

"What do you think of Bossuet singing the _Te Deum_ over the dragonnades?"

The reply was a harsh one, but it struck home with the precision of a steel point. The Bishop flinched. No answer came to him, but he was offended by this way of referring to Bossuet. Even the best minds have their idols, and they can feel a vague hurt when logic shows them no respect.

The conventionary began to gasp; the asthmatic struggle mixed with his final breaths kept breaking his voice. Even so, his eyes still held a perfect clarity of soul. He continued:—

"Let me add a few more words on several points; I am willing to do so. Setting the Revolution aside—which, taken as a whole, is a tremendous affirmation of humanity—'93 is, sadly, an answer. You call it relentless, sir; but what do you say of the monarchy as a whole? Carrier is a bandit; but what do you call Montrevel?

Fouquier-Tainville is a scoundrel; but what is your judgment of Lamoignon-Bâville? Maillard is dreadful; but what about Saulx-Tavannes, if you please? Duchêne senior is savage; but what word will you let me use for the elder Letellier? Jourdan Coupe-Tête is a monster; but not as great a one as Monsieur the Marquis de Louvois. Sir, sir, I pity Marie Antoinette, archduchess and queen; but I also pity that poor Huguenot woman who, in 1685, under Louis the Great, while she was nursing an infant, was tied to a stake, naked to the waist, with her child kept at a distance. Her breasts swelled with milk, and her heart with anguish. The little one, hungry and pale, saw that breast, cried, and suffered. The executioner said to the woman, who was both mother and nurse, 'Recant!' He gave her a choice between the death of her child and the death of her conscience. What do you say to that Tantalus torture inflicted on a mother? Remember this well, sir: the French Revolution had reasons to exist. The future will absolve its anger. Its result is a better world. From its most terrible blows, a caress for the human race emerges. I will shorten this; I will stop. I have too much the advantage. Besides, I am dying."

And, no longer looking at the Bishop, the conventionary ended his reflections with these calm words:

"Yes, the brutal acts of progress are called revolutions. When they are over, one thing becomes clear: the human race has been treated harshly, but it has moved forward."

The conventionary had no doubt that he had gradually overcome all the Bishop's deepest defenses. One remained, however, and from that last stronghold of Monseigneur

Bienvenu's resistance came this reply, in which almost all the severity of his opening tone returned:

"Progress should believe in God. Good cannot be served by impiety. An atheist is only a poor guide for the human race."

The former representative of the people said nothing. A fit of trembling came over him. He looked up toward heaven, and a tear slowly formed in his eyes. When it filled his eyelid, it ran down his pale cheek, and he said, almost stammering, very softly and to himself, with his gaze fixed on the depths:

"O thou! O ideal! You alone exist!"

The Bishop felt an indescribable shock.

After a pause, the old man raised one finger toward heaven and said:

"The infinite exists. He is there. If the infinite had no person, then person would be limitless; 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 spoke these last words in a loud voice, with a shiver of ecstasy, as if he were seeing someone. When he finished, his eyes closed. The effort had exhausted him. It was clear that, in a single moment, he had lived through the few hours he had left. What he had said had brought him closer to him who is in death. The final moment was near.

The Bishop understood. Time was running out. He had come as a priest. Little by little, his extreme coldness had turned into deep emotion. He looked at those closed eyes, took that

wrinkled, aged, ice-cold hand in his own, and bent over the dying man.

“This is God’s hour. Do you not think it would be a pity if we had met for nothing?”

The conventionary opened his eyes again. His face bore an expression of gravity mixed with gloom.

“Bishop,” he said slowly, a slowness that probably came less from failing strength than from the dignity of his spirit, “I spent my life in meditation, study, and reflection. I was sixty years old when my country called on me and ordered me to take part in its affairs. I obeyed. Abuses existed, and I fought them. Tyrannies existed, and I destroyed them. Rights and principles existed, and I proclaimed and affirmed them. Our territory was invaded, and I defended it. France was threatened, and I offered my breast. I was not rich; now I am poor. I was once one of the rulers of the state; the treasury vaults were so full of coin that we had to brace the walls, which were close to giving way under the weight of gold and silver. I ate my dinner in Dead Tree Street for twenty-two sous. I helped the oppressed and comforted those who suffered. It is true that I tore the cloth from the altar, but I did it to bind my country’s wounds. I have always supported the forward march of the human race, onward toward the light, and at times I have opposed progress without mercy. When the occasion arose, I even protected my own enemies, men of your profession. And at Peteghem, in Flanders, on the very site where the Merovingian kings had their summer palace, there is a convent of Urbanists, the Abbey of Sainte Claire en Beaulieu, which I saved in 1793. I did my duty as

best I could, and all the good I was able to do. After that, I was hunted, pursued, persecuted, slandered, mocked, scorned, cursed, and outlawed. For many years now, with my white hair, I have known that many people think they have the right to despise me. To the poor and ignorant crowd, I wear the face of a damned man. And I accept this lonely hatred without hating anyone myself. Now I am eighty-six years old. I am near death. What have you come to ask of me?"

"Your blessing," said the Bishop.

And he knelt.

When the Bishop lifted his head again, the conventionary's face had taken on a solemn grandeur. He had just died.

The Bishop returned home, deeply absorbed in thoughts we cannot know. He spent the whole night in prayer. The next morning, some bold and curious people tried to speak to him about Convention member G——; he answered only by pointing toward heaven.

From that moment on, he became even more tender and brotherly toward all children and everyone who suffered.

Any mention of "that old wretch of a G——" would throw him into a strange, absorbed mood. No one could deny that the passing of that soul before his own, and the reflection of that great conscience on his, played some part in his movement toward perfection.

This "pastoral visit" naturally gave all the little local circles something to whisper about.

“Was the bedside of a dying man like that really the right place for a bishop? There was clearly no conversion to hope for. All those revolutionaries are apostates anyway. So why go there? What was there to see? He must have been very curious indeed to watch a soul carried off by the devil.”

One day, an impertinent dowager of the sort who thinks herself witty said to him, “Monseigneur, people are asking when Your Greatness will receive the red cap!” “Oh! oh! that is a rather crude color,” the Bishop replied. “It is fortunate that those who scorn it in a cap still honor it in a hat.”

CHAPTER XI—A LIMIT

We would be in great danger of deceiving ourselves if we concluded from this that Monseigneur Welcome was “a philosophical bishop” or “a patriotic curé.” His meeting with conventionary G————one might almost call it a union—left in his mind a kind of astonishment that made him gentler still. That was all.

Although Monseigneur Bienvenu was very far from being a politician, this may be the right place to say, very briefly, what his position was in relation to the events of that time—if, indeed, Monseigneur Bienvenu ever thought of himself as taking a position at all.

So let us go back a few years.

Some time after M. Myriel became bishop, the Emperor made him a baron of the Empire, along with many other bishops. As everyone knows, the Pope was arrested on the night of July 5 to 6, 1809. After that, Napoleon summoned M. Myriel to the synod of the bishops of France and Italy, which was convened in Paris. The synod met at Notre-Dame and first assembled on June 15, 1811, under the presidency of Cardinal Fesch. M. Myriel was one of the ninety-five bishops who attended. But he was present for only one session and three or four private meetings. As the bishop of a mountain diocese, living very close to nature in simplicity and hardship, he seemed to bring ideas into the company of these eminent men that changed the whole atmosphere of the assembly. He soon returned to D——. When people asked why he had come back so quickly, he answered,

"I made them uncomfortable. The outside air reached them through me. I had the effect of an open door."

On another occasion he said, "What can you expect? Those gentlemen are princes. I am only a poor peasant bishop."

The truth is that he offended them. Among other unusual things, it is said that one evening, when he was at the house of one of his most distinguished colleagues, he happened to say: "What beautiful clocks! What beautiful carpets! What beautiful liveries! They must be a great burden. I would not want all those luxuries constantly crying 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 note, in passing, that hating luxury is not, in itself, a thoughtful position. Taken to its end, that hatred would mean hating the arts as well. Even so, luxury is wrong in churchmen, except when it belongs to religious display and ceremony. It seems to show habits with very little charity in them. A wealthy priest is a contradiction. A priest must stay close to the poor. And can someone live day and night among so much suffering, misfortune, and poverty without carrying a little of that misery on himself, as labor carries dust? Can you imagine a man standing by a brazier and not feeling warm? Can you imagine a worker laboring beside a furnace without a singed hair, blackened nails, a drop of sweat, or a speck of ash on his face? The first proof of charity in a priest, and especially in a bishop, is poverty.

This was no doubt what the Bishop of D—— thought.

Still, one should not suppose that he shared what we call the "ideas of the century" on certain delicate matters. He took very little part in the theological disputes of the time and kept silent on questions involving both Church and State. But if he had been pressed hard, it seems likely that he would have proved more ultramontane than gallican. Since we are drawing his portrait and do not wish to hide anything, we must also add that he was cold toward Napoleon after his fall. From 1813 on, he joined in or approved every hostile demonstration. He refused to see Napoleon when he passed through on his return from the island of Elba, and during the Hundred Days he did not order public prayers for the Emperor in his diocese.

Besides his sister, Mademoiselle Baptistine, he had two brothers, one a general and the other a prefect. He wrote to both fairly often. For a time he was severe toward the first, because during the disembarkation at Cannes, while commanding in Provence, the general had placed himself at the head of twelve hundred men and pursued the Emperor as if he were someone one wished to let escape. His correspondence with the other brother, the former prefect—a fine, worthy man living in retirement on Rue Cassette in Paris—remained more affectionate.

So Monseigneur Bienvenu, too, had his moment of partisanship, his moment of bitterness, his passing cloud. The shadow of the passions of the time crossed this great and gentle spirit, a spirit usually occupied with eternal things. A man like this would certainly have been better off without political opinions. Let us be clear about what we mean: we are not confusing what are

called “political opinions” with the great desire for progress, with that noble faith—patriotic, democratic, humane—which in our day ought to be the very foundation of every generous mind. Without going too deeply into questions only indirectly connected with this book, we will simply say this: it would have been better if Monseigneur Bienvenu had not been a Royalist, and if his gaze had never, even for a moment, turned away from that calm contemplation in which one can clearly see, above the illusions and hatreds of this world, above the turbulent changes of human affairs, the shining of those three pure lights: truth, justice, and charity.

Even if we admit that God did not make Monseigneur Welcome for political office, we should still understand and admire his protest in the name of justice and liberty, his proud defiance, and his rightful though dangerous resistance to the all-powerful Napoleon. But what we admire in people who are rising, we admire less in those who are falling. We love the struggle only while real danger remains. In any case, only those who fought from the beginning have the right to destroy at the end. A man who was not a firm accuser in times of success should keep silent in the face of ruin. Only the one who denounced power while it was triumphant has the right to condemn it when it collapses. As for us, when Providence steps in and strikes, we let it do its work. 1812 began to disarm our indignation. In 1813, the cowardly breaking of silence by that previously mute legislative body, emboldened now by disaster, showed nothing but qualities that provoked contempt. And in 1814, in the presence of those marshals who had betrayed, in the presence of that senate which passed from one dunghill to another,

insulting after having worshipped, in the presence of that idolatry which, losing its footing, spat on its idol—it was a duty to turn away. In 1815, when final disasters were gathering in the air, when France shuddered at their dark approach, when Waterloo could already be seen dimly opening before Napoleon, the sorrowful acclamation of the army and the people for the man condemned by destiny was not ridiculous. And even after allowing for the despot, a heart like the Bishop of D——'s perhaps ought not to have failed to recognize the noble and moving sight of a great nation and a great man embracing on the edge of the abyss.

With that one exception, he was in every way just, honest, fair, intelligent, humble yet dignified, generous, and kind—which is simply another form of generosity. He was a priest, a wise man, and fully human. It must also be said that even in the political opinions for which we have just criticized him, and which we are inclined to judge rather harshly, he was tolerant and easygoing—perhaps more so than we are as we speak of him here. The town-hall porter had been appointed by the Emperor. He was an old non-commissioned officer of the Old Guard, a member of the Legion of Honor from Austerlitz, and as devoted to Bonaparte as the eagle itself. From time to time, this poor man would let slip some reckless remarks, which the law in those days labeled _seditious speeches_. After the imperial profile was removed from the Legion of Honor, he never again put on his uniform, saying that otherwise he would be forced to wear his cross. He had piously removed the imperial image from the cross Napoleon had given him. That left a hole, and he refused to put anything in its place. _"I would rather die,"_ he said,

"than wear the three frogs on my heart!" He liked to mock Louis XVIII out loud. _"That gouty old thing in English gaiters!"_ he would say. _"Let him go off to Prussia with that pigtail of his."_ He took pleasure in cursing, in a single outburst, the two things he hated most: Prussia and England. He did this so often that he lost his job. There he was, thrown out, with his wife and children and no bread to eat. The Bishop sent for him, scolded him gently, and appointed him beadle of the cathedral.

Over the course of nine years, Monseigneur Bienvenu, through his holy actions and gentle manner, had inspired in the town of D—— a kind of tender, childlike reverence. Even his behavior toward Napoleon had been accepted and, in a quiet way, forgiven by the people—that good, somewhat weak flock who worshipped their emperor but loved their bishop.

CHAPTER XII—MONSEIGNEUR WELCOME IN SOLITUDE

A bishop is almost always surrounded by a whole squad of young abbés, much as a general is surrounded by a cluster of junior officers. Somewhere, the charming Saint Francis de Sales calls them “les prêtres blancs-becs” — callow priests. Every profession has its hopefuls, trailing after those who have already risen to prominence. No power exists without dependents. No fortune exists without its circle of followers. Those who hope to rise gather around those who shine in the present. Every capital has its retinue of officials. Every bishop with even a little influence has around him his own patrol of seminary cherubs, making the rounds, keeping order in the episcopal palace, and standing watch over monseigneur’s smile. To win a bishop’s favor is to get a foot in the stirrup on the way to becoming a subdeacon. One must move carefully along that path; the apostolic calling does not look down on a canonry.

Just as there are important people everywhere else, there are important mitres in the Church as well. These are the bishops who do well at Court: rich, well provided for, politically skilled, and fully accepted by the world. No doubt they know how to pray, but they also know how to ask for favors. They have no great hesitation about making an entire diocese revolve around them. They serve as links between the sacristy and diplomacy. They are more abbés than priests, more prelates than bishops. Fortunate are those who get close to them. Because they have

influence, they shower benefits on the attentive, the favored, and all the young men who know how to please: large parishes, prebends, archdeaconries, chaplaincies, and cathedral appointments, all while they wait for bishoprics of their own. As these men rise, they bring their followers up with them. It is a whole solar system in motion. Their splendor throws a purple glow over everyone around them. Behind the scenes, their success breaks down into a series of neat little promotions. The larger the patron's diocese, the richer the living for the favorite. And then there is Rome. A bishop who knows how to become an archbishop, an archbishop who knows how to become a cardinal, takes you along as his conclavist. You enter a papal court, receive the pallium, and before long you are an auditor, then a papal chamberlain, then a monsignor. From a Grace to an Eminence is only one step, and between Eminence and Holiness there is nothing but the smoke of a ballot. Every skullcap may dream of the tiara. Nowadays the priest is the only man who can become a king by regular means—and what a king: the highest king of all. What a breeding ground for ambition a seminary is, then. How many blushing choristers, how many young abbés, carry Perrette's milk pot on their heads. Who can say how easily ambition may call itself a vocation? Perhaps in complete sincerity, while still deceiving itself, devout as it is.

Monseigneur Bienvenu was poor, humble, and reserved, and no one counted him among the great bishops. That was obvious from the total lack of young priests around him. As we have seen, he had no influence in Paris. Not a single hopeful career tried to attach itself to this solitary old man. Not one budding ambition made the mistake of trying to grow in his shadow. His

canons and vicars-general were worthy old men, somewhat commonplace like himself, shut up with him in this diocese, with no path leading to a cardinal's rank. They resembled their bishop in one respect, with this difference: they were merely finished, while he was complete. Everyone understood that no one could rise to greatness under Monseigneur Bienvenu. So as soon as the young men he ordained left the seminary, they made sure to get recommendations to the archbishops of Aix or Auch and hurried away. For, after all, we must say it again: men want to be advanced. A saint living in an extreme state of self-denial is a dangerous neighbor. He might infect you with an incurable poverty, a stiffness in the joints that are useful for getting ahead, and, in short, more renunciation than you want. People avoid that kind of contagious virtue. That is why Monseigneur Bienvenu was so isolated. We live in the middle of a dark society. Success—that is the lesson corruption lets fall, drop by drop.

Let it be said in passing: success is a very ugly thing. Its false resemblance to merit deceives people. To the crowd, success looks almost the same as greatness. Success, that twin of talent, has one dupe—history. Only Juvenal and Tacitus protest against it. In our own day, a philosophy that is almost official has entered its service, wears its uniform, and waits in its antechamber. Succeed: that is the theory. Prosperity is taken as proof of ability. Win the lottery, and suddenly you are called a clever man. The man who triumphs is revered. Be born with a silver spoon in your mouth—everything follows from that. Be fortunate, and you will have all the rest; be happy, and people will think you great. Apart from five or six immense exceptions

that make up the glory of a century, contemporary admiration is nothing but short-sightedness. Gilding passes for gold. There is no objection to arriving first by pure chance, so long as you do arrive. The crowd is an old Narcissus, in love with its own reflection, applauding the vulgar mob. That vast power by which a man becomes Moses, Æschylus, Dante, Michael Angelo, or Napoleon, the multitude instantly awards, with loud acclaim, to anyone who reaches his goal, whatever that goal may be. Let a notary turn himself into a deputy; let a false Corneille write _Tiridate_; let a eunuch come into possession of a harem; let a military Prudhomme happen by accident to win the decisive battle of an age; let an apothecary invent cardboard shoe-soles for the army of the Sambre-and-Meuse, and from that cardboard, sold as leather, build himself an income of four hundred thousand francs; let a pork-packer marry himself to usury and make it produce seven or eight millions, of which he is the father and it the mother; let a preacher become a bishop through the force of his nasal drawl; let the steward of a great family grow so rich in retirement that he is made minister of finances—and people call that Genius, just as they call the face of Mousqueton Beauty and the bearing of Claude Majesty. They confuse the constellations of the sky with those stars of the abyss that are formed in the soft mud of a puddle by the feet of ducks.

CHAPTER XIII—WHAT HE BELIEVED

We do not need to question the Bishop of D—— about his orthodoxy. In the presence of a soul like his, we can feel nothing but respect. A just man's conscience should be taken at his word. Besides, when certain natures are given, we can accept that every form of human virtue may fully develop within a faith different from our own.

What did he think about this doctrine or that mystery? Those secrets, judged in the inner court of conscience, are known only to the grave, where souls enter naked. What we do know is this: in his case, the struggles of faith never turned into hypocrisy. A diamond does not lose its brilliance. He believed as far as his powers allowed. "Credo in Patrem," he would often exclaim. And from his good works he drew that measure of peace which is enough for the conscience, and which whispers to a man, "Thou art with God!"

The point we feel bound to note is this: beyond the limits of his faith, the Bishop seemed to possess an overflowing abundance of love. It was there—_quia multum amavit_, because he loved much—that "serious men," "grave persons," and "reasonable people" saw him as vulnerable. Those are favorite phrases in our gloomy world, where pedantry gives the orders and egotism obeys. What was this excess of love? It was a calm kindness that extended to all people, as we have already said, and at times even to things. He lived without contempt. He was gentle toward all of God's creation. Every person, even the best,

carries some careless cruelty within them, which they reserve for animals. The Bishop of D—— had none of that harshness, though it is common enough among priests. He did not go as far as the Brahmin, but he seemed to have reflected on that saying from Ecclesiastes: “Who knoweth whither the soul of the animal goeth?” Ugliness of form or deformity of instinct did not disturb him or stir his anger. They moved him instead; they almost softened him. It was as if he withdrew into thought, searching beyond the visible limits of life for their cause, their explanation, or their excuse. At times he seemed to be asking God to lessen these penalties. Without anger, he studied that part of chaos which still remains in nature, with the eye of a scholar deciphering a palimpsest. This habit of reflection sometimes led him to say strange things. One morning he was in his garden and thought he was alone, though his sister was walking behind him without his noticing her. Suddenly he stopped and looked at something on the ground. It was a large, black, hairy, terrifying spider. His sister heard him say:

“Poor creature! It is not its fault!”

Why should we leave out these sayings, almost childlike in their divine kindness? They may seem childish, but this kind of sublime childishness belonged to Saint Francis of Assisi and to Marcus Aurelius as well. One day he sprained his ankle while trying not to step on an ant. That was how this righteous man lived. Sometimes he fell asleep in his garden, and nothing could have looked more venerable.

People said that in his youth—and even later, as a grown man—Monseigneur Bienvenu had been passionate, and perhaps even violent. The gentleness he showed to everyone was less a natural trait than the result of a deep conviction that life had slowly worked into his heart, one thought at a time. In a person's character, as in a rock, water can wear openings drop by drop. Once formed, those hollows cannot be erased; those shapes cannot be destroyed.

In 1815, as we believe we have already said, he turned seventy-five, though he did not look more than sixty. He was not tall; he was somewhat stout, and to keep that tendency in check he liked to take long walks. His step was steady, and his figure was only slightly bent, a detail from which we do not claim to draw any conclusion. Gregory XVI, at the age of eighty, stood upright and smiling, and that did not keep him from being a bad bishop. Monseigneur Welcome had what people call a "fine head," but he was so kind that they forgot how handsome it was.

When he spoke with the childlike cheerfulness that was one of his great charms, and that we have already mentioned, people immediately felt comfortable with him, and happiness seemed to shine from his whole being. His fresh, rosy complexion and his very white teeth, which he had kept into old age and which showed when he smiled, gave him that open, easy manner that makes people say of a man, "He's a good fellow," and of an old man, "He is a fine man." As you may recall, that was the impression he made on Napoleon. At first meeting, and to anyone seeing him for the first time, he seemed to be nothing

more than a fine old man. But if you stayed near him for a few hours and saw him even slightly thoughtful, that fine man gradually seemed transformed and took on an imposing quality that is hard to describe. His broad, serious forehead, made venerable by his white hair, seemed made venerable also by thought itself. Majesty shone from his goodness, yet his goodness did not cease to shine. One felt something like the emotion of seeing a smiling angel slowly unfold his wings without ceasing to smile. A deep, inexpressible respect entered you little by little and rose to your heart, and you felt that before you stood one of those strong, deeply tested, and merciful souls in whom thought has become so great that it can no longer be anything but gentle.

As we have seen, prayer, religious services, giving alms, comforting the suffering, tending a small piece of land, brotherhood, thrift, hospitality, self-denial, trust, study, and work filled every day of his life. Filled is exactly the right word; the Bishop's day was packed to the brim with kind words and good deeds. Even so, it did not feel complete if cold or rainy weather kept him from spending an hour or two in his garden before bed, after the two women had gone to their rooms. This seemed to be a kind of ritual for him: he prepared himself for sleep by meditating in the presence of the great spectacle of the night sky. Sometimes, if the two old women were still awake, they heard him walking slowly along the paths very late at night. He was there alone, in quiet conversation with himself—peaceful, reverent—matching the calm of his heart to the calm of the heavens, stirred in the darkness by the visible splendor of the stars and the invisible splendor of God. He

opened his heart to the thoughts that fall from the Unknown. At such moments, as he offered his heart at the hour when night flowers release their fragrance, glowing like a lamp beneath the starry sky, pouring himself out in ecstasy amid the universal radiance of creation, he probably could not have said exactly what was happening within him. He felt something rise out of him, and something descend into him. It was a mysterious exchange between the depths of the soul and the depths of the universe.

He thought about the greatness and presence of God; about the eternity to come, that strange mystery; about eternity past, an even stranger mystery; and about all the infinities that pressed in on every sense beneath his gaze. Without trying to understand what cannot be understood, he simply looked at it. He did not analyze God; he was overwhelmed by him. He contemplated those magnificent combinations of atoms that give matter its forms, reveal forces by making them manifest, create individuality within unity, proportion within vastness, and the countless within the infinite, and that, through light, produce beauty. These combinations are constantly forming and breaking apart; from that come life and death.

He sat down on a wooden bench, his back against a worn-out vine, and looked up at the stars beyond the small, stunted outlines of his fruit trees. This quarter-acre, so badly planted and cluttered with shabby buildings and sheds, was precious to him and gave him all he needed.

What more did this old man need? In a life with so little free time, he divided his spare hours between gardening by day and contemplation at night. Was this small enclosure, with the sky for its ceiling, not enough to let him worship God in His most divine works, each in its turn? Did it not, in fact, contain everything? What more was there to want? A little garden to walk in, and immensity to dream in. At his feet, what could be cultivated and gathered; overhead, what could be studied and meditated on: a few flowers on earth, and all the stars in the sky.

CHAPTER XIV—WHAT HE THOUGHT

One final word.

Because details of this kind might, especially at the present time, and to use a phrase now in fashion, give the Bishop of D—— a certain “pantheistic” appearance, and lead people to believe, whether for or against him, that he held one of those personal philosophies peculiar to our century—philosophies that sometimes arise in solitary souls, take shape there, and grow until they replace religion—we must insist that no one who knew Monseigneur Welcome would have felt justified in thinking any such thing. What gave this man light was his heart. His wisdom was made from the light that came from there.

He had no systems, but many deeds. Obscure speculations carry a kind of dizziness; no, nothing suggests that he ever risked his mind in apocalyptic visions. An apostle may be bold, but a bishop must be cautious. He would probably have felt a scruple about probing too far into certain questions that are, in a sense, reserved for terribly great minds. There is a sacred dread beneath the archways of mystery; those dark openings gape there, but something tells you—you, a passerby in life—that you must not go in. Woe to the man who enters!

Geniuses who live in the hard-to-reach depths of abstraction and pure speculation, standing, so to speak, above all dogma, present their ideas to God. Their prayer boldly enters into debate. Their worship asks questions. This is a direct form of

religion, full of anxiety and responsibility for anyone who tries to climb its steep heights.

Human meditation has no limits. At its own risk, it analyzes and digs into its own dazzlement. One might almost say that, by a kind of magnificent reaction, it dazzles nature in return. The mysterious world around us gives back what it has received. It is possible that those who contemplate are themselves contemplated. However that may be, there are men on earth—or are they men?—who clearly perceive, at the far edge of reverie, the heights of the absolute, and who behold the terrible vision of the infinite mountain. Monseigneur Welcome was one of these men. But Monseigneur Welcome was not a genius. He would have feared those sublime heights from which even some very great men, like Swedenborg and Pascal, have fallen into madness. Certainly, these powerful meditations have their moral value, and along these difficult paths one comes closer to ideal perfection. But as for him, he chose the shorter road: the Gospel's.

He did not try to give his chasuble the grandeur of Elijah's mantle. He cast no ray of the future onto the dark swell of events. He did not know how to gather the light of things into flame. He was nothing like a prophet and nothing like a magician. This humble soul loved, and that was all.

He probably raised prayer to a level of almost superhuman aspiration. But one can no more pray too much than love too much. And if it is heresy to pray beyond the texts, then Saint Theresa and Saint Jerome would be heretics.

He was drawn to everything that groans and everything that suffers in expiation. The universe seemed to him like one immense sickness. Everywhere he felt fever; everywhere he heard suffering. Without trying to solve the mystery, he worked to bind up the wound. The terrible spectacle of created things filled him with tenderness. He concerned himself only with finding, for himself and for others, the best way to feel compassion and bring relief. For this good and rare priest, all that exists was a constant sorrow seeking consolation.

Some men labor to dig gold out of the earth; he labored to draw pity out of human suffering. Universal misery was his mine. The sorrow that ruled everywhere became, for him, a reason for endless kindness. “Love one another”: he said that this was enough, asked for nothing more, and made it the whole of his teaching. One day, the man who thought himself a “philosopher,” the senator already mentioned, said to the Bishop, “Just look at the world: everyone is at war with everyone else; the strongest is the cleverest. Your ‘love one another’ is nonsense.” “Well,” replied Monseigneur Welcome, without arguing the point, “if it is nonsense, then the soul should enclose itself in it, like a pearl in an oyster.” And that is what he did. He lived there and was completely content with it, setting aside the vast questions that both attract and terrify us: the bottomless reaches of abstraction, the cliffs of metaphysics, all those depths that lead, for the apostle, to God, and for the atheist, to nothingness; destiny, good and evil, being set against non-being, the conscience of man, the dreaming sleepwalk of the animal, transformation in death, the summary of lives contained in the tomb, the incomprehensible grafting of

successive loves onto the enduring self, essence, substance, the Nile and the Ens, the soul, nature, liberty, necessity; all those sheer, ominous problems where the giant archangels of the human mind seem to hover; those terrible abysses that Lucretius, Manou, Saint Paul, and Dante gaze into with lightning in their eyes, as if their fixed stare into the infinite could make stars flare into being there.

Monseigneur Bienvenu was simply a man who noticed the outward face of mysterious questions without probing into them or troubling his own mind over them, and who kept in his soul a deep respect for darkness.

CHAPTER I—THE EVENING OF A DAY OF WALKING

Early in October 1815, about an hour before sunset, a man traveling on foot entered the little town of D——. The few people who happened to be standing at their windows or doorsteps looked at him with a kind of unease. It would have been hard to find a traveler in worse condition. He was of height, broad and strong, and in the prime of life. He might have been forty-six or forty-eight. A cap with a drooping leather visor partly hid his face, darkened by sun and wind and wet with sweat. His coarse yellow linen shirt, fastened at the neck with a small silver anchor, left his hairy chest partly visible. He wore a neckcloth twisted into a cord; blue drill trousers, worn thin and shabby, white at one knee and torn at the other; and an old gray smock, ragged and patched at one elbow with a piece of green cloth sewn on with twine. On his back he carried a tightly packed soldier’s knapsack, carefully strapped and perfectly new. In his hand he held a huge knotted stick. On his bare feet, without stockings, were iron-shod shoes. His head was shaved, and he wore a long beard.

The sweat, the heat, the long walk, and the dust gave this battered figure an added air of grime and misery. His hair had been cut close, but it stood up in bristles now, since it had started to grow back and clearly had not been cut for some time.

No one knew who he was. He was plainly just a passerby. Where had he come from? From the south, perhaps from the seacoast, since he entered D—— by the same road that, seven months earlier, had seen Emperor Napoleon pass through on his way from Cannes to Paris. The man must have been walking all day. He looked utterly exhausted. Some women in the old market town below the city had seen him stop under the trees on the boulevard Gassendi and drink from the fountain at the end of the promenade. He must have been very thirsty, because the children following him saw him stop again for a drink two hundred paces farther on, at the fountain in the marketplace.

When he reached the corner of Rue Poichevert, he turned left and headed for the town hall. He went in, then came out fifteen minutes later. A gendarme was sitting by the door on the stone bench that General Drouot had stood on, on March 4, to read the proclamation of the Gulf of Juan to the frightened crowd of D——'s townspeople. The man took off his cap and respectfully greeted the gendarme.

The gendarme did not return the greeting. He looked at the man closely, watched him for a short distance, and then went into the town hall.

At that time, D—— had a fine inn called the _Cross of Colbas_. Its owner was a man named Jacquin Labarre, who was well regarded in the town because he was related to another Labarre, the keeper of the _Three Dauphins_ inn in Grenoble, who had served in the Guides. When the Emperor landed, all sorts of rumors spread through the region about the _Three Dauphins_. People said that General Bertrand, disguised as a carter, had

gone there often in January, handing out crosses of honor to soldiers and fistfuls of gold to the townspeople. The truth was that when the Emperor entered Grenoble, he refused to stay at the prefecture hotel. He thanked the mayor and said, _"I am going to the house of a brave man of my acquaintance,"_ and went instead to the _Three_ Dauphins_. The fame of the Labarre of the _Three_ Dauphins_ reached even the Labarre of the _Cross_ of Colbas_, twenty-five leagues away. In the town, people said of him, _"That is the cousin of the man of Grenoble."_

The man made his way to this inn, the best in the surrounding country. He entered the kitchen, which opened directly onto the street. Every stove was lit, and a great fire burned brightly in the hearth. The innkeeper, who was also the head cook, moved busily from one stewpan to another, overseeing an excellent dinner being prepared for the wagoners, whose loud voices, talk, and laughter could be heard from the next room. Anyone who has traveled knows that no one eats better than wagoners. A fat marmot, with white partridges and heather-cocks beside it, 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 innkeeper heard the door open and saw someone new come in. Without looking up from his stoves, he said:

“What can I do for you, sir?”

“Food and a bed,” said the man.

“That’s easy enough,” the innkeeper replied. Then he turned his head, took in the traveler’s appearance in a single glance, and

added, “If you can pay for it.”

The man pulled a large leather purse from the pocket of his blouse and said, “I have money.”

“In that case, we’re at your service,” said the innkeeper.

The man slipped his purse back into his pocket, took his knapsack off his back, and set it on the floor near the door. He kept his stick in his hand and sat down on a low stool by the fire. D—— lies in the mountains, and October evenings are cold there.

But as the innkeeper moved back and forth, he kept studying the traveler.

“Will dinner be ready soon?” the man asked.

“Right away,” replied the landlord.

While the newcomer warmed himself by the fire with his back turned, the worthy host, Jacquin Labarre, pulled a pencil from his pocket. Then he tore off the corner of an old newspaper lying on a small table near the window. On the blank margin he wrote a line or two, folded it without sealing it, and handed the scrap of paper to a child who seemed to serve him as both kitchen boy and errand runner. The landlord whispered something in the child’s ear, and the boy ran off toward the town hall.

The traveler noticed none of this.

Once again he asked, “Will dinner be ready soon?”

“Right away,” the host answered.

The child came back with the paper. The host unfolded it eagerly, like someone expecting an answer. He seemed to read it carefully, then gave a slight toss of the head and stood thinking for a moment. Then he stepped toward the traveler, who seemed lost in troubled thoughts.

“I can’t take you in, sir,” he said.

The man half rose.

“What! Are you afraid I won’t pay? Do you want me to pay in advance? I’m telling you, I have money.”

“That’s not it.”

“Then what is it?”

“You have money—”

“Yes,” the man said.

“And I,” said the innkeeper, “have no room.”

The man calmly went on: “Put me in the stable.”

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“The horses fill all the space.”

“Fine!” the man shot back. “Then give me a corner in the loft, a bundle of straw. We can settle that after dinner.”

“I can’t give you any dinner.”

The stranger was alarmed by this statement, delivered in an even but firm tone. He stood up.

“Ah, nonsense! I’m starving. I’ve been walking since sunrise. I’ve traveled twelve leagues. I’m paying. I want something to eat.”

“I have nothing,” said the landlord.

The man burst out laughing and turned toward the fireplace and the stoves. “Nothing? Then what’s all that?”

“All of it is spoken for.”

“By whom?”

“By the wagoners.”

“How many of them are there?”

“Twelve.”

“There’s enough food there for twenty.”

“They reserved all of it and paid in advance.”

The man sat down again and said, without raising his voice, “I’m at an inn. I’m hungry, and I’m staying.”

Then the innkeeper leaned down to his ear and said in a voice that made him jump, “Go away!”

At that moment the traveler was leaning forward, pushing a few logs into the fire with the iron tip of his staff. He spun around quickly, and as he opened his mouth to answer, the innkeeper fixed him with a steady stare and added, still in a low voice: “Stop. That’s enough of that kind 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 had my suspicions. I sent to the town hall, and this is the answer I got back. Can you read?”

As he said this, he held out the paper to the stranger, fully opened—the same paper that had just gone from the inn to the town hall and back again. The man glanced at it. After a brief pause, the landlord spoke again.

"I make a point of being polite to everyone. Now leave!"

The man lowered his head, picked up the knapsack he had set on the ground, and walked away.

He took the main street. He walked straight ahead at random, staying close to the houses like a man who was sad and ashamed. He never once turned around. If he had, he would have seen the innkeeper of the Cross of Colbas standing in his doorway, surrounded by all the guests from his inn and by people passing in the street, talking excitedly and pointing him out. From the fearful, suspicious looks in the crowd, he might have guessed that his arrival would soon become the talk of the whole town.

He saw none of this. People who have been crushed do not look behind them. They know too well the cruel fate that follows them.

He went on like this for some time, walking without stopping through unfamiliar streets, wandering at random and forgetting his weariness, as often happens when a man is deeply

unhappy. Then, all at once, hunger struck him sharply. Night was coming on. He looked around to see whether he could find some kind of shelter.

The fine inn was closed to him; now he was looking for some very humble tavern, some hut, no matter how poor.

Just then, a light appeared at the end of the street. A pine branch hanging from an iron crossbeam stood out against the pale evening sky. He headed toward it.

It was, in fact, a tavern—the tavern in the Rue de Chaffaut.

The traveler stopped for a moment and peered through the window into the tavern's low-ceilinged room, lit by a small lamp on a table and by a large fire on the hearth. Several men were drinking there. The landlord was warming himself. An iron pot hung from a crane and bubbled over the fire.

This tavern, which also serves as a kind of inn, has two entrances. One opens onto the street, and the other into a small yard full of manure. The traveler did not dare go in through the street door. He slipped into the yard, paused again, then timidly lifted the latch and opened the door.

“Who’s there?” said the хозяин.

“Someone looking for supper and a bed.”

“Good. We provide both here.”

He went in. All the men who were drinking turned to look at him. The lamp lit one side of him, and the firelight lit the other. They watched him for a while as he took off his knapsack.

The innkeeper said to him, “There’s the fire. Supper is cooking in the pot. Come warm yourself, friend.”

He came forward and sat down by the hearth. He stretched his feet, worn out with fatigue, toward the fire. A rich smell rose from the pot. Beneath his cap, pulled low over his face, the only expression one could make out was a dim look of comfort, mixed with that sharper look that long suffering gives a person.

Even so, his profile was strong, resolute, and sad. His face had a strange quality: at first it seemed humble, but in the end it seemed stern. His eye shone beneath his lashes like fire under brushwood.

One of the men sitting at the table, however, was a fishmonger who, before coming into the tavern on the Rue de Chaffaut, had gone to stable his horse at Labarre’s. By chance, that very morning he had met this unpleasant-looking stranger on the road between Bras d’Asse and—I have forgotten the name. I think it was Escoublon. When they met, the man, who already looked utterly exhausted, had asked for a ride on the back of his horse. The fishmonger’s only answer was to urge his horse on faster. Half an hour earlier, this same fishmonger had been part of the group gathered around Jacquin Labarre, and he himself had told the people at the Cross of Colbas about his disagreeable encounter that morning. From where he sat, he made a slight sign to the tavern-keeper. The tavern-keeper went over to him. They exchanged a few quiet words. The man had once again sunk into his thoughts.

The innkeeper went back to the fireplace, suddenly put his hand on the man's shoulder, and said:

"You need to leave here."

The stranger turned and answered gently, "Ah! So you know?—"

"Yes."

"They sent me away from the other inn."

"And they're turning you out of this one too."

"Where do you expect me to go?"

"Somewhere else."

The man picked up his stick and his knapsack and left.

As he went out, some children who had followed him from the Cross of Colbas_, and who seemed to have been waiting for him, threw stones at him. Angry, he turned back and threatened them with his stick; the children scattered like a flock of birds.

He passed in front of the prison. An iron chain hung at the door, attached to a bell. He rang it.

The wicket opened.

"Turnkey," he said, politely taking off his cap, "would you be kind enough to let me in and give me a place to sleep for the night?"

A voice answered:

“This prison is not an inn. Get yourself arrested, and then you can come in.”

The wicket closed again.

He went into a small street lined with many gardens. Some were enclosed only by hedges, which gave the street a cheerful look. Among these gardens and hedges, he noticed a small one-story house with a light in the window. He looked through the pane, just as he had at the public house. Inside was a large whitewashed room, with a bed hung with printed cotton curtains and a cradle in one corner, a few wooden chairs, and a double-barreled gun hanging on the wall. A table was set in the middle of the room. A copper lamp lit the coarse white linen tablecloth, the pewter jug gleaming like silver and filled with wine, and the brown soup tureen sending up steam. At the table sat a man of about forty with a cheerful, open face, bouncing a small child on his knees. Nearby, a very young woman was nursing another child. The father was laughing, the child was laughing, and the mother was smiling.

The stranger stood still for a moment, lost in thought as he looked at this gentle, peaceful scene. What was going on inside him? Only he could have said. He was probably thinking that this happy home might welcome him, and that in a place where he saw so much joy, he might perhaps find a little compassion.

He tapped lightly on the windowpane, so softly it was barely a knock.

They did not hear him.

He knocked again.

He heard the woman say, “It seems to me, husband, that someone is knocking.”

“No,” the husband replied.

He knocked a third time.

The husband stood up, took the lamp, and went to the door, which he opened.

He was a tall man, part peasant and part craftsman. He wore a huge leather apron that reached up to his left shoulder. A hammer, a red handkerchief, a powder horn, and all sorts of other things tucked into his belt like a pocket made it bulge out. He held his head tilted back. His shirt was open wide and folded back, showing his thick, bare, white neck. He had heavy eyelashes, enormous black whiskers, bulging eyes, and the lower part of his face looked almost like a snout. Above all, he had that unmistakable air of a man completely at home on his own ground.

“Forgive me, sir,” said the traveler. “If I pay, could you give me a plate of soup and let me sleep in a corner of that shed over there in the garden? Tell me, can you? For money?”

“Who are you?” the master of the house asked.

The man answered, “I’ve just come from Puy-Moisson. I’ve been walking all day. I’ve traveled twelve leagues. Can you take me in—if I pay?”

“I would not refuse lodging to any respectable man who could pay,” said the peasant. “But why don’t you go to the inn?”

“There’s no room.”

“Bah! Impossible. It’s neither a fair day nor a market day. Have you been to Labarre’s?”

“Yes.”

“Well?”

The traveler answered awkwardly, “I don’t know. He would not take me in.”

“Have you been to what’s-his-name’s place in Rue Chaffaut?”

The stranger grew even more embarrassed. Stammering, he said, “He wouldn’t receive me either.”

The peasant’s face hardened with suspicion. He looked the newcomer over from head to foot, then suddenly cried out with a shudder:

“Are you the man?”

He looked at the stranger again, stepped back three paces, set the lamp on the table, and took his gun down from the wall.

Meanwhile, at the words, “Are you the man?” the woman had jumped to her feet, gathered her two children into her arms, and hurried behind her husband for shelter. She stared at the stranger in terror, her breast uncovered, her eyes wide with fear, as she murmured softly, “Tso-maraude.”1

All this happened in less time than it takes to imagine it. After studying the man for several moments, the way one watches a viper, the master of the house went back to the door and said:

“Get out!”

“For pity’s sake, a glass of water,” said the man.

“A shot from my gun!” said the peasant.

Then he slammed the door, and the man heard him slide two heavy bolts into place. A moment later, the window shutter closed, and from outside came the sound of an iron bar being set across it.

Night kept falling, and a cold wind blew down from the Alps. In the fading light, the stranger noticed a kind of hut in one of the gardens along the street. It looked as though it had been built out of sod. He climbed over the wooden fence without hesitation and entered the garden. Then he went up to the hut. Its doorway was a very low, narrow opening, and it looked like the shelters road workers build for themselves beside the roads. He naturally assumed that it was, in fact, a road worker’s hut. He was cold and hungry, but at least it offered some protection from the wind. Huts like this are not usually occupied at night. He lay flat on his stomach and crawled inside. It was warm, and he found a fairly decent bed of straw. For a moment he stretched out on it, too exhausted to move. Then, because the knapsack on his back was in the way and could also serve as a ready-made pillow, he began to unbuckle one of its straps. At that moment, a savage growl sounded. He looked up. In the darkness at the entrance to the hut, the head of an enormous

dog took shape.

It was a dog kennel.

He was strong and formidable himself. Gripping his staff as a weapon and using his knapsack as a shield, he managed to get out of the kennel as best he could, though not without tearing his rags even more.

He got out of the garden the same way, but walking backward. To keep the dog at a respectful distance, he had to use that maneuver with his stick which masters of that kind of fencing call _la rose couverte_.

After he had climbed back over the fence with some difficulty and found himself once more in the street—alone, with no refuge, no shelter, no roof over his head, driven even from that bed of straw and that wretched kennel—he collapsed onto a stone rather than sat down on it. It seems that a passer-by heard him cry out, “I am not even a dog!”

He soon got up again and went on. He left the town, hoping to find some tree or haystack out in the fields that might give him shelter.

He walked on like that for some time, his head still bowed. When he felt he was far from any house or human presence, he lifted his eyes and looked carefully around. He was in a field. In front of him rose one of those low hills covered with short stubble that, after harvest, look like shaved heads.

The horizon was completely black. It was not just the darkness of night. Very low clouds hung over it, seeming to rest on the hill

itself, and they were spreading upward until they filled the whole sky. At the same time, the moon was about to rise, and a last trace of twilight still lingered overhead. At the top of the sky, the clouds formed a kind of pale arch, and from it a faint light fell across the earth.

So the ground was more brightly lit than the sky, which creates a particularly sinister effect. The hill, with its poor, unimpressive outline, stood out faint and pale against the dark horizon. The whole scene was ugly, small, mournful, and cramped.

There was nothing in the field or on the hill except a misshapen tree, twisting and trembling a few steps from the traveler.

This man was clearly far from having the refined habits of mind and feeling that make a person sensitive to the mysterious side of things. Even so, there was something in that sky, that hill, that plain, and that tree so deeply desolate that, after standing still and lost in thought for a moment, he suddenly turned back. There are moments when nature seems hostile.

He went back the way he had come. The gates of D—— were closed. D——, which had endured sieges during the wars of religion, was still enclosed in 1815 by ancient walls with square towers, though those have since been demolished. He passed through a gap and entered the town again.

It may have been eight o’clock in the evening. Since he did not know the streets, he started wandering again at random.

In this way he came to the prefecture, then to the seminary. As he crossed Cathedral Square, he shook his fist at the church.

At the corner of that square there is a printing house. It was there that the Emperor's proclamations, and those of the Imperial Guard to the army—brought from the Island of Elba and dictated by Napoleon himself—were printed for the first time.

Exhausted and with all hope gone, he lay down on a stone bench by the doorway of the printing office.

Just then an old woman came out of the church. She saw the man lying in the shadow. "What are you doing there, my friend?" she asked.

He answered sharply and angrily, "As you can see, my good woman, I am sleeping." The good woman, who truly deserved the name, was the Marquise de R——.

"On this bench?" she continued.

"For nineteen years I had a wooden mattress," said the man. "Today I have a stone one."

"You were a soldier?"

"Yes, my good woman, a soldier."

"Why don't you go to the inn?"

"Because I have no money."

"Alas!" said Madame de R——. "I have only four sous in my purse."

"Give them to me anyway."

The man took the four sous. Madame de R—— went on: "You cannot get a room at an inn for so little. But have you tried? You

cannot possibly spend the night like this. You must be cold and hungry. Surely someone might have taken you in out of charity."

"I have knocked on every door."

"Well?"

"I was turned away everywhere."

The "good woman" touched the man's arm and pointed to a small, low house across the street, beside the Bishop's palace.

"You have knocked on every door?"

"Yes."

"Have you knocked on that one?"

"No."

"Knock there."

CHAPTER II—PRUDENCE COUNSELS WISDOM.

That evening, after his walk through the town, the Bishop of D—— stayed in his room until quite late. He was working on a major book about duties, a book that was unfortunately never finished. He was carefully gathering everything the Fathers and the doctors of the Church had written on this important subject. The book was arranged in two parts: first, the duties of everyone; second, the duties of each person according to the class to which he belonged. The duties of everyone were the great duties, and there were four of them. Saint Matthew identifies them: duties toward God (Matt. vi.); duties toward oneself (Matt. v. 29, 30); duties toward one's neighbor (Matt. vii. 12); and duties toward animals (Matt. vi. 20, 25). As for the other duties, the Bishop found them set out and prescribed elsewhere: the duties of sovereigns and subjects in the Epistle to the Romans; those of magistrates, wives, mothers, and young men in Saint Peter; those of husbands, fathers, children, and servants in the Epistle to the Ephesians; those of the faithful in the Epistle to the Hebrews; and those of virgins in the Epistle to the Corinthians. From all these precepts he was painstakingly trying to build a harmonious whole that he hoped to place before souls.

At eight o'clock he was still at work. He was writing, somewhat awkwardly, on little square slips of paper, with a large book open on his knees, when Madame Magloire came in, as she usually did, to take the silverware from the cupboard near his

bed. A moment later, realizing that the table was ready and that his sister was probably waiting for him, the Bishop closed his book, rose from his table, and went into the dining-room.

The dining-room was a rectangular room with a fireplace, a door opening onto the street, as we have said, and a window looking out on the garden.

Madame Magloire was in fact just putting the final touches on the table.

As she did so, she was talking with Mademoiselle Baptistine.

A lamp stood on the table, which was placed near the fireplace. A wood fire was burning there.

It is easy to imagine these two women, both past sixty. Madame Magloire was small, plump, and lively. Mademoiselle Baptistine was gentle, slim, delicate, and a little taller than her brother. She wore a puce silk dress in the style of 1806, bought in Paris that year and still in use ever since. To use plain, common expressions that say in one word what a whole page might struggle to convey, Madame Magloire looked like a peasant, and Mademoiselle Baptistine like a lady. Madame Magloire wore a white quilted cap; around her neck, on a velvet ribbon, hung a gold Jeannette cross, the only feminine ornament in the house. A very white fichu puffed out over a dress of coarse black wool, with large short sleeves. She wore a cotton apron in red and green checks, tied at the waist with a green ribbon, with a stomacher of the same fabric fastened at the top corners by two pins. On her feet were heavy shoes and yellow stockings, like the women of Marseilles. Mademoiselle Baptistine’s dress

followed the 1806 fashion, with a short waist, a narrow sheath-like skirt, puffed sleeves, flaps, and buttons. She hid her gray hair under a curled wig known as the baby wig. Madame Magloire had an alert, lively, and kind expression; but the uneven lift of the corners of her mouth, and her upper lip, which was fuller than the lower, gave her a somewhat sharp and commanding look. As long as Monseigneur was silent, she spoke to him boldly, with a mixture of respect and familiarity. But the moment Monseigneur began to speak, as we have already seen, she became as obedient as her mistress. Mademoiselle Baptistine hardly spoke at all. She simply devoted herself to obeying him and pleasing him. She had never been beautiful, even in youth. She had large, blue, prominent eyes and a long arched nose. Yet her whole face, her whole person, radiated an indescribable goodness, as we said at the beginning. She had always been meant for gentleness; but faith, charity, and hope, those three virtues that softly warm the soul, had gradually raised that gentleness into holiness. Nature had made her a lamb; religion had made her an angel. Poor saintly virgin! Sweet memory now gone!

Mademoiselle Baptistine told so often what happened at the bishop's house that evening that many people still living can remember even the smallest details.

Just as the Bishop came in, Madame Magloire was speaking very animatedly. She was lecturing Mademoiselle Baptistine about a subject she often returned to, and one the Bishop knew well too: the lock on the front door.

It seemed that while buying provisions for supper, Madame Magloire had heard alarming reports in several places. People were talking about a sinister-looking prowler. A suspicious vagrant had arrived and was said to be somewhere in town, and anyone foolish enough to come home late that night might run into trouble. On top of that, the police were badly run, since the Prefect and the Mayor were on bad terms and tried to undermine each other by letting things go wrong. Sensible people, she said, had to act as their own police, protect themselves carefully, and make sure to shut, bolt, and barricade their houses, and to fasten the doors securely.

Madame Magloire stressed those last words. But the Bishop had just come from his room, where it was rather cold. He sat down by the fire to warm himself and soon drifted into other thoughts. He did not respond to the pointed remark Madame Magloire had let fall. She repeated it. Then Mademoiselle Baptistine, wanting to satisfy Madame Magloire without offending her brother, said timidly:

“Did you hear what Madame Magloire is saying, brother?”

“I heard something of it, vaguely,” the Bishop replied. Then he turned halfway in his chair, rested his hands on his knees, and lifted toward the old servant his warm, open face, so quick to brighten, lit from below by the firelight. “Well, what is it? What is it? Are we in some great danger?”

Then Madame Magloire began the whole story again, making it a little worse without realizing she was doing so. Apparently a Bohemian, a barefoot vagrant, some sort of dangerous beggar,

was in town at that very moment. He had gone to Jacquin Labarre's asking for a place to stay, but Labarre had refused to take him in. He had been seen coming by way of the boulevard Gassendi and wandering through the streets at dusk. A born criminal with a terrifying face.

"Really!" said the Bishop.

This readiness to ask questions encouraged Madame Magloire. To her, it seemed to mean that the Bishop was beginning to feel alarmed, and she pressed on triumphantly:

"Yes, Monseigneur, that is exactly how it is. Some kind of disaster will happen in this town tonight. Everyone says so. And on top of that, the police are so badly managed" (a useful repetition). "Just think of living in a mountain town and not even having streetlights at night! You step outside, and it is black as an oven. And I say, Monseigneur, and Mademoiselle agrees with me—"

"I," his sister interrupted, "say nothing. Whatever my brother does is right."

Madame Magloire went on as if no objection had been made:

"We say this house is not safe at all. If Monseigneur will allow it, I will go and tell Paulin Musebois, the locksmith, to come and replace the old locks on the doors. We have them already, and it would only take a moment. For I say there is nothing more dreadful than a door that the first passer-by can open from the outside with a latch. And I say we need bolts, Monseigneur, if only for tonight. Besides, Monseigneur is always saying, 'come

in’; and then, even in the middle of the night, O my God! no one even needs to ask permission.”

At that moment, there was a fairly loud knock at the door.

“Come in,” said the Bishop.

CHAPTER III—THE HEROISM OF PASSIVE OBEDIENCE.

The door opened.

It swung wide with a quick motion, as if someone had pushed it open firmly and decisively.

A man came in.

We already know this man. He was the traveler we saw wandering about in search of shelter.

He came in, took a step forward, and stopped, leaving the door open behind him. His knapsack was on his shoulders, his cudgel in his hand, and his eyes held a look that was coarse, defiant, exhausted, and violent. The fire on the hearth lit him up. He was dreadful to look at. He seemed like a sinister apparition.

Madame Magloire did not even have the strength to cry out. She trembled and stood there with her mouth open.

Mademoiselle Baptistine turned, saw the man come in, and half rose in fright. Then she slowly turned back toward the fireplace and looked at her brother, and her face became deeply calm and serene once again.

The Bishop looked at the man with calm, steady eyes.

He was just opening his mouth, no doubt to ask the newcomer what he wanted, when the man placed both hands on his staff, looked at the old man and the two women, and, without waiting for the Bishop to speak, said in a loud voice:

“Look here. My name is Jean Valjean. I am a convict from the galleys. I spent nineteen years in the galleys. I was released four days ago, and I am on my way to Pontarlier, where I am headed. I have been walking for four days since leaving Toulon. Today I traveled a dozen leagues on foot. This evening, when I arrived here, I went to an inn, and they threw me out because of my yellow passport, which I had shown at the town hall. I had to show it. I went to one inn. I went to another. At both places they told me, ‘Be off.’ No one would take me in. I went to the prison. The jailer would not let me in. I went into a dog kennel. The dog bit me and drove me away, as if he were a man. You would have thought he knew who I was. I went into the fields, meaning to sleep outside under the stars. There were no stars. I thought it was going to rain, so I came back into town to look for shelter in a doorway. Over there in the square, I meant to sleep on a stone bench. A good woman pointed me to your house and said, ‘Knock there!’ I knocked. What is this place? Do you keep an inn? I have money—savings. One hundred and nine francs fifteen sous, earned in the galleys by my labor over nineteen years. I will pay. What does it matter to me? I have money. I am very tired; I have walked twelve leagues on foot; I am very hungry. Will you let me stay?”

“Madame Magloire,” said the Bishop, “set another place at the table.”

The man stepped forward three paces and came up to the lamp on the table. “Wait,” he went on, as if he still wasn’t sure he had been understood. “That’s not it. Did you hear what I said? I’m a galley slave, a convict. I’ve come from the galleys.” He pulled a

large sheet of yellow paper from his pocket and unfolded it. “Here is my passport. Yellow, as you can see. It gets me driven out of every place I go. Will you read it? I can read. I learned in the galleys. There’s a school there for men who want to learn. Listen, this is what they wrote on this passport: ‘Jean Valjean, discharged convict, native of’—that part means nothing to you—‘has spent nineteen years in the galleys: five years for housebreaking and burglary; fourteen years for attempting to escape on four occasions. He is a very dangerous man.’ There! Everyone has turned me away. Will you take me in? Is this an inn? Will you give me something to eat and a bed? Do you have a stable?”

“Madame Magloire,” said the Bishop, “put white sheets on the bed in the alcove.” We have already explained how completely the two women obeyed him.

Madame Magloire went to carry out his orders.

The Bishop turned to the man.

“Sit down, sir, and warm yourself. We will have supper in a few moments, and your bed will be made while you eat.”

At that moment, the man suddenly understood. Until then, his face had been dark and hard; now it showed astonishment, doubt, and joy all at once, and the change was remarkable. He began to stammer like a madman:

“Really? What? You’ll let me stay? You won’t throw me out? A convict! And you call me sir! You don’t speak to me like I’m dirt? People always say to me, ‘Get out of here, you dog!’ I was sure

you would drive me away, so I told you at once who I am. Oh, what a good woman it was who sent me here! I'm going to have supper! A bed with a mattress and sheets, like everyone else! A bed! It's been nineteen years since I slept in a bed! And you really don't want me to leave! You are good people. Besides, I have money. I'll pay well. Forgive me, monsieur innkeeper, but what is your name? I'll pay whatever you ask. You are a fine man. You are an innkeeper, aren't you?"

"I am," replied the Bishop, "a priest who lives here."

"A priest!" the man said. "Oh, a fine sort of priest! So you're not going to ask me for money? You're the curé, aren't you? The curé of this big church? Well! I'm a fool, truly. I hadn't noticed your skullcap."

As he spoke, he set his knapsack and cudgel in a corner, slipped his passport back into his pocket, and sat down. Mademoiselle Baptistine looked at him gently. He went on:

"You are kind, Monsieur le Curé; you have not treated me with contempt. A good priest is a very good thing. So you do not expect me to pay?"

"No," said the Bishop. "Keep your money. How much do you have? Didn't you say one hundred and nine francs?"

"And fifteen sous," the man added.

"One hundred and nine francs and fifteen sous. And how long did it take you to earn that?"

"Nineteen years."

“Nineteen years!”

The Bishop sighed deeply.

The man went on: “I still have all my money. In four days I’ve spent only twenty-five sous, which I earned by helping unload wagons at Grasse. Since you are an abbé, I’ll tell you this: we had a chaplain in the galleys. And one day I saw a bishop there. Monseigneur, that’s what they call him. He was the Bishop of Majore at Marseilles. He is the curé who rules the other curés, you understand. Forgive me, I’m saying it very badly; it is all so far removed from me. You understand what we are. He said mass in the middle of the galleys, at an altar. He had a pointed gold thing on his head, and it glittered in the bright midday light. We were lined up on three sides, with cannons facing us, their matches lit. We could not see very well. He spoke, but he was too far away, and we could not hear him. That is what a bishop is like.”

While he was speaking, the Bishop went and shut the door, which had been standing wide open.

Madame Magloire came back. She brought a silver fork and spoon and set them on the table.

“Madame Magloire,” said the Bishop, “put those things as close to the fire as possible.” Then he turned to his guest. “The night wind is bitter in the Alps. You must be cold, sir.”

Every time he said the word _sir_, in that gently serious, refined voice of his, the man’s face brightened. To a convict, _monsieur_ is like a glass of water to one of the survivors of the _Medusa_.

Shame is thirsty for respect.

“This lamp gives very poor light,” said the Bishop.

Madame Magloire understood. She went to fetch the two silver candlesticks from the mantelpiece in Monseigneur’s bedroom, then set them on the table and lit them.

“Monsieur le Curé,” said the man, “you are kind. You do not look down on me. You welcome me into your house. You light your candles for me. And yet I have not hidden where I come from or that I am an unfortunate man.”

The Bishop, who was sitting beside 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 ask the person who enters whether he has a name, but whether he has a sorrow. You are suffering. You are hungry and thirsty. You are welcome here. And do not thank me; do not say that I am receiving you into my house. No one is at home here except the person who needs shelter. I tell you, traveler, that you are far more at home here than I am. Everything here belongs to you. Why should I need to know your name? Besides, before you told me, you already had one that I knew.”

The man stared at him in astonishment.

“Really? You knew what I was called?”

“Yes,” replied the Bishop, “your name is my brother.”

“Wait, Monsieur le Curé,” the man cried. “I was terribly hungry when I came in 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 greatly?”

“Oh, the red coat, the ball on the ankle, a plank to sleep on, heat, cold, hard labor, the convicts, the beatings, the double chain for nothing, the cell for a single word; even when you are sick in bed, still the chain! Dogs—dogs are happier! Nineteen years! I am forty-six. And now there is the yellow passport. That is what it is like.”

“Yes,” the Bishop went on, “you have come from a place of great sorrow. Listen to me. There is more joy in heaven over the tear-stained face of a sinner who repents than over the white robes of a hundred righteous men. If you come out of that sad place filled with hatred and anger toward humanity, you deserve pity. If you come out of it with goodwill and peace in your heart, you are worthier than any of us.”

Meanwhile, Madame Magloire had served supper: soup made of water, oil, bread, and salt; a little bacon, a piece of mutton, figs, fresh cheese, and a large loaf of rye bread. On her own initiative, she had added a bottle of the Bishop’s old Mauves wine to his usual simple meal.

The Bishop’s face immediately lit up with the cheerfulness so natural to hospitable people. “To the table!” he cried brightly. As he always did when a stranger supped with him, he seated the

man at his right. Mademoiselle Baptistine, calm and entirely at ease, sat down at his left.

The Bishop said the blessing, then served the soup himself, as he usually did. The man began to eat eagerly.

Suddenly the Bishop said, “It seems to me something is missing from this table.”

In fact, Madame Magloire had set out only the three forks and spoons that were strictly necessary. But when the Bishop had a guest for supper, it was the custom in the house to place all six sets of silver on the tablecloth—a harmless display. This graceful appearance of luxury was a kind of childlike pleasure, full of charm in that gentle yet austere household, where poverty itself was given dignity.

Madame Magloire understood at once. Without a word, she left the room, and a moment later the three additional sets of silver forks and spoons the Bishop wanted were shining on the tablecloth, neatly arranged before the three people seated there.

CHAPTER IV—DETAILS ABOUT THE CHEESE-DAIRIES OF PONTARLIER.

Now, to give a clear idea of what happened at that table, nothing would serve better than to quote a passage from one of Mademoiselle Baptistine's letters to Madame Boischevron, in which she describes the conversation between the convict and the Bishop with careful detail.

". . . This man paid no attention to anyone. He ate like a man who was starving. But after supper, he said:

"'Monsieur le Curé of the good God, this is all much too good for me; but I have to say, the carters who wouldn't let me eat with them keep a better table than you do.'

"To be frank, the remark shocked me a little. My brother replied:

"'They are more tired than I am.'

"'No,' the man replied, 'they have more money. You are poor; I can see that clearly. You can't even be a curate. Are you really a curé? Ah, if the good God were 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, are you going to Pontarlier?'

"'With my road already marked out for me.'

“I believe that is what the man said. Then he went on:

“‘I must leave by daybreak tomorrow. Traveling is hard. If the nights are cold, the days are hot.’

“‘You are going to a good region,’ said my brother. ‘During the Revolution, my family was ruined. At first I took refuge in Franche-Comté, and I lived there for some time by the work of my own hands. I was willing to work, and I found plenty to do. One only has to choose. There are paper mills, tanneries, distilleries, oil mills, large watch factories, steelworks, copper works, and at least twenty iron foundries. Four of them, at Lods, Châtillon, Audincourt, and Beure, are fairly large.’

“I believe I remember those names correctly as the ones my brother mentioned. Then he broke off and turned to me:

“‘Don’t we have some relatives in that part of the country, my dear sister?’

“I replied:

“‘We did have some. Among them was M. de Lucenet, who was captain of the gates at Pontarlier under the old régime.’

“‘Yes,’ my brother went on, ‘but in ’93, one no longer had relatives; one had only one’s arms. I worked. In the country around Pontarlier, where you are going, Monsieur Valjean, they have a truly patriarchal and truly charming industry, my sister. It is their cheese dairies, which they call _fruitières_.’

Then my brother, while encouraging the man to eat, explained in detail what the _fruitières_ of Pontarlier were. He said they were divided into two kinds: the _big barns_, owned by wealthy people,

where forty or fifty cows produce seven to eight thousand cheeses each summer; and the _associated fruitières_, which belong to the poor. These are run by the peasants of the middle mountains, who keep their cows in common and divide the profits. ‘They hire a cheese-maker, whom they call the _grurin–. The _grurin– collects the milk from the members three times a day and records the amount on a double tally. The work of the cheese dairies begins toward the end of April. Around the middle of June, the cheese-makers drive their cows up into the mountains.’

“As he ate, the man gradually came back to life. My brother had him drink some of that fine Mauves wine, which he never drinks himself because, he says, wine is costly. He told me all this in his usual easy, cheerful way, pausing now and then for those graceful little courtesies you know so well. He kept returning to that comfortable trade of _grurin–, as if he wanted the man to understand—without saying it directly or bluntly—that it could offer him a refuge. One thing struck me. This man was exactly what I have told you. And yet, neither during supper nor at any point that evening did my brother say a single word—except for a few words about Jesus when the man first came in—that could have reminded him of what he was, or of what my brother was. To anyone else, this would have seemed the perfect occasion to preach a little sermon, to impress the Bishop upon the convict, and to leave behind some lasting mark of the encounter. Anyone else, with this unfortunate man in his hands, might have thought it a chance to feed his soul as well as his body, and to add a little reproach mixed with moral advice, or some pity accompanied by an exhortation to behave better in

the future. My brother did not even ask what country he came from or what his history was. For there is a stain in that history, and my brother seemed careful to avoid anything that might remind him of it. He carried this so far that, at one moment, while speaking of the mountaineers of Pontarlier, _who_ do a gentle labor near heaven, and who_, he added, _are_ happy because they are innocent_, he broke off suddenly, afraid that he might have let slip something that could wound the man. After thinking it over, I believe I understand what was passing in my brother's heart. No doubt he was thinking that this man, whose name is Jean Valjean, already felt his misfortune only too keenly; that the best thing was to turn his mind away from it, and to make him feel, if only for a moment, that he was a person like anyone else, by treating him in the most ordinary way. Is this not, indeed, a true understanding of charity? Is there not, dear Madame, something genuinely evangelical in this delicacy that refrains from sermonizing, moralizing, and allusion? And when a man has a sore spot, is not the truest pity simply not to touch it? It seemed to me that this may have been my brother's private thought. In any case, I can say this: if he did have all these ideas, he gave no sign of them. From beginning to end, even with me, he was exactly as he is every evening, and he supped with this Jean Valjean in the same spirit and in the same manner as he would have supped with M. Gédéon le Prévost or with the curate of the parish."

"Near the end of the meal, just as he had gotten to the figs, someone knocked at the door. It was Mother Gerbaud, carrying her little child in her arms. My brother kissed the child on the forehead and borrowed the fifteen sous I had with me so he

could give them to Mother Gerbaud. By then, the man was hardly paying attention to anything. He was no longer speaking, and he seemed extremely tired. After poor old Gerbaud had gone, my brother said grace. Then he turned to the man and said, 'You must be badly in need of your bed.' Madame Magloire cleared the table at once. I understood that we were meant to withdraw so this traveler could sleep, and we both went upstairs. A moment later, though, I sent Madame Magloire back down to take the man a goatskin from the Black Forest that was in my room. The nights are freezing, and it keeps you warm. It is a pity the skin is old; all the hair is falling out. My brother bought it in Germany, at Tottlingen, near the sources of the Danube, along with the little ivory-handled knife I use at table."

"Madame Magloire came back at once. We said our prayers in the drawing room, where we keep the linen, and then each of us went to our own room without saying a word."

CHAPTER V—CALM

After saying good night to his sister, Monseigneur Bienvenu took one of the two silver candlesticks from the table, gave the other to his guest, and said,

“Monsieur, I will show you to your room.”

The man followed him.

As may already be clear from what has been said, the house was arranged in such a way that anyone going into or out of the oratory where the alcove stood had to pass through the Bishop’s bedroom.

As he crossed the room, Madame Magloire was putting the silverware away in the cupboard near the head of the bed. This was the last thing she did every evening before going to bed.

The Bishop settled his guest in the alcove. A fresh white bed had been made there. The man placed the candle on a small table.

“Well,” said the Bishop, “I hope you sleep well. Tomorrow morning, before you leave, you shall have a cup of warm milk from our cows.”

“Thank you, Monsieur l’Abbé,” said the man.

He had barely spoken those peaceful words when, suddenly and without warning, he made a strange movement—one that would have filled the two saintly women with horror if they had seen it. Even now, it is hard to say what drove him in that

moment. Was he trying to give a warning, or make a threat? Or was he simply following some instinctive impulse that was unclear even to himself? He turned sharply to the old man, crossed his arms, fixed his host with a savage stare, and cried out in a hoarse voice:

“Ah! So you really put me up in your house, right here beside you?”

He stopped, then added with a laugh that had something monstrous in it:

“Did you really think it through? How do you know I haven’t been a murderer?”

The Bishop replied:

“That is God’s concern.”

Then, gravely, moving his lips as though he were praying or speaking to himself, he raised two fingers of his right hand and gave his blessing to the man, who did not bow. Without turning his head or looking back, he went back to his bedroom.

When the alcove was being used, a large serge curtain stretched from wall to wall hid the altar. As he passed, the Bishop knelt before the curtain and said a short prayer. A moment later he was in his garden, walking, meditating, and contemplating, with his heart and soul completely absorbed in those vast and mysterious things that God reveals at night to eyes that remain open.

As for the man, he was so exhausted that he did not even make use of the fine white sheets. He snuffed out his candle with his nostrils, in the convict's manner, and dropped onto the bed fully dressed, where he immediately fell into a deep sleep.

Midnight struck as the Bishop came back from the garden to his room.

A few minutes later, everyone in the little house was asleep.

CHAPTER VI—JEAN VALJEAN

Around the middle of the night, Jean Valjean woke.

Jean Valjean came from a poor peasant family in Brie. He never learned to read as a child. When he grew up, he became a tree-pruner in Faverolles. His mother's name was Jeanne Mathieu. His father was called Jean Valjean, or Vlajean, probably a nickname formed from voilà Jean—"here's Jean."

Jean Valjean had a thoughtful nature, but not a gloomy one; that kind of temperament is often found in affectionate people. Still, at least in appearance, there was something plainly slow and unremarkable about him. He had lost both his father and mother when he was very young. His mother died of milk fever because she was not properly cared for. His father, a tree-pruner like Jean Valjean himself, was killed in a fall from a tree. The only family Jean Valjean had left was an older sister, a widow with seven children, boys and girls. She had raised him, and while she still had a husband, she gave her younger brother food and a place to live.

The husband died. The oldest of the seven children was eight years old. The youngest was one.

Jean Valjean had just turned twenty-five. He took the dead father's place and, in turn, supported the sister who had raised him. He did this simply out of duty, and even with a certain rough unwillingness. So his youth passed in hard, poorly paid labor. In his native region, he had never known what people call a "kind woman friend." He had never had time to fall in love.

He came home at night exhausted and ate his soup without saying a word. His sister, Mother Jeanne, would often take the best part of his meal right out of his bowl while he was eating—a piece of meat, a slice of bacon, the heart of the cabbage—and give it to one of her children. He kept eating with his head bent over the table, almost in his soup, his long hair hanging around the bowl and hiding his eyes. He looked as though he noticed nothing and accepted it. In Faverolles, not far from the Valjean cottage with its thatched roof, there lived a farmer's wife named Marie-Claude on the other side of the lane. The Valjean children, always hungry, sometimes went to borrow a pint of milk from her in their mother's name. Then they would drink it behind a hedge or in the corner of an alley, grabbing the jug from one another so eagerly that the little girls spilled it over their aprons and down their necks. If their mother had known about this thieving, she would have punished them harshly. Jean Valjean, gruff and complaining, paid Marie-Claude for the milk behind his sister's back, and the children escaped punishment.

During pruning season, he earned eighteen sous a day. After that, he hired himself out as a haymaker, a laborer, a cowherd on a farm, or a general servant. He did whatever work he could find. His sister worked too, but what could she do with seven small children? It was a miserable family, wrapped in poverty and slowly being crushed by it. Then a very hard winter came. Jean had no work. The family had no bread. No bread at all. Seven children!

One Sunday evening, Maubert Isabeau, the baker in the Church Square at Faverolles, was getting ready for bed when he heard a violent blow against the barred front of his shop. He got there just in time to see an arm thrust through a hole smashed through the grating and the glass by a punch. The arm grabbed a loaf of bread and pulled it away. Isabeau rushed outside. The thief ran as fast as he could. Isabeau chased him and caught him. The man had thrown away the loaf, but his arm was still bleeding. It was Jean Valjean.

This happened in 1795. Jean Valjean was brought before the courts of that time for theft and for breaking into an occupied house at night. He carried a gun and handled it better than anyone else, and he was something of a poacher, which hurt his case. There is a certain accepted prejudice against poachers. Like smugglers, they seem too close to brigands. Even so, we should briefly note that there is still a vast distance between such men and the monstrous murderer of the city. The poacher lives in the forest; the smuggler lives in the mountains or on the sea. Cities create violent men because they first create corrupt men. The mountain, the sea, and the forest create wild men; they bring out fierceness, but often without destroying humanity.

Jean Valjean was found guilty. The language of the Code was clear. There are terrible moments in civilization, moments when the penal law pronounces a kind of shipwreck. What a dark instant it is when society recoils and completes the irreversible abandonment of a living human being. Jean Valjean was sentenced to five years in the galleys.

On April 22, 1796, Paris received news of the victory of Montenotte, won by the commander-in-chief of the army of Italy, whom the Directory's message to the Five Hundred, dated the 2d of Floréal, year IV., calls Buona-Parte. That very same day, a large chain gang of galley-slaves was shackled at Bicêtre. Jean Valjean was among them. An old prison turnkey, now nearly eighty years old, still remembers clearly that unhappy man, chained at the end of the fourth line in the north corner of the courtyard. He sat on the ground like the others. He did not seem to understand what was happening to him, except that it was horrible. He too was probably trying to sort out, through the confused thoughts of a poor man who knew nothing, something overwhelming. As the bolt of his iron collar was riveted behind his head under heavy hammer blows, he wept. His tears choked him and kept him from speaking. From time to time he managed only to say, "I was a tree-pruner at Faverolles." Then, still sobbing, he lifted his right hand and slowly lowered it seven times, as though he were touching, one after another, seven heads of different heights. From that gesture, people understood that whatever he had done, he had done it to clothe and feed seven little children.

He left for Toulon. After a twenty-seven-day journey in a cart, with a chain around his neck, he arrived there. At Toulon, they dressed him in the red convict's coat. Everything that had made up his life, even his name, was erased. He was no longer Jean Valjean; he was number 24,601. What happened to his sister? What happened to the seven children? Who cared about that? What happens to the handful of leaves on a young tree when it is cut down at the root?

It was always the same story. These poor living creatures, these children of God, now left without support, guidance, or shelter, drifted away aimlessly—who can even say how?—perhaps each in a different direction. Little by little, they vanished into that cold fog that swallows up lonely lives: dark shadows where so many unfortunate souls disappear, one after another, in the grim march of humanity. They left the countryside. The bell tower of what had once been their village forgot them. The boundary of what had once been their field forgot them. After a few years in the galleys, even Jean Valjean forgot them. In the place in his heart where there had been a wound, there was now only a scar. That was all. Only once, during all his time at Toulon, did he hear his sister mentioned. I believe it was near the end of the fourth year of his imprisonment. I do not know how the news reached him. Someone who had known the family in their home region had seen his sister. She was in Paris. She lived in a poor street near Saint-Sulpice, on the Rue du Gindre. She had only one child with her, a little boy, the youngest. Where were the other six? Perhaps she did not know herself. Every morning she went to a printing shop at No. 3 Rue du Sabot, where she worked folding and stitching. She had to

be there at six in the morning—long before daylight in winter. In the same building as the print shop there was a school, and she brought her little boy there. He was seven years old. But because she entered the print shop at six, and the school did not open until seven, the child had to wait in the courtyard for an hour—one full hour outside on a winter morning before dawn. They would not let him into the print shop because, they said, he was in the way. When the workers arrived in the morning, they would see the poor child sitting on the pavement, heavy with sleep, often fast asleep in the shadows, crouched over and curled around his basket. When it rained, an old woman, the porter's wife, took pity on him. She brought him into her little room, where there was a straw mattress, a spinning wheel, and two wooden chairs, and the child slept in a corner, pressing close to the cat so he would feel the cold less. At seven o'clock the school opened, and he went in. That was what Jean Valjean was told.

They spoke to him about it for a single day. It was only a moment, a brief flash, as if a window had suddenly opened onto the fate of those he had loved. Then it all closed again. He never heard another word. Nothing from them ever reached him after that. He never saw them again, never met them again, and in the rest of this sorrowful story they do not appear again.

Near the end of this fourth year, Jean Valjean's chance to escape came. His fellow prisoners helped him, as was the custom in that miserable place. He escaped. For two days he wandered through the fields, free—if it can be called freedom to be hunted, to turn your head at every moment, to tremble at the

slightest sound, to fear everything: a smoking roof, a passerby, a barking dog, a galloping horse, a clock striking, the day because you can be seen, the night because you cannot see, the highway, the path, a bush, sleep itself. On the evening of the second day, he was caught. He had neither eaten nor slept for thirty-six hours. For this offense, the maritime tribunal added three years to his sentence, bringing it to eight years. In the sixth year, his chance to escape came again. He took it, but did not manage to get away completely. He was absent at roll call. The cannon were fired, and that night the patrol found him hiding under the keel of a ship that was being built. He resisted the galley guards who seized him. Escape and rebellion. Under a special code that covered such cases, he was punished with five more years, two of them in double irons. Thirteen years. In the tenth year, his turn came again, and he tried once more. He fared no better. Three years for this new attempt. Sixteen years. Finally, I believe it was in his thirteenth year that he made one last attempt, only to be recaptured after four hours of freedom. Three years for those four hours. Nineteen years. In October 1815, he was released. He had entered that place in 1796 for breaking a pane of glass and taking a loaf of bread.

A brief aside. This is the second time, in the course of the author's studies of crime and punishment under the law, that he has found the theft of a loaf of bread at the beginning of a ruined life. Claude Gaux stole a loaf; Jean Valjean stole a loaf. English statistics show that in London, four thefts out of five are caused directly by hunger.

Jean Valjean entered the galleys weeping and trembling; he came out expressionless. He went in despairing; he came out dark and grim.

What had happened in that soul?

CHAPTER VII—THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR

Let us try to explain it.

Society must look directly at these things, because it is society itself that creates them.

As we have said, he was an ignorant man, but he was not a stupid one. A natural light burned within him. Misery, which has its own sharp clarity, strengthened the little daylight already present in his mind. Under the cudgel, under the chain, in the cell, in suffering, beneath the blazing sun of the galleys, on the convict's plank bed, he turned inward and reflected.

He made himself the judge.

He began by putting himself on trial.

He knew he was not an innocent man being punished unfairly. He admitted that he had committed a grave and blameworthy act. If he had asked for that loaf of bread, he probably would not have been refused. In any case, it would have been better to wait until he could get it through charity or through work. He also admitted that “Can a man wait when he is hungry?” is not an argument that settles everything. First, people rarely die of hunger in the literal sense. Second, fortunately or unfortunately, human beings are made to endure long and severe suffering, both physical and moral, without dying. So patience was necessary. It would even have been better for those poor little children. For him, a miserable and unfortunate wretch, to seize

society violently by the collar and imagine that theft could be a way out of misery had been an act of madness. In any case, it was a poor door through which to escape misery, since it was also the door through which disgrace entered. In short, he had been in the wrong.

Then he asked himself:

Had he been the only one at fault in that disastrous story? Was it not a grave matter that he, a laborer, an unemployed but hardworking man, had been left without bread? And once the fault had been committed and confessed, had the punishment not been savage and out of all proportion? Had the law not been more abusive in the penalty than the offender had been in the offense? Had there not been too much weight in one side of the scales—the side that held expiation? Was the excess of punishment not so great that it wiped out the crime itself? Did it not reverse the whole situation, replacing the offender's fault with the fault of the punishment, turning the guilty man into the victim and the debtor into the creditor, and placing the law, in the end, on the side of the man who had broken it?

And had this punishment, made worse again and again by added penalties for his attempts to escape, not finally become a kind of outrage committed by the strong against the weak—a crime of society against the individual, a crime renewed every day, a crime that had lasted nineteen years?

He asked himself whether society had any right to make its members suffer equally in two different ways: in one case because of its own foolish lack of foresight, and in the other

because of its merciless foresight. Did it have the right to trap a poor man forever between two extremes—too little work and too much punishment?

Was it not outrageous for society to treat in this way the very people who had been given the least by chance in the distribution of life's goods, and who therefore deserved the most consideration?

After asking and answering these questions, he judged society and found it guilty.

He sentenced it to his hatred.

He held society responsible for the fate he was enduring, and he told himself that the day might come when he would not hesitate to demand an account from it. He told himself that there was no balance between the harm he had done and the harm being done to him. In the end, he concluded that his punishment was not exactly unjust, but it was certainly iniquitous.

Anger can be foolish and unreasonable; a person can be upset without cause. But real exasperation comes only when there is, underneath it, at least some appearance of justice on one's side. Jean Valjean felt that exasperation.

And besides, society had done nothing to him but harm. He had seen only one face of it: the angry face it calls Justice, the face it turns on those it strikes. Men had touched him only to hurt him. Every contact had been a blow. Never, since childhood, since the days of his mother and his sister, had he met with a kind word or a gentle look. Suffering after suffering, he had

gradually come to believe that life was a war, and in that war he was the defeated man. He had no weapon left but his hatred. He resolved to sharpen it in the galleys and carry it away with him when he left.

At Toulon there was a school for convicts, run by the Ignorantin friars, where the most necessary subjects were taught to those unfortunate men who wanted to learn. He was one of them. At the age of forty, he went to school and learned to read, write, and do arithmetic. He felt that strengthening his mind was also strengthening his hatred. In some cases, education and enlightenment can help evil grow.

This is a painful thing to say: after judging the society that had caused his misery, he judged Providence, which had made that society, and condemned that as well.

So through nineteen years of torture and slavery, this soul rose even as it sank. Light entered on one side, and darkness on the other.

As we have seen, Jean Valjean was not naturally evil. He was still a good man when he arrived at the galleys. There he condemned society and felt himself growing wicked; there he condemned Providence and knew that he was becoming impious.

At this point, it is hard not to stop and reflect.

Can human nature really be changed so completely, from top to bottom? Can a man created good by God be made wicked by man? Can the soul be remade entirely by fate and become evil

because fate itself is evil? Can the heart be twisted and take on incurable deformities and weaknesses under the weight of overwhelming misery, as the spine bends beneath a ceiling that is too low? Is there not in every human soul—and in Jean Valjean's soul in particular—a first spark, a divine element, incorruptible in this world and immortal in the next, which good can nurture, stir, kindle, and make shine brilliantly, and which evil can never fully put out?

These are grave and shadowy questions. To the last of them, any physiologist would probably have answered no without hesitation if he had seen, at Toulon, during the hours of rest—which for Jean Valjean were hours of brooding—this dark galley slave sitting with folded arms on the beam of a capstan, the end of his chain tucked into his pocket so it would not drag, solemn, silent, and thoughtful: an outcast under the law, looked on with anger by society, condemned by civilization, and looking up at heaven with severity.

Certainly—and we do not try to hide it—the observing physiologist would have seen a hopeless misery. He might perhaps have felt pity for this man, made sick by the law; but he would not even have tried to cure him. He would have turned his eyes away from the depths he had glimpsed in this soul, and, like Dante at the gates of hell, he would have erased from this life the word that the finger of God has nevertheless written on every man's brow: hope.

Was the state of his soul, which we have tried to examine, as clear to Jean Valjean himself as we have tried to make it for our readers? Did he clearly understand, once they had taken

shape—or even while they were forming—all the elements that made up his moral suffering? Had this rough, uneducated man gained a fully clear sense of the chain of thoughts through which he had gradually risen and fallen into the gloomy visions that had, for so many years, formed the inner horizon of his mind? Was he aware of everything that was happening within him, and of everything at work there? We do not claim that he was; indeed, we do not even believe it. There was too much ignorance in Jean Valjean, even after his misfortune, for all vagueness to have disappeared. At times, he did not really know what he felt. Jean Valjean lived in shadow; he suffered in shadow; he hated in shadow. One might almost say that his hatred came before his own awareness of it. He lived habitually in that darkness, groping his way like a blind man and a dreamer. Only now and then, from both outside and within, a burst of anger would come over him, an excess of suffering, a pale and sudden flash that lit up his whole soul. In that dreadful light, all at once, he saw around him—before him, behind him—the hideous precipices and the dark sweep of his destiny.

The flash passed, and night closed over him again; and where was he then? He no longer knew. The terrible thing about suffering of this kind, in which what is pitiless—that is, what degrades and brutalizes—takes over, is that it slowly changes a man through a kind of dull transformation into a wild beast, and sometimes into a savage one.

Jean Valjean’s repeated, stubborn escape attempts would by themselves be enough to show this strange effect of the law on the human soul. He would have tried again every time the

chance appeared, no matter how useless or reckless it was, without stopping for a moment to think about the outcome or what he had already suffered. He escaped in a rush, like a wolf that finds its cage open. Instinct told him, “Run!” Reason would have said, “Stay!” But faced with such a powerful temptation, reason disappeared and instinct alone remained. Only the animal in him acted. And when they caught him again, each new punishment only made him wilder.

One detail we must not leave out is that he had a physical strength unmatched by anyone else in the galleys. At work—hauling a cable or turning a capstan—Jean Valjean was worth four men. He could sometimes lift and carry enormous weights on his back, and when necessary he could take the place of the tool called a jack-screw, formerly known as orgueil– [pride]. It is worth noting in passing that this is where the name of the Rue Montorgueil, near the Halles [Fishmarket] in Paris, comes from. His fellow prisoners had nicknamed him Jean the Jack-screw. Once, while they were repairing the balcony of the town-hall at Toulon, one of Puget’s admirable caryatids that support the balcony came loose and was about to fall. Jean Valjean, who was there, braced it on his shoulder and held it long enough for the workmen to get there.

He was even more agile than he was strong. Some convicts, forever dreaming of escape, eventually turned strength and skill together into a true science. It was the science of muscles. Prisoners—men always envying the flies and birds—practised a whole system of secret statics every day. For Jean Valjean, climbing a sheer wall and finding footholds where almost no

ledge could be seen was easy. Given the angle of a wall, he could press with his back and legs, wedge his elbows and heels into the rough places in the stone, and raise himself as if by magic to the third story. Sometimes he climbed this way all the way to the roof of the galley prison.

He spoke very little. He never laughed. Only some overwhelming surge of feeling could force from him, once or twice a year, that mournful convict's laugh, like an echo of a demon's laughter. To anyone watching, he seemed constantly absorbed in the contemplation of something terrible.

He was deeply absorbed, in fact.

And he was absorbed for a reason. Through the distorted perceptions of a damaged nature and a crushed mind, he dimly felt that something monstrous was weighing on him. In the dim, sickly shadow where he dragged himself along, whenever he turned his head and tried to lift his eyes, he saw—with terror mixed with rage—a dreadful piling up of things rising above him, beyond what he could fully make out: laws, prejudices, men, and events. Their outlines escaped him, but their sheer mass filled him with fear. It was nothing less than that enormous pyramid we call civilization. Here and there in that swarming, shapeless mass, sometimes close by, sometimes far away on unreachable heights, he could make out some group or detail lit up sharply: here the galley-sergeant with his cudgel; there the gendarme with his sword; farther off the mitred archbishop; and high above all, like a kind of sun, the Emperor, crowned and dazzling. It seemed to him that these distant splendors, instead of breaking through his darkness, only made it more funeral,

more black. All of it—laws, prejudices, events, men, things—moved above him and over his head, following the complicated and mysterious motion that God gives to civilization, treading on him and crushing him with a cruelty that was calm and an indifference that was relentless. Souls that have fallen to the very bottom of misery, unhappy men lost in the lowest of those limbos that no one even notices anymore, those condemned by the law, feel the full weight of human society resting on their heads—society so formidable to the man outside it, and so terrifying to the man beneath it.

In this condition, Jean Valjean reflected. And what could his thoughts have been?

If the grain of millet under the millstone could think, it would no doubt think what Jean Valjean thought.

In the end, all these things—realities crowded with spectres, phantasmagorias crowded with realities—had created within him a state of mind that is almost impossible to describe.

Sometimes, in the middle of his convict labor, he would stop. He would sink into thought. His mind, more mature than before and more deeply disturbed at the same time, rebelled. Everything that had happened to him seemed absurd. Everything around him seemed unreal. He told himself, "This is a dream." He looked at the galley sergeant standing a few steps away, and the man seemed like a ghost. Then, without warning, the ghost struck him with his cudgel.

The natural world barely existed for him. It would almost be true to say that, for Jean Valjean, there was no sun, no beautiful

summer days, no shining sky, no fresh dawns in April. I do not know through what narrow opening daylight still managed to reach his soul.

In short, to reduce all this to plain facts, we need only say that over the course of nineteen years Jean Valjean—the harmless tree-pruner of Faverolles and the fearsome convict of Toulon—had become capable, through the way the galleys had shaped him, of two kinds of evil action. First, there was the kind that was sudden, unplanned, bold, and purely instinctive: a form of retaliation for the wrongs he had suffered. Second, there was the kind that was serious, deliberate, and carefully thought out, driven by the false ideas that such misery can produce. His deliberate acts passed through three successive stages, which only certain kinds of natures can go through: reasoning, will, and perseverance. What drove him was his constant anger, the bitterness in his soul, his deep sense of humiliation, and even a reaction against goodness itself—against the innocent and the just, if such people exist. The starting point, and also the end point, of all his thoughts was hatred of human law. If nothing stops that hatred through some providential event, it grows in time into hatred of society, then hatred of the human race, then hatred of creation itself. It shows itself as a vague, relentless, brutal urge to harm some living being, no matter who. It is clear, then, that Jean Valjean's passport did not call him _a very dangerous man_ without reason.

Year by year, this soul had slowly dried up, with fatal certainty. When the heart is dry, the eyes are dry as well. By the time he left the galleys, nineteen years had passed since he had shed a

tear.

CHAPTER VIII—WAVES AND SHADOWS

A man overboard!

What does it matter? The ship does not stop. The wind is blowing. That dark vessel follows a course it cannot leave. It sails on.

The man vanishes, then appears again. He sinks, then rises back to the surface. He cries out and stretches out his arms, but no one hears him. The ship, shaking in the hurricane, is completely taken up with its own struggle. The passengers and sailors do not even see the drowning man. His wretched head is only a speck in the vastness of the waves. From the depths he sends up desperate cries. What a ghost that receding sail is! He stares at it wildly, again and again. It moves farther away. It grows dim. It grows smaller. Just a moment ago he was there. He was one of the crew. He walked the deck with the others. He had his share of breath and sunlight. He was a living man. And now what has happened? He slipped. He fell. Everything is over.

He is in the immense sea. Beneath his feet there is nothing but what gives way and breaks apart. The waves, ripped and whipped by the wind, close around him horribly. The heaving abyss carries him off. Every surge crashes over his head. A whole mob of waves spits on him. Dark openings half swallow him. Each time he sinks, he catches sight of chasms filled with night. Terrible, unknown sea growths clutch at him, twist around his feet, and pull him down. He feels himself becoming part of

the abyss, part of the foam. The waves fling him from one to another. He drinks in bitterness. The treacherous ocean attacks him savagely, bent on drowning him. That vastness toys with his agony. It seems as though all that water were hatred.

Still, he struggles.

He tries to defend himself. He tries to keep himself afloat. He strains and swims. With his tiny strength, exhausted at once, he fights the inexhaustible.

So where is the ship? Over there—barely visible in the pale shadows along the horizon.

The wind comes in violent gusts, and the foam keeps crashing over him. He lifts his eyes and sees nothing but the sickly color of the clouds. In the agony of dying, he faces the vast madness of the sea. That madness torments him. He hears sounds no human being should hear, as if they were coming from beyond the edges of the earth, from some terrifying region farther still.

There are birds in the clouds, just as there are angels above human suffering; but what can they do for him? They sing, fly, and drift, while he lies there, choking in the agony of death.

He feels buried at once in those two infinities, the ocean and the sky: one is a tomb, the other a shroud.

Night falls. He has been swimming for hours. His strength is gone. That ship, that far-off thing carrying men, has disappeared. He is alone in the terrible gulf of twilight. He sinks, braces himself, twists his body. Beneath him he feels the monstrous swells of the unseen sea. He cries out.

There are no more men. Where is God?

He cries out: Help! Help! He keeps shouting.

Nothing on the horizon. Nothing in the sky.

He begs the vast expanse, the waves, the seaweed, the reef; they do not hear. He pleads with the storm, but the unshaken storm obeys only the infinite.

Around him are darkness, fog, solitude, the blind violence of the storm, the shapeless curling of those savage waters. Inside him are horror and exhaustion. Beneath him are the depths. There is nothing to hold on to. He thinks of the grim journey of a corpse through endless shadow. The bottomless cold paralyzes him. His hands clench in convulsions; they close on nothing. Winds, clouds, whirlwinds, gusts, useless stars—what can be done? In despair, the man gives up. He is tired. He chooses death. He no longer fights. He lets himself go. He releases his hold. Then he is tossed forever in the mournful, dreary depths of the abyss.

Oh, the pitiless march of human societies! Oh, the loss of men and souls along the way! Ocean into which everything falls that the law lets slip! Fatal absence of help! Oh, moral death!

The sea is the merciless social night into which penal laws throw the condemned. The sea is the vastness of human misery.

A soul drifting down into this abyss can become like a corpse. Who can bring it back to life?

CHAPTER IX—NEW TROUBLES

When the time came for him to leave the galleys, and Jean Valjean heard the strange words whispered in his ear, _You are free!_, the moment felt unreal, unlike anything he had ever known. A bright beam of light—the true light of the living—suddenly entered his soul. But it did not stay bright for long. Jean Valjean had been dazzled by the idea of freedom. He had believed a new life was beginning. He very quickly discovered what kind of freedom comes with a yellow passport.

And that freedom was filled with bitterness. He had calculated that his earnings during his time in the galleys should have come to a hundred and seventy-one francs. To be fair, he had forgotten to count the enforced rest on Sundays and feast days over those nineteen years, which reduced the total by about eighty francs. Even so, after various local deductions, his savings had been cut down to one hundred and nine francs fifteen sous, which was counted out to him when he left. He understood none of this and believed he had been cheated. Let us use the word—robbed.

The day after his release, he saw some men in Grasse unloading bales in front of an orange-flower distillery. He offered to help. The work was urgent, so they took him on. He began at once. He was intelligent, strong, and skillful, and he worked as hard as he could. The owner seemed satisfied. While he was working, a gendarme passed by, noticed him, and asked for his papers. He had to show the yellow passport. After that, Jean Valjean went back to work. A little earlier, he had asked

one of the laborers how much they earned each day at that job, and had been told _thirty sous_. When evening came, since he had to leave again the next day, he went to the owner of the distillery and asked to be paid. The owner said nothing, but handed him fifteen sous. Jean Valjean protested. He was told, _"That is enough for thee."_ He insisted. The master looked him straight in the eye and said, _"Beware of the prison."_

Once again, he felt that he had been robbed.

Society—the State—had robbed him on a grand scale by shrinking his savings. Now an individual was robbing him bit by bit.

Being set free is not the same as being delivered. A man may leave the galleys, but he does not escape the sentence.

That was what happened to him at Grasse. We have already seen how he was received at D——.

CHAPTER X—THE MAN AWAKENS

When the cathedral clock struck two in the morning, Jean Valjean woke up.

What woke him was the bed itself: it was too comfortable. It had been nearly twenty years since he had slept in a bed, and although he had not taken off his clothes, the feeling was so unfamiliar that it disturbed his sleep.

He had slept for more than four hours. His weariness was gone. He was used to sleeping only a few hours.

He opened his eyes and looked into the darkness around him. Then he closed them again, intending to go back to sleep.

When a day has been filled with many different emotions, when the mind is occupied by all sorts of things, a person falls asleep once, but not twice. Sleep comes more easily than it comes back. That was what happened to Jean Valjean. He could not get to sleep again, and he began to think.

He was in one of those states when a person’s thoughts are confused and unsettled. A kind of dark disorder filled his mind. Memories of the distant past and of the present moment drifted there together in a jumble, blending into one another, losing their true shape, swelling out of proportion, then suddenly vanishing, like things seen in a pool of muddy, troubled water. Many thoughts came to him. But one kept returning again and again, driving all the others away. We may name it at once: he

had noticed the six silver forks and spoons, and the ladle, that Madame Magloire had placed on the table.

Those six silver place settings kept haunting him. They were there, only a few steps away. As he had passed through the next room to get to this one, the old servant woman had been putting them into a small cupboard near the head of the bed. He had carefully noted that cupboard: on the right as you came in from the dining room. They were solid silver, and old. The ladle alone would bring at least two hundred francs—twice what he had earned in nineteen years. True, he would have earned more if "the administration had not robbed him."

For a full hour, his mind swayed back and forth, and there was clearly some inner struggle mixed in with it. Three o'clock struck. He opened his eyes, suddenly sat up, and reached for the knapsack he had thrown into a corner of the alcove. Then he let his legs hang over the side of the bed and set his feet on the floor, finding himself seated there almost without realizing how he had come to it.

He stayed for a while in that thoughtful pose. To anyone who might have seen him there in the dark—the only person awake in a house where everyone else slept—he would have looked sinister. Suddenly he bent down, took off his shoes, and set them quietly on the mat beside the bed. Then he returned to the same thoughtful posture and became still again.

Throughout this dreadful meditation, the thoughts we have already described kept moving endlessly through his mind. They came, went, returned, and seemed to press down on him.

He also found himself thinking, for no clear reason and with the mechanical persistence of a daydream, about a convict named Brevet, whom he had known in the galleys, and whose trousers had been held up by a single knitted cotton suspender. The checkered pattern of that suspender kept coming back to him again and again.

He remained like this, and might have stayed that way indefinitely, even until daybreak, if the clock had not struck one—the half-hour or quarter-hour. It seemed to him that the sound was saying, “Come on!”

He got to his feet, hesitated for one more moment, and listened. The house was completely quiet. Then he walked straight toward the window he had noticed, taking short steps. The night was not very dark. A full moon hung in the sky, while large wind-driven clouds passed across it. Outside, this made the light shift constantly between shadow and brightness, moments of darkness followed by clear openings in the clouds. Inside, it created a kind of dim half-light. It was enough to find one’s way, though it came and went with the clouds. It resembled the pale, ghostly light that falls through a cellar air-hole while people pass back and forth above it. When he reached the window, Jean Valjean examined it. There were no bars. It opened onto the garden and, as was common in the countryside, was secured only by a small pin. He opened it, but a sudden rush of sharp, icy air swept into the room, and he immediately shut it again. He studied the garden with the focused gaze of someone examining rather than merely looking. The garden was enclosed by a fairly low white wall that would be easy to climb. In the

distance, at the far end, he saw the tops of trees set at regular intervals, showing that the wall separated the garden from a tree-lined road or path.

After taking in all this, he moved like a man who had made his decision. He went to his alcove, grabbed his knapsack, opened it, and searched inside. He took out something and laid it on the bed, put his shoes into one of his pockets, closed the bag again, slung the knapsack over his shoulders, put on his cap, and pulled the visor down over his eyes. He felt for his cudgel, went to place it in the corner of the window, then came back to the bed and firmly picked up the object he had set there. It looked like a short iron bar, pointed at one end like a pike. In the darkness, it was hard to tell what the piece of iron was meant for. Perhaps it was a lever. Possibly it was a club.

In daylight, it would have been easy to see that it was simply a miner's candlestick. At that time, convicts were sometimes used to quarry stone from the high hills surrounding Toulon, and it was not unusual for them to have miners' tools available to them. These miners' candlesticks were made of heavy iron and ended in a point at the bottom, so they could be driven into the rock.

He took the candlestick in his right hand. Holding his breath and trying to muffle the sound of his footsteps, he moved toward the door of the next room, where the Bishop was staying, as we already know.

When he reached the door, he found it partly open. The Bishop had not shut it.

CHAPTER XI—WHAT HE DOES

Jean Valjean listened. He heard nothing.

He pushed the door.

He pressed it gently with the tip of his finger, with the cautious, uneasy softness of a cat trying to slip inside.

The door gave under the pressure and moved so slightly and quietly that the opening widened almost without a sound.

He waited a moment, then pushed it again, this time more boldly.

It kept giving way without a sound. The opening was now wide enough for him to get through. But a small table stood near the door, making an awkward angle with it and blocking the entrance.

Jean Valjean saw the problem. Whatever it took, he had to open the door wider.

He made up his mind and pushed the door a third time, harder than before. This time, in the silence, a badly oiled hinge suddenly let out a harsh, drawn-out creak.

Jean Valjean trembled. The sound of the hinge rang in his ears like the sharp and terrible blast of the trumpet of Judgment Day.

In the wild panic of that first instant, he almost imagined the hinge had come alive. It seemed to take on a dreadful life of its own, barking like a dog to rouse everyone and warn those who were asleep. He stopped, trembling and confused, and dropped

back from tiptoe onto his heels. He could hear the blood pounding in his temples like two forge hammers, and it seemed to him that his breath came out of his chest with the roar of wind from a cavern. It felt impossible that the horrible screech of that rusty hinge had not woken the whole house, as if an earthquake had struck. The door, under his hand, had taken fright and cried out. The old man would get up at once. The two old women would scream. People would come running to help them. In less than fifteen minutes the whole town would be in an uproar, and the gendarmes would be there. For a moment, he thought he was lost.

He stayed where he was, frozen like a statue of salt, not daring to move. Several minutes passed. The door had swung completely open. He finally dared to glance into the next room. Nothing had moved there. He listened. Nothing stirred in the house. The noise from the rusty hinge had woken no one.

That first danger had passed, but a terrible turmoil still raged inside him. Even so, he did not retreat. Not even when he had thought himself lost had he turned back. Now he wanted only to finish as quickly as possible. He took a step and entered the room.

The room was perfectly still. Here and there, dim, confused shapes could be made out—things that in daylight were papers scattered across a table, open folios, books piled on a stool, an armchair heaped with clothes, and a prie-Dieu, but that at this hour were only patches of shadow and pale blurs. Jean Valjean moved forward carefully, making sure not to bump into the furniture. From the far end of the room, he could hear the

Bishop's steady, peaceful breathing as he slept.

He suddenly stopped. He was close to the bed. He had reached it sooner than he expected.

Nature sometimes blends her sights and effects with our actions in a dark, meaningful way, as if she wants to make us think. For the past half-hour, a great cloud had covered the sky. Just as Jean Valjean stopped beside the bed, the cloud broke apart, as though deliberately, and a shaft of light passed through the tall window and suddenly lit the Bishop’s pale face. He was sleeping peacefully. Because of the cold in the Basses-Alps, he lay in bed still almost fully dressed, wearing a brown wool garment that covered his arms to the wrists. His head rested back on the pillow in the easy posture of deep rest. His hand, with the pastoral ring on it—the same hand from which so many good and holy deeds had come—hung over the side of the bed. His whole face shone with a faint expression of contentment, hope, and happiness. It was more than a smile, almost a radiance. On his brow there was the indescribable reflection of a light that could not be seen. In sleep, the soul of a just man beholds a mysterious heaven.

A reflection of that heaven rested on the Bishop.

At the same time, it was a clear, shining transparency, because that heaven was within him. That heaven was his conscience.

[Illustration: The Fall]

When the ray of moonlight seemed to fall across that inner radiance, the sleeping Bishop appeared almost transfigured. Yet

the effect remained gentle, softened by an indescribable half-light. The moon in the sky, the sleeping world of nature, the garden without a stir, the house so full of calm, the hour, the moment, the silence—all of it gave a solemn, unspoken grandeur to this venerable man's rest. It wrapped his white hair, his closed eyes, that face filled entirely with hope and trust, that old man's head, and that infant's sleep in a kind of serene and majestic halo.

There was something almost divine about this man, so dignified without knowing it himself.

Jean Valjean stood in the shadows, perfectly still, the iron candlestick in his hand, frightened by the sight of this radiant old man. He had never seen anything like it. That trust terrified him. The moral world offers no greater spectacle than this: a troubled, restless conscience, on the verge of doing evil, looking at the sleep of a righteous man.

That sleep, in that solitude, with a neighbor like Jean Valjean beside him, had something sublime about it, and Jean Valjean felt it dimly but powerfully.

No one could have said what was happening inside him, not even Jean Valjean himself. To imagine it at all, you would have to picture the most violent force confronted by the gentlest thing. Even his face revealed nothing clearly. It showed only a kind of wild astonishment. He stared, and that was all. But what was he thinking? No one could have guessed. What was clear was that he was moved and stunned. But what kind of feeling was it?

His eyes never left the old man. The only thing his posture and expression clearly suggested was a strange uncertainty. It was as if he stood between two abysses: one in which a man is lost, and one in which he is saved. He seemed ready either to crush that skull or to kiss that hand.

After a few minutes, his left arm slowly rose to his forehead, and he took off his cap. Then his arm dropped again with the same slow deliberation, and Jean Valjean sank back into thought, his cap in his left hand, his club in his right, his hair bristling over his savage head.

The Bishop went on sleeping in deep peace beneath that terrifying stare.

The moonlight dimly lit the crucifix above the mantel, and it seemed to stretch out its arms over both of them, offering a blessing to one and forgiveness to the other.

Suddenly Jean Valjean pulled his cap down over his forehead, then hurried past the bed without looking at the Bishop and went straight to the cupboard he had noticed near the head of it. He lifted his iron candlestick as if he meant to break the lock, but the key was already there. He opened it. The first thing he saw was the basket of silverware. He grabbed it and crossed the room in long strides, taking no care to be quiet and paying no attention to the noise he made. He reached the door, went back through the oratory, opened the window, picked up his cudgel, climbed onto the ground-floor windowsill, put the silver into his knapsack, threw away the basket, crossed the garden, sprang over the wall like a tiger, and fled.

CHAPTER XII—THE BISHOP AT WORK

The next morning, at sunrise, Monseigneur Bienvenu was walking in his garden. Madame Magloire came running up to him in complete alarm.

“Monseigneur, Monseigneur!” she cried. “Does your Grace know where the basket of silver is?”

“Yes,” the Bishop replied.

“Blessed be the Lord Jesus!” she went on. “I had no idea what had happened to it.”

The Bishop had just picked up the basket from a flower-bed. He handed it to Madame Magloire.

“Here it is.”

“Well!” she said. “There’s nothing in it! Where is the silver?”

“Ah,” said the Bishop, “is it the silver that is worrying you? I don’t know where it is.”

“Good God! It’s been stolen! That man who was here last night took it!”

In an instant, with all the quickness of an energetic old woman, Madame Magloire rushed to the oratory, went into the alcove, and came back to the Bishop. He had just bent down with a sigh to examine a cochlearia des Guillons plant that the basket had broken when it fell across the bed. He straightened up at Madame Magloire's cry.

"Monseigneur, the man is gone! The silver has been stolen!"

As she cried this out, her eyes fell on a corner of the garden where there were clear signs that someone had climbed over the wall. The top of the wall had been damaged.

"Look! That's the way he went. He jumped over into Cochefilet Lane. Ah, how dreadful! He has stolen our silver!"

The Bishop was silent for a moment. Then he lifted his serious eyes and said gently to Madame Magloire:

"First of all, was that silver really ours?"

Madame Magloire could not speak. There was another pause, and then the Bishop continued:

"Madame Magloire, I have kept that silver for a long time without any right to it. It belonged to the poor. And who was that man? Clearly, a poor man."

"Oh! Jesus!" cried Madame Magloire. "It is not for me, or for Mademoiselle. It makes no difference to us. But for Monseigneur—what is Monseigneur supposed to eat with now?"

The Bishop looked at her in surprise.

“Why, come now! Are there no pewter forks and spoons?”

Madame Magloire shrugged.

“Pewter smells.”

“Then iron forks and spoons.”

Madame Magloire made a telling face.

“Iron leaves a taste.”

“Very well,” said the Bishop. “Then wooden ones.”

A few moments later, he was eating breakfast at the very table where Jean Valjean had sat the night before. As he ate, Monseigneur Welcome cheerfully remarked to his sister, who said nothing, and to Madame Magloire, who was muttering under her breath, that one does not really need a fork or spoon—not even a wooden one—to dip a piece of bread into a cup of milk.

“A fine idea indeed,” Madame Magloire said to herself as she went back and forth, “to take in a man like that and give him a room so near one’s own! And how lucky that all he did was steal! Ah, my God! it makes one shudder to think about it!”

Just as the brother and sister were about to leave the table, someone knocked at the door.

“Come in,” said the Bishop.

The door opened. A strange and forceful-looking group appeared on the threshold. Three men were gripping a fourth man by the collar. The three were gendarmes; the other was

Jean Valjean.

A brigadier of gendarmes, who appeared to be in charge of the group, stood near the door. He came in and approached the Bishop, giving him a military salute.

“Monseigneur—” he said.

At that word, Jean Valjean, who had looked crushed and hopeless, lifted his head in stunned surprise.

“Monseigneur!” he murmured. “So he is not the curé?”

“Quiet!” said the gendarme. “He is Monseigneur the Bishop.”

Meanwhile, Monseigneur Bienvenu had come forward as quickly as his age allowed.

“Ah, there you are!” he cried, looking at Jean Valjean. “I’m glad to see you. But what is this? I gave you the candlesticks too. They’re silver like the rest, and you could certainly get two hundred francs for them. Why didn’t you take them along with your forks and spoons?”

Jean Valjean’s eyes widened, and he stared at the venerable Bishop with an expression no words could describe.

“Monseigneur,” said the brigadier of gendarmes, “then what this man told us was true? We came across him. He was walking like someone trying to escape. We stopped him to find out what was going on. He had this silver—”

“And he told you,” the Bishop cut in with a smile, “that a kind old priest, with whom he had spent the night, had given it to him? I understand. And you brought him back here? That was a

mistake."

"In that case," said the brigadier, "we can let him go?"

"Certainly," said the Bishop.

The gendarmes let Jean Valjean go, and he drew back.

"Is it true that I'm to be released?" he said in a voice that was almost unintelligible, as if he were speaking in his sleep.

"Yes, you're released. Don't you understand?" said one of the gendarmes.

"My friend," the Bishop went on, "before you leave, here are your candlesticks. Take them."

He went to the mantelpiece, took the two silver candlesticks, and brought them to Jean Valjean. The two women watched without saying a word, making a gesture, or even giving a look that might unsettle the Bishop.

Jean Valjean was trembling all over. He took the two candlesticks mechanically, looking utterly bewildered.

"Now," said the Bishop, "go in peace. And by the way, when you come back, my friend, you do not need to go through the garden. You can always come in and go out through the street door. It is never locked with anything but a latch, day or night."

Then he turned to the gendarmes:

"You may go, gentlemen."

The gendarmes left.

Jean Valjean looked like a man about to faint.

The Bishop stepped closer to him and said in a low voice:

“Do not forget—never forget—that you have promised to use this money to become an honest man.”

Jean Valjean, who did not remember ever promising anything, stood speechless. The Bishop had stressed those words as he said them. He went on solemnly:

“Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I am buying from you. I am taking it away from dark thoughts and the spirit of damnation, and giving it to God.”

CHAPTER XIII—LITTLE GERVAIS

Jean Valjean left the town as if he were running from it. He hurried across the fields, taking whatever roads and paths came before him, without realizing that he was constantly doubling back. He wandered like that all morning. He had eaten nothing, yet he did not feel hungry. A flood of new sensations had taken hold of him. He felt a kind of anger, though he did not know who it was aimed at. He could not have said whether he felt moved or humiliated. At times a strange emotion came over him, and he fought it with the hardness he had built up over the last twenty years of his life. This state of mind exhausted him. To his dismay, he felt the dreadful calm that the injustice of his suffering had given him beginning to break apart inside him. He wondered what would take its place. Sometimes he would actually have preferred to be in prison with the gendarmes, and for things to have happened in the ordinary way; it would have disturbed him less. Although the season was fairly advanced, a few late flowers still bloomed here and there in the hedgerows, and as he passed, their scent brought back memories of his childhood. Those memories were almost unbearable, it had been so long since they had returned to him.

Thoughts he could not put into words gathered inside him like this all day long.

As the sun sank lower, throwing long shadows from every pebble across the ground, Jean Valjean sat down behind a bush on a wide reddish plain that was completely deserted. Nothing

broke the horizon except the Alps. There was not even the steeple of a distant village. Jean Valjean may have been three leagues from D——. A path crossed the plain a few steps from the bush.

In the middle of this brooding, which would only have made his rags look more frightening to anyone who met him, he heard a cheerful sound.

He turned his head and saw a little Savoyard boy, about ten years old, coming along the path and singing, with his hurdy-gurdy at his hip and his marmot-box on his back.

He was one of those cheerful, gentle children who travel from country to country, their knees showing through the holes in their trousers.

Without interrupting his song, the boy stopped now and then as he walked and played knucklebones with the coins in his hand—probably everything he owned.

Among them was a forty-sou coin.

The child stopped beside the bush, not noticing Jean Valjean, and tossed up his handful of sous, which until then he had been catching quite skillfully on the back of his hand.

This time, the forty-sou coin slipped away from him and rolled toward the brush until it reached Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean put his foot on it.

Meanwhile, the child had followed the coin with his eyes and had seen him.

He showed no surprise, but walked straight up to the man.

The place was completely deserted. As far as the eye could see, there was no one on the plain or on the road. The only sound was the faint, tiny cries of a flock of migrating birds crossing the sky far overhead. The child stood with his back to the sun, which threaded his hair with gold and cast a blood-red glow over Jean Valjean's harsh face.

"Sir," said the little Savoyard, with that childlike trust born of ignorance and innocence, "my money."

"What is your name?" said Jean Valjean.

"Little Gervais, sir."

"Go away," said Jean Valjean.

"Sir," the child said again, "give me back my money."

Jean Valjean lowered his head and said nothing.

The child repeated, "My money, sir."

Jean Valjean kept his eyes fixed on the ground.

"My coin!" cried the child. "My white coin! My silver!"

Jean Valjean seemed not to hear him. The child grabbed the collar of his blouse and shook him. At the same time, he tried to push aside the big iron-shod shoe that was resting on his treasure.

"I want my money! My forty-sou coin!"

The child burst into tears. Jean Valjean lifted his head. He was still sitting down. His eyes looked troubled. He stared at the child in bewilderment, then reached for his cudgel and shouted in a terrible voice, “Who’s there?”

“Me, sir,” the child answered. “Little Gervais! Me! Please give me back my forty sous! Please take your foot off it, sir!”

Then, angry despite his small size and growing almost threatening, he said:

“Come on now, are you going to take your foot away? Take it away, or you’ll see!”

“Ah! It’s you again!” said Jean Valjean. He sprang abruptly to his feet, still keeping his foot on the silver coin, and added:

“Get out of here!”

The terrified child looked at him, then began to tremble from head to foot. After a few stunned moments, he ran off as fast as he could, not daring to look back or cry out.

Still, after a certain distance, he had to stop for breath, and in the middle of his own reverie Jean Valjean could hear him sobbing.

A few moments later, the child had disappeared.

The sun had gone down.

Shadows were gathering around Jean Valjean. He had eaten nothing all day; he was probably feverish.

He remained standing, unchanged since the child had fled. His chest rose and fell at long, uneven intervals. His gaze, fixed ten or twelve paces ahead, seemed to study with intense attention the shape of an old shard of blue earthenware lying in the grass. Suddenly he shivered; he had just begun to feel the evening cold.

He pulled his cap down more firmly over his brow, mechanically tried to pull his blouse together and button it, took a step forward, and stopped to pick up his cudgel.

At that moment he saw the forty-sou coin, half pressed into the dirt by his foot, shining among the pebbles. It was like an electric shock. “What is this?” he muttered through clenched teeth. He stumbled back three steps, then stopped, unable to take his eyes off the spot his foot had touched only a moment before, as if the thing glittering there in the dim light were an open eye fixed on him.

A few moments later, he lunged convulsively toward the silver coin, snatched it up, and straightened again. Then he stared out across the plain, scanning every edge of the horizon, standing rigid and trembling like a frightened wild animal searching for shelter.

He saw nothing. Night was falling. The plain looked cold and indistinct, and great masses of violet mist were rising in the fading twilight.

He said, “Ah!” and hurried off in the direction where the child had disappeared. After about thirty paces, he stopped, looked around, and saw nothing.

Then he shouted with all his strength:

“Little Gervais! Little Gervais!”

He stopped and waited.

There was no answer.

The landscape was dark and empty. He was surrounded by open space. Around him there was nothing but darkness, where his eyes could find nothing to rest on, and a silence that swallowed up his voice.

An icy north wind was blowing, giving everything around him a grim kind of life. The bushes shook their thin little branches with wild violence. It looked as though they were threatening someone and chasing them.

He started walking again, then broke into a run. From time to time he stopped and shouted into the emptiness, in a voice as terrible as it was despairing, “Little Gervais! Little Gervais!”

Certainly, if the child had heard him, he would have been frightened and would have been careful not to show himself. But the child was probably already far away.

He came across a priest on horseback. He went up to him and said:

“Monsieur le Curé, have you seen a child pass by?”

“No,” said the priest.

“Someone called Little Gervais?”

“I haven’t seen anyone.”

He took two five-franc coins from his purse and handed them to the priest.

“Monsieur le Curé, this is for your poor. Monsieur le Curé, he was a little boy, about ten years old, with a marmot, I think, and a hurdy-gurdy. One of those Savoyard children, you know?”

“I haven’t seen him.”

“Little Gervais? Aren’t there any villages around here? Can you tell me?”

“If he looks as you describe, my friend, then he’s a little stranger. People like that pass through this country. We know nothing about them.”

Jean Valjean snatched out two more five-franc coins 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 dug his spurs into his horse and rode off quickly, badly frightened.

Jean Valjean began to run in the direction he had first taken.

He covered a fairly long distance like this, searching, calling, and shouting, but he found no one. Two or three times he ran across the plain toward something that looked like a person lying down or crouching there; each time it turned out to be only brushwood or rocks almost level with the ground. At last he stopped where three paths crossed. The moon had risen. He stared into the distance and shouted one last time, “Little Gervais! Little Gervais! Little Gervais!” His cry faded into the mist without even stirring an echo. He murmured once more, “Little Gervais!” but now his voice was faint and barely clear. It was his last effort. His legs suddenly gave way beneath him, as if some invisible force had dropped the full weight of his guilty conscience on him. He collapsed, exhausted, onto a large stone, his fists tangled in his hair and his face buried in his knees, and cried out, “I am a wretch!”

Then his heart broke, and he began to weep. It was the first time he had cried in nineteen years.

When Jean Valjean left the Bishop’s house, he was, as we have seen, completely shaken from everything he had thought and believed up to that point. He could not accept the clear truth of what was happening inside him. He steeled himself against the old man’s saintly influence and gentle words: “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.”

These words kept returning to him without pause. Against this heavenly kindness, he set his pride, that stronghold of evil within us. He dimly understood that this priest’s forgiveness was the greatest blow he had ever received, the most powerful

attack ever made on him; that if he resisted this mercy, his hardness would be fixed forever; that if he gave in, he would have to give up the hatred that other men's actions had planted in his soul over so many years, and that he had come to cherish; that this time he had to conquer or be conquered; and that a vast, final struggle had begun between his wickedness and that man's goodness.

Faced with these flashes of insight, he moved on like a drunken man. As he walked with wild eyes, did he clearly understand what might come of his adventure at D——? Did he hear all those mysterious inner murmurings that warn or plead with the soul at certain moments in life? Did a voice whisper to him that he had just passed the solemn hour of his destiny; that there was no middle path left for him; that if he was not from this point on the best of men, he would become the worst; that he must now, so to speak, rise higher than the Bishop or sink lower than the convict; that if he wished to become good, he must become an angel; and that if he wished to remain evil, he must become a monster?

Here again, we have to ask the same questions we have asked elsewhere: did he sense some faint shadow of all this, however dimly? Suffering does, as we have said, educate the mind. Even so, it is doubtful that Jean Valjean was able to sort out everything we have just described. If these ideas came to him at all, he only caught flashes of them rather than seeing them clearly, and they left him in a state of emotion so intense it was almost painful. When he came out of that dark, twisted world called the galleys, the Bishop wounded his soul just as a sudden

blaze of light would wound eyes emerging from darkness. The life ahead of him, the life now possible for him, so pure and radiant, filled him with trembling and dread. He no longer knew where he truly stood. Like an owl suddenly facing the sunrise, the convict was dazzled and, in a sense, blinded by virtue.

One thing was certain, and of this he had no doubt: he was no longer the same man. Everything around him had changed. It was no longer possible for him to pretend that the Bishop had neither spoken to him nor touched his soul.

In this state of mind, he came upon little Gervais and stole his forty sous. Why? He himself certainly could not have explained it. Was it the final effect, the last desperate surge, of the evil thoughts he had carried away from the galleys—a leftover impulse, what in mechanics is called acquired force? It was that, and perhaps it was even less than that. Put simply, it was not truly he who stole; it was not the man, but the beast, which through habit and instinct had merely set its foot on that money while the mind struggled through a storm of new and unheard-of thoughts.

When his mind fully woke and saw what the brute within him had done, Jean Valjean drew back in anguish and cried out in terror.

[Illustration: Awakened]

For in stealing that child's money, he had done something he was no longer capable of doing—a strange thing, possible only in the state he was in.

However that may be, this final evil act had a decisive effect on him. It suddenly cut through the chaos in his mind and cleared it away. It set the thick darkness on one side and the light on the other, and it worked on his soul, in the state it was then in, the way certain chemical agents act on a cloudy mixture, forcing one element to settle and making the other clear.

Before he even examined himself or had time to reflect, bewildered and desperate like a man trying to save himself, he first tried to find the child so he could return his money. Then, when he realized that was impossible, he stopped in despair. At the moment he cried, “I am a wretch!” he had just understood what he was. He was already so far divided from himself that he seemed to himself like nothing more than a phantom. It was as though, there before him in flesh and blood, stood the hideous galley-convict Jean Valjean, cudgel in hand, blouse tucked up at his hips, knapsack full of stolen goods on his back, with his hard, gloomy face and his mind full of vile schemes.

As we have said, extreme misery had made him something like a visionary. So this was, in a sense, a vision. He truly saw 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 mind was passing through one of those violent yet perfectly calm moments when thought becomes so deep that it swallows up reality. You no longer see the object in front of you. Instead, as if outside yourself, you see the figures that exist in your own mind.

So he looked at himself, as it were, face to face. At the same time, through this hallucination, he noticed in a mysterious depth a kind of light that he first took for a torch. But when he looked at this light, which appeared to his conscience more closely, he realized that it had a human form, and that this torch was the Bishop.

His conscience weighed the two men before him: the Bishop and Jean Valjean. Nothing less than the first could soften the second. In one of those strange effects that belong to such moments of spiritual rapture, the longer his meditation went on, the greater and more radiant the Bishop became in his eyes, while Jean Valjean diminished and faded away. After a while he was nothing but a shadow. Then, all at once, he disappeared. The Bishop alone remained, filling this wretched man's whole soul with a magnificent light.

Jean Valjean wept for a long time. Hot tears streamed down his face. He sobbed with more helplessness than a woman, with more terror than a child.

As he wept, daylight entered his soul more and more clearly—an extraordinary light, both enchanting and terrible. His past life, his first offense, his long punishment, his outward coarseness, his inner hardness, his release, his delight in all his plans for revenge, what had happened to him at the Bishop's house, and the last thing he had done—that theft of forty sous from a child, a crime all the more cowardly and monstrous because it had come after the Bishop's pardon—all of it came back to him and stood before him plainly, with a clarity he had never known before. He looked at his life, and it seemed

horrible to him; he looked at his soul, and it seemed dreadful to him. And yet a gentle light lay over both his life and his soul. It seemed to him that he was seeing Satan in the light of Paradise.

How many hours did he weep like this? What did he do when he had finished? Where did he go? No one ever knew. The only thing that seems certain is that, that same night, the carrier who served Grenoble at that time and arrived at D—— at about three in the morning saw, as he passed through the street where the Bishop lived, a man kneeling on the pavement in the shadows before Monseigneur Welcome's door, in an attitude of prayer.

CHAPTER I—THE YEAR 1817

1817 was the year that Louis XVIII, with a kind of royal self-confidence not untouched by pride, called the twenty-second year of his reign. It was the year when M. Bruguière de Sorsum was much talked about. Every barber's shop, hoping for the return of powder and the royal bird, was smeared with blue paint and decorated with fleurs-de-lys. It was that guileless period when Count Lynch sat every Sunday in the churchwardens' pew at Saint-Germain-des-Prés, dressed in his robes as a peer of France, with his red ribbon, his long nose, and the stately profile of a man known for some brilliant deed. M. Lynch's brilliant deed was this: as mayor of Bordeaux, on March 12, 1814, he had surrendered the city a little too quickly to the Duke d'Angoulême. That was how he became a peer. In 1817, fashion buried little boys from four to six years old in enormous morocco-leather caps with earflaps like Esquimaux mitres. The French army wore white, in the Austrian style. Regiments were called legions. Instead of numbers, they carried the names of departments. Napoleon was at St. Helena, and because England refused him green cloth, he was having his old coats turned. In 1817, Pelligrini sang, Mademoiselle Bigottini danced, and Potier ruled the stage; Odry had not yet appeared. Madame Saqui had taken Forioso's place. There were still Prussians in France. M. Delalot was an important figure. Legitimacy had just made its presence felt by first cutting off the hand, and then the head, of Pleignier, Carbonneau, and Tolleron. The Prince de Talleyrand, grand chamberlain, and the Abbé Louis, newly appointed minister of finance, laughed

together with the smile of two augurs. Both had celebrated the Federation mass in the Champ de Mars on July 14, 1790: Talleyrand had said the mass as bishop, and Louis had assisted as deacon. In 1817, in the side paths of that same Champ de Mars, you could still see two great wooden cylinders lying in the rain, rotting in the grass, painted blue, with traces of eagles and bees still visible beneath the peeling gilt. These were the columns that, two years earlier, had supported the Emperor's platform at the Champ de Mai. Here and there they were blackened by the campfires of Austrian troops encamped near Gros-Caillou. Two or three of the columns had vanished into those fires and had warmed the broad hands of the imperial soldiers. The Field of May had this curious distinction: it had taken place in June, and in the Field of Mars. In that year, 1817, two things were in fashion: the Voltaire-Touquet and the snuff-box à la Charter. The latest sensation in Paris was the crime of Dautun, who had thrown his brother's head into the fountain at the Flower-Market.

"Even when Loyson steals, you still feel he has paws."

Since Cardinal Fesch refused to resign, M. de Pins, Archbishop of Amasie, was administering the diocese of Lyons. The dispute over the valley of Dappes between Switzerland and France began with a memorandum by Captain Dufour, who later became General Dufour. Saint-Simon, ignored by everyone, was building his sublime dream. There was a famous Fourier at the Academy of Science, now forgotten by posterity; and in some attic there was an obscure Fourier whom the future would remember. Lord Byron was just beginning to make his name; a

note to a poem by Millevoye introduced him to France in these words: _a certain Lord Baron_. David d'Angers was trying his hand at marble. In the cul-de-sac of Feuillantines, before a small private gathering of seminarians, the Abbé Caron was speaking warmly of an unknown priest named Félicité-Robert, who would later become Lamennais. Something that smoked and rattled along the Seine with the noise of a dog paddling through water passed back and forth beneath the windows of the Tuileries, from the Pont Royal to the Pont Louis XV. It was a mechanical device of little use, a kind of toy, the idle fantasy of a dream-filled inventor, a utopia—a steamboat. The people of Paris watched this useless object with indifference. M. de Vaublanc, who had reshaped the Institute by a coup d'état and was the distinguished author of countless academicians, ordinances, and appointments, could not manage to become a member himself, even after creating so many. The Faubourg Saint-Germain and the pavilion de Marsan wanted M. Delaveau as prefect of police because of his piety. Dupuytren and Récamier got into a quarrel in the amphitheatre of the School of Medicine and shook their fists at each other over the divinity of Jesus Christ. Cuvier, with one eye on Genesis and the other on nature, tried to satisfy bigoted reaction by reconciling fossils with scripture and making mastodons pay homage to Moses.

M. François de Neufchâteau, who admirably kept Parmentier's memory alive, made countless attempts to get people to say _parmentière_ instead of _pomme de terre_ [potato], and failed completely. The Abbé Grégoire—former bishop, former member of the Convention, former senator—had, in royalist attacks, become "the infamous Grégoire." The phrase we have just

used—become—was condemned by M. Royer Collard as a neologism. Under the third arch of the Pont de Jéna, the new stone used two years earlier to fill the hole Blücher had mined in order to blow up the bridge could still be recognized by its whiteness. A man was brought before the courts because, when he saw the Comte d'Artois enter Notre Dame, he had said aloud: _"Sapristi! I miss the days when I saw Bonaparte and Talma go into the Bel Sauvage arm in arm."_ A seditious remark. Six months in prison. Traitors went about openly and at ease. Men who had joined the enemy on the eve of battle made no effort to hide their reward, and strutted shamelessly through broad daylight, flaunting the cynicism of their wealth and honors. Deserters from Ligny and Quatre-Bras, with the brazenness of their well-paid disgrace, displayed their devotion to the monarchy in the most blatant way.

This is the sort of thing that rises up in a confused jumble when one looks back at the year 1817, and all of it is forgotten now. History leaves out almost all such details, and really it cannot do otherwise; infinity would crush it. And yet these details, wrongly called trivial—for there are no trivial facts in human life, any more than there are little leaves in vegetation—are useful. The face of a century is made up of the faces of its years. In this year, 1817, four young Parisians planned "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 to say student is to say Parisian: to study in Paris is to be born in Paris.

These young men were unremarkable. Everyone has seen faces like theirs: four ordinary examples of humanity, chosen at random. They were neither good nor bad, neither clever nor ignorant, neither brilliant nor foolish. They were good-looking, with all the fresh charm of being twenty. They were four Oscars, because in those days there were no Arthurs yet. "Burn the perfumes of Araby for him!" cried romance. "Oscar is coming. I shall see Oscar!" People had only just come out of the age of Ossian. Elegance was still Scandinavian and Caledonian. The pure English style would not take hold until later, and the first Arthur, Wellington, had only just won the Battle of Waterloo.

These Oscars were named Félix Tholomyès, from Toulouse; Listolier, from Cahors; Fameuil, from Limoges; and Blachevelle, from Montauban. Naturally, each had his mistress. Blachevelle loved Favourite, who was called that because she had been to England. Listolier adored Dahlia, who had chosen the name of a flower as her nickname. Fameuil worshipped Zéphine, a shortened form of Joséphine. Tholomyès had Fantine, known as the Blonde because of her beautiful sunlit hair.

Favourite, Dahlia, Zéphine, and Fantine were four charming young women, fragrant and glowing, still with something of working women about them, not yet entirely separated from their sewing. Love affairs had unsettled them somewhat, but their faces still held some of the calm that comes from honest work, and in their souls there remained that flower of honesty that survives a woman's first fall. One of the four was called the young one because she was the youngest, and another was called the old one; the old one was twenty-three. To hide nothing, the first three were more experienced, more careless, and more swept up in the noise of life than Fantine the Blonde, who was still living in her first illusions.

Dahlia, Zéphine, and especially Favourite could not have said the same. Their love affairs had already gone through more than one episode, though they had barely begun. The lover called Adolph in the first chapter turned into Alphonse in the second and Gustave in the third. Poverty and flirtation are two deadly advisers: one scolds, the other flatters. The beautiful daughters of the people hear both voices whispering in their ears, one on each side. These poorly protected souls listen. That is how they fall, and how stones come to be thrown at them. They are dazzled by the splendor of everything pure and out of reach. Alas! what if the Jungfrau were hungry?

Favourite, having been to England, was admired by Dahlia and Zéphine. She had set up on her own very early in life. Her father was an elderly, unmarried professor of mathematics, a brutal, boastful man who still went out giving lessons despite his age. When he was young, this professor had once seen a

chambermaid's dress catch on a fender, and that accident made him fall in love. Favourite was the result. She met her father from time to time, and he would bow to her. One morning an old woman with the look of a religious devotee came into her rooms and said, "You do not know me, Mademoiselle?" "No." "I am your mother." Then the old woman opened the sideboard and ate and drank, had a mattress of her own brought in, and moved herself in. This sour, pious old mother never spoke to Favourite, would sit for hours without saying a word, ate enough for four at breakfast, dinner, and supper, and went down to the porter's quarters for company, where she spoke badly of her daughter.

It was her rosy, overly pretty nails that drew Dahlia to Listolier and, perhaps to others, to a life of idleness. How could hands like that be made to work? A woman who wants to remain virtuous must not be too tender with her hands. As for Zéphine, she won Fameuil over with her sly, affectionate little way of saying, "Yes, sir."

The young men were friends, and the young women were friends as well. Loves of this kind are always accompanied by friendships of this kind.

Goodness and philosophy are two different things. The proof is that, even after making every allowance for these slightly irregular households, Favourite, Zéphine, and Dahlia were philosophical young women, while Fantine was a good girl.

Good! someone will cry. And Tholomyès? Solomon would answer that love is part of wisdom. We will simply say that

Fantine's love was a first love, her only love, and a faithful love.

She alone, out of all four women, was not addressed as "thou" by any one of them.

Fantine was one of those beings who seem to bloom out of the very bottom of the people. Though she had come from the deepest social darkness, she carried on her forehead the mark of the nameless and the unknown. She was born at M. sur M. To what parents? Who can say? She had never known either father or mother. She was called Fantine. Why Fantine? She had never had any other name. At the time of her birth, the Directory still existed. She had no surname; she had no family; no baptismal name; the Church no longer existed. She bore the name that pleased the first passer-by who happened to meet her, when she was a very small child, running barefoot in the street. She received that name as she received rainwater on her brow from the clouds. She was called little Fantine. No one knew anything more. This human creature had entered life in exactly this way. At the age of ten, Fantine left the town and went into service with farmers in the surrounding country. At fifteen she came to Paris to seek her fortune. Fantine was beautiful, and she remained pure as long as she could. She was a lovely blonde with fine teeth. She had gold and pearls for a dowry; but her gold was on her head, and her pearls were in her mouth.

She worked to earn her living; then, still for the sake of living—for the heart also has its hunger—she loved.

She loved Tholomyès.

For him it was an affair; for her, a passion. The streets of the Latin Quarter, crowded with students and grisettes, saw the beginning of their dream. Fantine had long avoided Tholomyès in the winding paths of the hill of the Pantheon, where so many wanderers cross and recross one another, yet always in such a way as to meet him again. There is a way of avoiding someone that is very like seeking them. In short, the pastoral romance came to pass.

Blachevelle, Listolier, and Fameuil formed a sort of circle, with Tholomyès at its head. He was the one with wit.

Tholomyès was the old veteran of student life. He was rich, with an income of four thousand francs—four thousand francs! On Mount Sainte-Geneviève, that was a magnificent scandal. Tholomyès was a hard-living man of thirty, and it showed. He was wrinkled and toothless, and a bald spot was beginning to appear. He used to say sadly, "the skull at thirty, the knee at forty." His digestion was poor, and one of his eyes had started to water. But as his youth faded, his cheerfulness seemed to grow brighter. He replaced his teeth with clowning, his hair with laughter, his health with irony; his tearful eye was always laughing. He was worn out, yet still blooming. His youth was leaving far too early, but it withdrew in good order and in fits of laughter, and no one noticed anything but the sparkle. He had had a play rejected at the Vaudeville. From time to time he wrote a few verses. On top of that, he doubted everything to the utmost degree, which in the eyes of weak people is a great source of power. So, being both ironic and bald, he was the leader. Iron is an English word. Could irony possibly come from

it?

One day Tholomyès drew the other three aside and, with the air of an oracle, said:

"Fantine, Dahlia, Zéphine, and Favourite have been teasing us for nearly a year to give them a surprise. We have solemnly promised that we would. They are always talking to us about it—to me especially—just as the old women in Naples cry to Saint Januarius, '_Faccia gialluta, fa o miracolo_, Yellow face, perform thy miracle.' In the same way, our beauties keep saying to me, 'Tholomyès, when will you produce your surprise?' At the same time, our parents keep writing to us. We are under pressure from both sides. The moment has come, it seems to me. Let us discuss the matter."

Then Tholomyès lowered his voice and said something so amusing that all four men instantly broke into broad, delighted grins, and Blachevelle exclaimed, "Now that's an idea."

A smoky tavern room appeared before them. They went in, and the rest of their private conversation disappeared into the shadows.

Out of that shadowy discussion came a brilliant pleasure party, which was held the following Sunday, with the four young men inviting the four young women.

CHAPTER III—FOUR AND FOUR

It is hard today to imagine what a country outing with students and grisettes was like forty-five years ago. The outskirts of Paris are no longer what they were. The whole character of life around Paris has completely changed in the last half-century. Where people once heard the cuckoo, now there is the railway car. Where there was a small riverboat, there is now a steamboat. Today people talk about Fécamp the way they talked about Saint-Cloud in those days. The Paris of 1862 is a city with all of France as its suburb.

The four couples faithfully carried out every country amusement that was fashionable at the time. The holidays had just begun, and it was a warm, radiant summer day. The day before, Favourite, the only one who could write, had sent Tholomyès the following note on behalf of all four: “It is a good hour to emerge from happiness.” That was why they got up at five in the morning. Then they took the coach to Saint-Cloud, looked at the dry cascade, and cried, “This must be very beautiful when there is water!” They ate breakfast at the _Tête-Noir_, where Castaing had not yet appeared. They played ring-throwing under the quincunx of trees by the great fountain. They climbed Diogenes’ lantern, gambled for macaroons at the roulette booth on the Pont de Sèvres, picked bouquets at Pateaux, bought reed pipes at Neuilly, ate apple tarts everywhere, and were completely happy.

The young women rustled and chattered like songbirds escaped from a cage. It was sheer delight. Every now and then they gave

the young men little playful taps. Such is the intoxication of life in the early morning. Adorable years! The dragonfly's wings tremble. Oh, whoever you are, do you not remember? Have you wandered through the undergrowth, pushing branches aside for the lovely head coming behind you? Have you slid down a rain-soaked slope, laughing, with the woman you loved holding your hand and crying, "Ah! My new boots—look what a state they're in!"

Let us say at once that this cheerful interruption—a shower—did not arrive for this good-humored party, although Favourite had said as they set out, in a solemn, motherly tone, _"The slugs are crawling across the paths—a sign of rain, children."_

All four were strikingly beautiful. A well-known classical poet of the time, a likable man who had his own Éléonore, M. le Chevalier de Labouisse, was walking that day under the chestnut trees at Saint-Cloud when he saw them pass at about ten in the morning and cried, "There is one too many," thinking of the Graces. Favourite, Blachevelle's companion, the one who was twenty-three—the oldest of them—ran ahead beneath the great green branches, leaped over ditches, strode wildly across the bushes, and led the outing with the spirit of a young female faun. Zéphine and Dahlia, whom chance had made beautiful in a way that made each more striking beside the other, and who seemed to complete one another, never left each other's side. It was less from friendship than from an instinct for flirtation. Clinging to one another, they struck English poses. The first keepsakes_ had just appeared. Melancholy was beginning to come into fashion for women, just as Byronism later would for

men, and women's hair was beginning to droop in mournful styles. Zéphine and Dahlia wore their hair in rolls. Listolier and Fameuil, busy discussing their professors, were explaining to Fantine the difference between M. Delvincourt and M. Blondeau.

Blachevelle seemed to have been made for one purpose only: to carry Favourite's imitation India shawl, with its single border and Ternaux label, over his arm on Sundays.

Tholomyès came behind them, towering over the group. He was very cheerful, but there was a sense of authority about him; even his good humor had something commanding in it. His chief display was a pair of nankeen trousers with enormous elephant-leg cut and straps braided with copper wire. He carried a heavy rattan cane worth two hundred francs, and because he indulged himself in everything, he had in his mouth a strange object called a cigar. Nothing was off-limits to him. He smoked.

"That Tholomyès is astonishing!" the others said admiringly. "What trousers! What vigor!"

As for Fantine, she was a delight to look at. Her splendid teeth seemed to have been given one purpose by God: laughter. She liked to carry her little sewn-straw hat, with its long white ribbons, in her hand instead of wearing it on her head. Her thick blond hair, naturally wavy and quick to come loose, had to be pinned up again and again. It seemed made for Galatea fleeing beneath the willows. Her rosy lips chattered charmingly. The corners of her mouth curved upward with a sensual grace, like

the antique masks of Erigone, and seemed to encourage the bold; but her long, dark lashes fell modestly over the livelier lower half of her face, as if to restrain it. There was something striking and perfectly harmonious about her whole way of dressing. She wore a mauve barège gown, little reddish-brown buskins with ribbons crossing in an X over her fine white openwork stockings, and that kind of muslin spencer invented at Marseilles, called a _canezou_—a corruption of the words _quinze août_, pronounced in the Canebière manner, suggesting fine weather, heat, and noon. The other three, less shy, as we have already said, wore low-cut dresses without concealment, which in summer, under flower-trimmed hats, can be very graceful and alluring. But beside those daring outfits, blond Fantine's _canezou_, with its transparency, its boldness, and its reserve, hiding and revealing at the same time, seemed like decency made seductive. The famous Court of Love, presided over by the Vicomtesse de Cette with the sea-green eyes, might perhaps have awarded the prize for coquetry to this _canezou_ in a contest for modesty. What is most ingenious is sometimes also the wisest. It does happen.

Radiant in face, delicate in profile, with deep blue eyes under heavy lids, small high-arched feet, beautifully shaped wrists and ankles, and white skin through which the blue branching of her veins showed here and there, Fantine had joy itself in her expression and the fresh young bloom of her cheeks. She had the full throat of the Juno of Ægina, a strong and supple neck, and shoulders shaped as if by Coustou, with a sensual dimple in the middle visible through the muslin. Her liveliness was softened by dreaminess. She was at once statuesque and

exquisite. Such was Fantine; and beneath all those feminine ornaments and ribbons, one could sense a statue, and within that statue, a soul.

Fantine was beautiful without really knowing it. Those rare dreamers—the mysterious priests of beauty who silently measure everything against perfection—would have seen, in this little working woman, beneath the clear grace of her Parisian charm, an echo of ancient sacred harmony. This daughter of darkness was finely bred. She was beautiful in two ways: in style and in rhythm. Style is the shape of the ideal; rhythm is its motion.

We have said that Fantine was joy; she was also modest.

Anyone who watched her closely would have seen that, through all the intoxication of her youth, the season, and her love affair, there breathed an unconquerable reserve and modesty. She always seemed a little surprised. That pure astonishment is the subtle difference that separates Psyche from Venus. Fantine had the long, white, delicate fingers of a vestal virgin stirring the ashes of the sacred fire with a golden pin. Although she would have refused Tholomyès nothing, as we shall see all too clearly, her face at rest was deeply virginal. At certain moments, a serious, almost austere dignity would suddenly come over her, and nothing was stranger or more unsettling than to see her gaiety vanish so completely, with meditation replacing cheerfulness in an instant. This sudden gravity, sometimes sharply marked, looked like the disdain of a goddess. Her brow, her nose, and her chin had that balance of line which is different from mere proportion and from which harmony of face is born.

In the distinctive space between the base of her nose and her upper lip, she had that faint and charming fold, that mysterious sign of chastity, which makes Barberousse fall in love with a Diana discovered among the treasures of Iconia.

Love is a fault, if you like. Fantine was innocence floating far above that fault.

CHAPTER IV—THOLOMYÈS IS SO GAY THAT HE SINGS A SPANISH SONG

That whole day felt like dawn from beginning to end. Nature itself seemed to be on holiday, laughing all around them. The flower beds at Saint-Cloud filled the air with perfume. The breeze off the Seine stirred the leaves softly. Branches waved in the wind. Bees robbed the jasmine. A whole bohemian swarm of butterflies dropped onto the yarrow, the clover, and the barren oats. And in the stately park of the King of France, the birds moved about like a band of vagabonds.

The four cheerful couples, surrounded by sunlight, fields, flowers, and trees, looked radiant.

In this little paradise, they talked, sang, ran, danced, chased butterflies, picked convolvulus, and soaked their pink openwork stockings in the tall grass. They were fresh, carefree, and innocent. More or less, everyone kissed everyone else—except Fantine. She was protected by that vague resistance of hers, made up of dreaminess and wildness, and she was in love. “You always have such a strange look about you,” Favourite said to her.

These things are pure joy. Scenes of happy couples speak powerfully to life and nature, and they seem to draw tenderness and brightness out of everything. It is as though a fairy once created fields and forests especially for lovers—that endless hedge-school of love, always beginning again and lasting as

long as there are hedges and young hearts to meet behind them. That is why spring has always been so beloved by reflective minds. The patrician and the knife-grinder, the duke and the peer, the lawyer, the courtiers and the townspeople, as people used to say in earlier times, all fall under this fairy's spell. They laugh and chase one another, and the air itself seems lit with the splendor of an apotheosis. What a transformation love brings about! A notary's clerk becomes a god. The little cries, the running through the grass, the quick arms around a waist, the nonsense that sounds like music, the adoration that breaks out in the way a single syllable is spoken, the cherries taken from one mouth by another—all of it flares up and seems to join the glories of heaven. Beautiful women give themselves over to it with sweet abandon. They believe it can never end. Philosophers, poets, and painters watch these ecstasies and hardly know what to make of them, so dazzled are they. "The departure for Cythera!" cries Watteau. Lancret, painter of ordinary people, gazes at his bourgeois as though they had drifted up into the blue sky. Diderot opens his arms to all these love idylls, and d'Urfé mixes druids into them.

After breakfast, the four couples went to what was then called the King's Square to see a newly arrived plant from India. Its name escapes us at the moment, but at that time it was drawing all Paris to Saint-Cloud. It was a strange and charming shrub with a long stem. Its many branches were bristling, leafless, and as fine as threads, and they were covered with a million tiny white rosettes. The whole shrub looked like a head of hair studded with flowers. There was always a crowd around it, admiring it.

After looking over the shrub, Tholomyès cried, "I offer you asses!" After settling the price with the owner, they headed back by way of Vanvres and Issy. At Issy, something happened. The park there—truly a national place, and at that time owned by the contractor Bourguin—stood wide open. They went in through the gates, visited the little hermit figure in its grotto, and tried the curious tricks of the famous cabinet of mirrors, that shameless contrivance fit for a satyr turned millionaire, or for Turcaret transformed into a Priapus. They gave a vigorous push to the swing hanging from the two chestnut trees made famous by the Abbé de Bernis. As he sent these beauties swinging one after another, raising ripples in their fluttering skirts that Greuze would have enjoyed, and while laughter rang out all around, the Toulousan Tholomyès—who had something of the Spaniard in him, Toulouse being cousin to Tolosa—sang, in a melancholy tune, the old _gallega_ ballad, no doubt inspired by some lovely girl rushing through the air on a rope stretched 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; Into my burning eyes All my soul flows; For my lesson I learn At thy feet.”

Fantine alone refused to get on the swing.

“I can’t stand people putting on airs like that,” Favourite muttered bitterly.

After they left the asses behind, a new pleasure awaited them. They crossed the Seine by boat, then walked from Passy to the barrier of l’Étoile. They had been awake since five that morning, as the reader will remember. But _bah_! no one gets tired on Sunday_, said Favourite; _on_ Sunday, fatigue takes the day off_.

At about three o’clock, the four couples, almost overwhelmed by their own happiness, were gliding down the Russian mountains, a curious structure that then stood on the heights of Beaujon, its wavy outline visible above the trees of the Champs-Élysées.

From time to time Favourite cried:

“And the surprise? I want the surprise.”

“Be patient,” Tholomyès replied.

CHAPTER V—AT BOMBARDA'S

After they had worn themselves out on the Russian mountains, they started thinking about dinner. The bright party of eight, tired at last, ended up stuck in Bombarda's public house, a branch that the famous restaurateur Bombarda had opened on the Champs-Élysées. At that time, his sign could also be seen in the Rue de Rivoli, near Delorme Alley.

It was a large but unattractive room, with an alcove and a bed at the far end—they had had to accept those quarters because of the Sunday crowds. Two windows looked out past the elms to the quay and the river. The splendid August sunlight brushed the panes. There were two tables. On one stood a victorious heap of bouquets mixed up with the men's and women's hats. Around the other sat the four couples, surrounded by a cheerful chaos of platters, dishes, glasses, and bottles. Beer jugs stood beside wine flasks. There was very little order on the table, and some disorder underneath it.

"Under the table they made

an awful noise, a dreadful clatter of feet," says Molière.

This was what had become of the pastoral idyll that had begun at five in the morning by half past four in the afternoon. The sun was sinking, and their appetites were satisfied.

The Champs-Élysées, flooded with sunshine and crowded with people, was nothing but light and dust—the two elements glory is made of. The horses of Marly, those marble steeds that seemed to neigh, reared in a cloud of gold. Carriages came and

went. A squadron of splendid bodyguards, with their clarions leading them, rode down the Avenue de Neuilly. The white flag, faintly pink in the setting sun, floated above the dome of the Tuileries. The Place de la Concorde, which had once again become the Place Louis XV., was packed with cheerful strollers. Many wore the silver fleur-de-lys hanging from white watered ribbon, which in 1817 had not yet entirely vanished from buttonholes. Here and there, groups of little girls sang into the open air, while passers-by gathered in circles and applauded, the then-famous Bourbon song that was meant to strike the Hundred Days like lightning, and whose refrain was:

“Give us back our father from Ghent, give us back our father.”

Groups of people from the suburbs, dressed in their Sunday best and sometimes even wearing the fleur-de-lys like the bourgeois, were scattered across the large square and the Marigny square. Some were playing ring games and riding the wooden horses; others were drinking. A few journeyman printers wore paper caps, and their laughter could be heard. Everything was bright and cheerful. It was a time of unquestioned peace and deep royalist confidence. It was the period when a special private report from Chief of Police Anglès to the King, concerning the suburbs of Paris, ended with these lines:

"Taking everything into account, Sire, there is nothing to fear from these people. They are as careless and lazy as cats. The populace is restless in the provinces, not in Paris. These men are very slight, Sire. It would take two of them to make one of your grenadiers. There is nothing to fear from the populace of

Paris, the capital. It is remarkable that the height of this population has decreased over the last fifty years, and the people of the suburbs are even smaller than they were at the time of the Revolution. They are not dangerous. In short, it is a likable rabble."

Police prefects do not believe a cat can turn into a lion. And yet it can; that is the miracle the people of Paris perform. Besides, the cat so scorned by Count Anglès was honored by the republics of antiquity. To them, it embodied liberty. As a counterpart to the Minerva Aptera of the Piræus, there stood in the public square of Corinth a colossal bronze cat. The simple-minded police of the Restoration saw the people of Paris through glasses that were far too rose-colored. They are not quite the “amiable rabble” people imagine. The Parisian is to the Frenchman what the Athenian was to the Greek: no one sleeps more peacefully, no one is more openly lighthearted or lazy, no one wears forgetfulness more convincingly. And yet he should never be underestimated. He is ready for any cool, daring act, and when glory lies at the end of it, he is magnificent in every kind of fury. Put a pike in his hand, and you get the 10th of August; give him a gun, and you get Austerlitz. He is Napoleon’s support and Danton’s reserve strength. If the nation is at stake, he enlists; if liberty is at stake, he tears up the paving stones. Beware: when his hair bristles with anger, he becomes epic; his workman’s blouse falls around him like the folds of a chlamys. Take care: he will turn the first Rue Grenétat that comes to hand into the Caudine Forks. When the hour strikes, this man of the faubourgs grows taller. This little man rises up; his gaze becomes terrible, his breath a storm, and from that narrow

chest comes enough wind to throw the folds of the Alps into disorder. It is thanks to the working-class man of suburban Paris that the Revolution, armed, conquers Europe. He sings; that is his joy. Match his song to his nature, and you will see. As long as his refrain is only _la Carmagnole_, he merely overthrows Louis XVI.; make him sing the _Marseillaise_, and he will set the world free.

Having noted this remark scribbled in the margin of Anglès' report, let us return to our four couples. Dinner, as we have said, was coming to an end.

CHAPTER VI—A CHAPTER IN WHICH THEY ADORE ONE ANOTHER

Table talk, and the talk of love: one is just as impossible to reproduce as the other. Lovers' talk is a cloud; table talk is smoke.

Fameuil and Dahlia were humming. Tholomyès was drinking. Zéphine was laughing. Fantine was smiling, and Listolier was blowing a wooden trumpet he had bought at Saint-Cloud.

Favourite looked at Blachevelle with affection and said:

"Blachevelle, I adore you."

That prompted Blachevelle to ask:

"What would you do, Favourite, if I stopped loving you?"

"Me!" cried Favourite. "Ah, don't say that, even as a joke! If you stopped loving me, I'd run after you, I'd scratch you, I'd tear you to pieces, I'd throw you into the water, I'd have you arrested."

Blachevelle smiled with the smug, sensual vanity of a man whose ego has been flattered. Favourite went on:

"Yes, I'd call the police! Ah, I wouldn't hold myself back, not at all! Scoundrel!"

Blachevelle leaned back in his chair in rapture and proudly closed both eyes.

As Dahlia ate, she said softly to Favourite through the noise:

“So you really are madly in love with that Blachevelle of yours?”

“Me? I hate him,” Favourite replied in the same low voice, picking up her fork again. “He’s stingy. I’m in love with the little fellow who lives across from me. He’s very charming, that young man; do you know him? You can tell he’s an actor. I love actors. As soon as he comes in, his mother says to him, ‘Ah! mon Dieu! there goes my peace of mind. Off he goes shouting again. My dear, you’re splitting my head!’ So he climbs up into rat-infested garrets, into black little holes, as high as he can get, and there he starts singing and declaiming and who knows what else, just so he can be heard downstairs! He earns twenty sous a day in a lawyer’s office, writing legal nonsense. He’s the son of a former precentor of Saint-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas. Ah, he’s very charming. He worships me so much that one day, when he saw me mixing batter for some pancakes, he said to me: _‘Mamselle, make fritters out of your gloves, and I’ll eat them.’_ Only artists can say things like that. Ah, he’s very charming. I’m well on my way to losing my head over that little fellow. Never mind; I tell Blachevelle that I adore him—what a liar I am! Oh, how I do lie!”

Favourite paused, then went on:

“I’m unhappy, you see, Dahlia. It has done nothing but rain all summer. The wind gets on my nerves, and it never lets up. Blachevelle is terribly stingy. There are hardly any green peas in the market. You never know what to eat. I have the spleen, as the English say. Butter is so expensive! And then, just

look—here we are having dinner in a room with a bed in it, and that makes me sick of life."

CHAPTER VII—THOLOMYÈS'S WISDOM

Meanwhile, while some were singing, the others were all talking loudly at once; it had become nothing but noise. Tholomyès stepped in.

“Let’s not talk wildly or too fast,” he cried. “Let’s think, if we want to be brilliant. Too much improvising drains the mind in a foolish way. Rolling beer gathers no foam. No hurry, gentlemen. Let us bring a little dignity to the feast. Let us eat thoughtfully; let us hurry slowly. Let us not rush. Look at springtime: if it comes too quickly, it is ruined—that is to say, it gets frozen. Too much zeal ruins peach trees and apricot trees. Too much zeal kills the charm and gaiety of good dinners. No zeal, gentlemen! Grimod de la Reynière agrees with Talleyrand.”

A low murmur of rebellion rolled through the group.

“Leave us alone, Tholomyès,” said Blachevelle.

“Down with the tyrant!” said Fameuil.

“Bombarda, Bombance, and Bambochel!” cried Listolier.

“Sunday exists,” Fameuil went on.

“We are sober,” added Listolier.

“Tholomyès,” said Blachevelle, “behold my calmness [_mon calme_].”

“You are the Marquis of it,” Tholomyès shot back.

This mediocre pun had the effect of a stone dropped into a pond. The Marquis de Montcalm was, at that time, a famous royalist. All the frogs fell silent.

“Friends,” cried Tholomyès, in the tone of a man who had regained command, “Pull yourselves together. This pun that has dropped from the heavens should not be greeted with too much amazement. Not everything that falls from above deserves enthusiasm and respect. A pun is the droppings of a soaring mind. The joke falls wherever it may, and after producing that bit of foolishness, the mind dives back into the blue depths. A pale smear flattened on a rock does not keep the condor from rising into the sky. Far be it from me to insult the pun! I value it according to its worth, and no more. Everything most august, most sublime, and most charming in humanity—and perhaps beyond humanity as well—has made puns. Jesus Christ made a pun about St. Peter, Moses about Isaac, Æschylus about Polynices, Cleopatra about Octavius. And note this: Cleopatra’s pun came before the battle of Actium, and if not for it, no one would remember the city of Toryne, a Greek name meaning a ladle. That established, I return to my advice. I repeat, brothers, I repeat: no overexcitement, no uproar, no excess—not even over wit, cheerfulness, merriment, or wordplay. Listen to me. I have the caution of Amphiaraüs and the baldness of Cæsar. There must be limits, even to rebuses. _Est modus in rebus_.”

“There has to be a limit, even to dinners. Ladies, you’re fond of apple turnovers; just don’t eat too many of them. Even turnovers require good judgment and a sense of art. Gluttony punishes the glutton: _Gula punit Gulax_. Indigestion is one of the good Lord’s

ways of preaching morality to the stomach. And remember this: every one of our passions, even love, has a stomach that must not be overfilled. In everything, the word finis– must be written at the proper moment. When things become pressing, self-control must step in. Appetite must be locked away. One must make one's own fancy dance to the violin and march oneself to the guardhouse. A wise man is someone who knows how to place himself under arrest at the right moment. You may trust me a little, since I have had some success in my study of the law, if my examination results are to be believed; since I know the difference between the question asked and the question at issue; since I defended a thesis in Latin on how torture was administered in Rome at the time when Munatius Demens was quæstor of the Parricide. And just because I am apparently going to be a doctor, it does not necessarily follow that I must be an idiot. I urge you to be moderate in your desires. It is true that my name is Félix Tholomyès; I speak well. Happy is the man who, when the hour strikes, makes a heroic decision and abdicates, like Sylla or Origenes."

Favourite listened with deep attention.

"Félix," she said, "what a lovely word! I love that name. It's Latin; it means prosper."

Tholomyès continued:

"Quirites, gentlemen, caballeros, my friends. Do you want never to feel the sting, to do without the marriage bed, and to defy love? Nothing could be simpler. Here is the recipe: lemonade, excessive exercise, hard labor; work yourself to death, haul

stones, do not sleep, keep watch, swallow nitrous drinks and potions of nymphæas; drink emulsions of poppies and agnus castus; top it all off with a strict diet, starve yourself, and add cold baths, belts of herbs, the application of a lead plate, lotions made with subacetate of lead, and fomentations of oxycrat."

"I prefer a woman," said Listolier.

"Woman," Tholomyès went on, "mistrust her. Pity the man who gives himself up to a woman's changeable heart! Woman is false and insincere. She hates the serpent out of professional jealousy. The serpent is the shop across the street."

"Tholomyès!" cried Blachevelle. "You're drunk!"

"Of course," said Tholomyès.

"Then be cheerful," Blachevelle went on.

"Agreed," replied Tholomyès.

Then he filled his glass again and stood up.

"Glory to wine! _Nunc te, Bacche, canam!_ Forgive me, ladies; that was Spanish. And the proof, señoras, is this: as the people are, so is the cask. The arrobe of Castile holds sixteen litres; the cantaro of Alicante, twelve; the almude of the Canaries, twenty-five; the cuartin of the Balearic Islands, twenty-six; and Tsar Peter's boot, thirty. Long live that great Tsar, and long live his boot, which was greater still! Ladies, take a friend's advice: if you must make a mistake, make it in your lover. Love's very nature is to go astray. A love affair is not meant to crouch and degrade itself like an English servant girl with knees hardened from scrubbing. No, that is not what love is for. Our gentle love

errs gaily. People say that to err is human; I say that to err is love. Ladies, I adore you all. O Zéphine, O Joséphine, your face is more than irregular; you would be charming if it were not so crooked. You look like a pretty face that someone accidentally sat on. And as for Favourite—O nymphs and muses!—one day, when Blachevelle was crossing the gutter in the Rue Guérin-Boisseau, he caught sight of a beautiful girl in white stockings pulled up high enough to show her legs. That opening scene delighted him, and Blachevelle fell in love. The girl he loved was Favourite. O Favourite, your lips are Ionian. There was once a Greek painter named Euphorion, known as the painter of lips. He alone would have been worthy to paint your mouth. Listen: before you, no creature truly deserved the name. You were made either to receive the apple like Venus or to eat it like Eve; beauty begins with you. I just mentioned Eve; it is you who created her. You deserve official letters patent as the beautiful woman. O Favourite, I stop calling you 'thou,' because I am moving from poetry to prose. A little while ago you were talking about my name. That touched me. But whoever we are, let us distrust names. They can deceive us. My name is Félix, and I am not happy. Words are liars. Let us not trust their hints too readily. It would be a mistake to write to Liège 2 for corks and to Pau for gloves. Miss Dahlia, if I were you, I would call myself Rosa. A flower ought to have fragrance, and a woman ought to have wit. I say nothing of Fantine. She is a dreamer—thoughtful, reflective, pensive. She is like a phantom with the shape of a nymph and the modesty of a nun, somehow wandered into the life of a grisette, yet taking refuge in illusions. She sings, prays, and gazes into the blue sky without quite

knowing what she sees or what she is doing. With her eyes fixed on heaven, she wanders through a garden where there are more birds than exist anywhere. O Fantine, know this: I, Tholomyès, am an illusion; but that fair-haired girl of chimeras does not even hear me! In every other way, she is freshness, sweetness, youth, the soft light of morning. O Fantine, maiden worthy to be called Marguerite or Pearl, you are a woman of the beautiful East. Ladies, a second piece of advice: do not marry. Marriage is a graft; sometimes it takes, sometimes it fails. Avoid the risk. But what am I saying? I am wasting my breath. Girls are hopeless where marriage is concerned, and nothing we wise men say will stop the waistcoat-makers and shoe-stitchers from dreaming of husbands covered in diamonds. Very well, then. But, my beauties, remember this: you eat too much sugar. You have only one fault, O woman, and that is nibbling sugar. O nibbling sex, your pretty little white teeth worship it. Now listen carefully: sugar is a salt. All salts dry things out. Sugar is the most drying salt of all; it draws the fluids from the blood through the veins. Then comes coagulation, then the blood hardens; then come tubercles in the lungs, and then death. That is why diabetes stands next door to consumption. So do not crunch sugar, and you will live. Now I turn to the men. Gentlemen, make conquests. Steal one another's beloveds without remorse. _Chassez croisé._ In love there are no friends. Wherever there is a pretty woman, open hostility begins. No mercy—war to the death! A pretty woman is a _casus belli_; a pretty woman is a public offense. All the invasions of history were caused 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 circles like a vulture over other men's mistresses. And for my part, to all those unfortunate men who are widowers, I proclaim Bonaparte's sublime address to the army of Italy: 'Soldiers, you lack everything; the enemy has it.'"

Tholomyès broke off.

"Catch your breath, Tholomyès," said Blachevelle.

At that moment, Blachevelle, with Listolier and Fameuil backing him up, launched into a mournful tune—one of those workshop songs made from whatever words happen to come first, rhymed lavishly or not at all, as meaningless as the movement of a tree or the sound of the wind. They are born in pipe smoke and vanish with it. This was the verse the group used to answer Tholomyès' speech:

"The solemn father turkey-cocks gave some money to an agent, so that worthy Clermont-Tonnerre might be made pope on Saint John's fair day. But good Clermont could not be made pope, because he was no priest; and then their agent, blazing with anger, came back with all their money."

This did nothing to cool Tholomyès' flow of improvisation. He drained his glass, filled it, filled it again, and started up once more:

"Down with wisdom! Forget everything I've said. Let us be neither prudes nor prudent men nor worthy citizens. I give you a toast to gaiety: be merry. Let us finish our study of law with folly and feasting! Indigestion and the Digest! Let Justinian be the

man, and Feasting the woman! Joy to the very bottom! Live, O creation! The world is a great diamond. I am happy. The birds are marvelous. What a festival everywhere! The nightingale is an Elleviou that costs nothing. Summer, I salute you! O Luxembourg! O Georgics of the Rue Madame and the Allée de l'Observatoire! O thoughtful infantry soldiers! O all you charming nurses who amuse yourselves while watching the children! The pampas of America would delight me if I did not have the arcades of the Odéon. My soul flutters away to virgin forests and savannas. Everything is beautiful. The flies hum in the sunlight. The sun sneezed out the hummingbird. Kiss me, Fantine!"

He got it wrong and embraced Favourite instead.

CHAPTER VIII—THE DEATH OF A HORSE

“The dinners are better at Édon’s than at Bombarda’s,” cried Zéphine.

“I like Bombarda better than Édon,” said Blachevelle. “It’s more luxurious. More Asiatic. Look at the downstairs room—there are mirrors [glaces–] on the walls.”

“I prefer them [glaces–, ices] on my plate,” said Favourite.

Blachevelle went on:

“Look at the knives. At Bombarda’s, the handles are silver; at Édon’s, they’re bone. And silver is worth more than bone.”

“Except for people with a silver chin,” Tholomyès remarked.

He was gazing at the dome of the Invalides, visible from Bombarda’s windows.

There was a brief pause.

“Tholomyès,” cried Fameuil, “Listolier and I were just having a debate.”

“A debate is good,” Tholomyès replied. “An argument is better.”

“We were arguing about philosophy.”

“And?”

“Which do you prefer, Descartes or Spinoza?”

“Désaugiers,” said Tholomyès.

Having delivered this verdict, he took a drink and went on:

“I’m willing to go on living. Not everything on earth is over as long as we can still talk nonsense. For that, I give thanks to the immortal gods. We lie. We lie, and we laugh. We make assertions, and we doubt them. The unexpected leaps out of the syllogism. That is delightful. There are still people in this world who know how to open and shut the surprise box of paradox with a cheerful hand. Ladies, what you are drinking so calmly is Madeira wine, from the vineyard of Coural das Freiras, which lies three hundred and seventeen fathoms above sea level. Keep that in mind as you drink: three hundred and seventeen fathoms! And Monsieur Bombarda, that magnificent restaurateur, gives you all three hundred and seventeen fathoms for four francs and fifty centimes.”

Fameuil interrupted him again:

“Tholomyès, your opinions settle everything. Who is your favorite author?”

“Ber—”

“Quin?”

“No. Choux.”

And Tholomyès went on:

“Honor to Bombarda! He would rival Munophis of Elephanta if only he could get me an Indian dancing girl, and Thygelion of Chaeronea if he could bring me a Greek courtesan. For, ladies, there were Bombardas in Greece and in Egypt too. Apuleius tells us so. Alas, it is always the same, and there is nothing new; the

creator has left nothing unpublished in creation. _Nil sub sole novum_, says Solomon; _amor omnibus idem_, says Virgil. And Carabine steps into the boat with Carabin at Saint-Cloud just as Aspasia embarked with Pericles on the fleet at Samos. One last word. Do you know what Aspasia was, ladies? Though she lived in an age when women were not yet thought to have souls, she was a soul herself—a soul tinted rose and purple, hotter than fire, fresher than dawn. Aspasia was a being in whom two extremes of womanhood came together. She was the prostitute goddess; Socrates plus Manon Lescaut. Aspasia was created in case Prometheus should ever need a mistress."

Once Tholomyès got going, he would not have found it easy to stop, if a horse had not collapsed on the quay at that very moment. The jolt brought both the cart and the speaker to an abrupt standstill. It was a Beauce mare, old, gaunt, and fit only for the knacker, dragging a very heavy cart. When she reached the front of Bombarda's, the poor worn-out animal refused to go another step. The incident drew a crowd. The carter, furious and swearing, had barely had time to shout the customary word, _Mâtin_ (the jade), and reinforce it with a merciless crack of the whip, when the poor beast fell and never got up again. At the noise and commotion from the passers-by, Tholomyès' cheerful listeners turned their heads, and he took the chance to end his speech with this melancholy stanza:—

"She belonged to that world where cuckoos and carriages Share the same fate; And, being a nag, she lived—as nags do while they live— Only for the space of a morning!" 3

“Poor horse!” Fantine sighed.

And Dahlia exclaimed:—

“There’s Fantine, just about to cry over a horse. How can anyone be such a pathetic little fool?”

At that moment Favourite folded her arms, threw back her head, looked straight at Tholomyès, and said firmly:—

“Well then—the surprise?”

"Exactly. The time has come," replied Tholomyès. "Gentlemen, the hour has struck to give these ladies a surprise. Ladies, wait for us a moment."

"It starts with a kiss," said Blachevelle.

"On the forehead," added Tholomyès.

Each man solemnly kissed his mistress on the forehead. Then all four slipped out the door with their fingers to their lips.

Favourite clapped her hands as they left.

"This is already getting amusing," she said.

"Don't be too long," murmured Fantine. "We'll be waiting for you."

CHAPTER IX—A MERRY END TO MIRTH

Once the young women were alone, they leaned against the window ledges in pairs, chatting, stretching their heads out, and calling from one window to another.

They saw the young men come out of the Café Bombarda arm in arm. The men turned back, waved to them, smiled, and disappeared into that dusty Sunday crowd that flooded the Champs-Élysées every week.

"Don't be long!" cried Fantine.

"What are they going to bring us?" said Zéphine.

"It will certainly be something lovely," said Dahlia.

"As for me," said Favourite, "I want it to be gold."

Their attention was soon drawn away by the activity on the shore of the lake, which they could see through the branches of the large trees, and which entertained them greatly.

It was the hour when the mail-coaches and diligences set out. Nearly all the stagecoaches bound for the south and west passed through the Champs-Élysées. Most of them followed the quay and went through the Passy Barrier. Every few moments, some huge yellow-and-black vehicle came crashing through the crowd—heavily loaded, loudly harnessed, misshapen with trunks, tarpaulins, and valises, packed with faces that vanished at once. It seemed to burst forward with all the sparks of a

forge, with dust instead of smoke, and an air of fury, rattling over the pavement and turning every paving-stone into steel. The uproar delighted the young women. Favourite exclaimed:

"What a racket! You'd think it was a heap of chains flying away."

One of the carriages, barely visible through the thick elm trees, stopped for a moment and then set off again at a gallop. Fantine was surprised.

“That’s strange!” she said. “I didn’t think the diligence ever stopped.”

Favourite shrugged.

“Fantine is astonishing. Now I want to look at her just out of curiosity. The simplest things amaze her. Imagine this: I’m a traveler, and I say to the diligence, ‘I’ll go on ahead; pick me up on the quay as you pass.’ The diligence comes by, sees me, stops, and takes me on. That happens every day. You really don’t know life, my dear.”

Time passed like this. Suddenly Favourite stirred, like someone just waking up.

“Well,” she said, “what about the surprise?”

“Yes, come to think of it,” Dahlia added, “the famous surprise?”

“They’re taking a very long time with it!” said Fantine.

As Fantine finished with that sigh, the waiter who had served their dinner came in. He was holding something that looked like a letter.

“What is that?” Favourite asked.

The waiter replied:

“It’s a paper those gentlemen left for these ladies.”

“Why didn’t you bring it right away?”

“Because,” said the waiter, “the gentlemen told me not to give it to the ladies for an hour.”

Favourite snatched the paper from the waiter’s hand. It was indeed a letter.

“Wait!” she said. “There’s no address, but this is what’s written on it—”

“This Is the Surprise.”

She tore the letter open quickly, unfolded it, and read it aloud [she could read]:

“Our Beloved:—

“You should know that we have parents. You don’t know much about that sort of thing. The civil code, in its childish honesty, calls them fathers and mothers. Well, those parents are sighing for us. Those old people are begging us to come back. Those worthy men and women call us prodigal sons. They want us home again, and they are ready to kill the fatted calf for our return. Being virtuous, we are obeying them. By the time you read this, five spirited horses will be carrying us back to our papas and mammas. We are pulling up our stakes, as Bossuet says. We are leaving; in fact, we are already gone. We are fleeing in the arms of Laffitte and on the wings of Caillard. The Toulouse coach is dragging us away from the abyss, and that abyss is you, O our little beauties! We are returning to society, to duty, to respectability, at a full trot, at the speed of three leagues an hour. For the good of the country, we must become like everyone else: prefects, fathers of families, rural police officers, and councillors of state. Revere us. We are making a sacrifice. Mourn us quickly, and replace us without delay. If this letter tears your hearts, do the same to it. Farewell.”

“For nearly two years we have made you happy. We do not hold that against you. “Signed: BLACHEVELLE. FAMUEIL. LISTOLIER. FÉLIX THOLOMYÈS.”

“Postscript—. The dinner has been paid for.”

The four young women looked at one another.

Favourite was the first to speak.

“Well!” she cried. “It’s a very amusing joke, all the same.”

“It’s very funny,” said Zéphine.

“That must have been Blachevelle’s idea,” Favourite went on. “It makes me adore him. The moment he’s gone, he’s loved. This really is an adventure.”

“No,” said Dahlia. “It was one of Tholomyès’ ideas. That’s obvious.”

“In that case,” Favourite shot back, “death to Blachevelle, and long live Tholomyès!”

“Long live Tholomyès!” cried Dahlia and Zéphine.

And they burst into laughter.

Fantine laughed along with the others.

An hour later, when she had gone back to her room, she began to weep. As we have said, this was her first love affair. She had given herself to this Tholomyès as if he were her husband, and the poor girl had a child.

CHAPTER I—ONE MOTHER MEETS ANOTHER

In the first quarter of this century, there stood at Montfermeil, near Paris, a kind of roadside eating-house that no longer exists. It was run by a married couple named Thénardier. The place stood in Boulanger Lane. Above the door, a signboard was nailed flat against the wall. Painted on it was something like a man carrying another man on his back. The man being carried wore the large gilt epaulettes of a general, with big silver stars. Red blotches stood for blood. The rest of the picture was smoke, and was probably meant to show a battle. Underneath was this inscription: AT THE SIGN OF SERGEANT OF WATERLOO (_Au Sargent de Waterloo_).

There is nothing unusual about a cart or wagon standing outside an inn. Even so, the vehicle—or, more exactly, the wreck of a vehicle—that blocked the street in front of the cook-shop called the _Sergeant of Waterloo_ one spring evening in 1818 would certainly have caught the eye of any painter passing by, simply because of its sheer bulk.

It was the front carriage of one of those wagons used in wooded regions to haul thick planks and tree trunks. It consisted of a massive iron axle with a pivot, fitted with a heavy pole, and supported by two enormous wheels. The whole thing was dense, cumbersome, and badly shaped. It looked like the gun carriage of some gigantic cannon. The ruts in the road had coated the wheels, the rims, the hub, the axle, and the pole with a layer of mud—a hideous yellowish smear, much like the color

people are so fond of using to decorate cathedrals. The wood was vanishing under the mud, and the iron under rust. Beneath the axle hung a huge chain like a piece of drapery, fit for some Goliath among convicts. The chain called to mind not the beams it was meant to carry, but the mastodons and mammoths it might have been used to harness. It suggested the galleys, but galleys on a cyclopean, superhuman scale, as though it had been torn from some monster. Homer would have used it to bind Polyphemus, and Shakespeare, Caliban.

Why was that truck's front carriage sitting there in the street? First, to get in everyone's way; second, so it could go on rusting. A great many institutions in the old social order are like that—things you come across out in the world that seem to exist for no reason except those two.

The middle of the chain hung very close to the ground, and in its loop, like the rope of a swing, two little girls were sitting together that evening, beautifully tangled up with each other. One was about two and a half years old, the other eighteen months, and the younger was in the older one's arms. A handkerchief, tied skillfully around them, kept them from falling out. Their mother had looked at that alarming chain and said, "There! That will do as a toy for my children."

The two children, dressed neatly and with a touch of elegance, were glowing with delight. They looked like two roses among old iron. Their eyes shone with triumph, and their fresh cheeks were full of laughter. One had chestnut hair, the other brown. Their innocent faces were bright with happy surprise. A flowering shrub growing nearby sent out a fragrance that

seemed to come from them. The eighteen-month-old showed her pretty little bare stomach with the innocent immodesty of childhood. Above and around those two delicate heads, so full of happiness and light, the huge front carriage, black with rust and almost frightening, twisted upward in a mass of curves and wild angles like the mouth of a cave. A few steps away, crouched on the threshold of the inn, the mother—who was not, by the way, a very attractive woman, though she was moving at that moment—was pushing the two children on their swing with a long cord. She watched them carefully in case of accidents, wearing that half-animal, half-heavenly expression that belongs to motherhood alone. Each time the swing moved back and forth, the ugly links gave out a harsh sound like a cry of anger. The little girls were ecstatic. The setting sun joined in their joy, and nothing could have been more charming than this whim of chance, which had turned a chain fit for Titans into a swing for cherubs.

As she rocked her little ones, the mother hummed, in an off-key voice, a song that was famous at the time:

“It must be so,” said a warrior.

Her song, and the way she was gazing at her daughters, kept her from noticing what was happening in the street.

Meanwhile, as she began the first couplet of the ballad, someone came up to her, and she suddenly heard a voice very close to her ear say:

“You have two beautiful children there, Madame.”

“To fair and gentle Imogene—”

the mother replied, continuing her ballad; then she turned her head.

A woman was standing before her, a few steps away. She too had a child, which she was carrying in her arms.

She was also carrying a large carpetbag that looked very heavy.

This woman’s child was one of the most heavenly little creatures anyone could imagine. She was a girl of two or three. In the finery of her dress, she could rival the other two little ones: she wore a fine linen cap, ribbons on her bodice, and Valenciennes lace on her cap. Her skirt was lifted enough to show her white, sturdy, dimpled leg. She looked wonderfully rosy and healthy. The little beauty made you want to bite those apple-round cheeks. You could not really see her eyes, except to know that they must have been very large and framed by magnificent lashes. She was asleep.

She slept with the complete trust that belongs to children her age. A mother’s arms are made of tenderness; in them, children sleep deeply.

As for the mother, she looked sad and worn down by poverty. She was dressed like a working woman on the verge of slipping back into peasant life. She was young. Was she beautiful? Perhaps, but in those clothes you could not tell. Her hair, with one golden strand fallen loose, seemed very thick, but it was tightly hidden under an ugly, close-fitting cap, almost like a nun’s, tied beneath her chin. A smile shows beautiful teeth,

when a person has them, but she did not smile. Her eyes looked as though they had not been dry for a very long time. She was pale and looked exhausted, even a little ill. She gazed at her daughter asleep in her arms with that expression only a mother who has nursed her own child can have. A large blue handkerchief, like those used at the Invalides, was folded into a fichu and awkwardly hid her figure. Her hands were sunburned and covered with freckles. Her forefinger was hardened and torn by needlework. She wore a cloak of coarse brown wool, a linen dress, and heavy shoes. It was Fantine.

It was Fantine, though she was hard to recognize. And yet, if you looked closely, you could see that she still had her beauty. A sorrowful line, almost like the first hint of irony, creased her right cheek. As for her dress, that light, airy muslin-and-ribbon finery that had seemed made of laughter, foolishness, and music, full of little bells and scented with lilacs, had disappeared. It had vanished like that lovely, glittering frost that looks like diamonds in the sun; then it melts, and the branch is left completely black.

Ten months had passed since the “pretty farce.”

What had happened during those ten months? It is easy to guess.

After she was abandoned, Fantine’s situation quickly became desperate. She immediately lost sight of Favourite, Zéphine, and Dahlia. Once the men had broken off the relationship, the bond between the women came undone as well. If anyone had told them two weeks later that they had once been friends, they

would have been astonished. There was no longer any reason for that friendship to continue. Fantine was left alone. The father of her child was gone—and, alas, such breaks cannot be repaired. She found herself completely isolated, with no habit of work and a taste for pleasure she had acquired. Her relationship with Tholomyès had led her to look down on the modest trade she knew, and she had neglected it until she lost her place in it altogether. Now that path was closed to her. She had nothing to fall back on. Fantine could barely read and could not write. As a child, she had only been taught to sign her name. She paid a public letter-writer to compose a letter to Tholomyès, then a second, then a third. Tholomyès answered none of them. Fantine heard people gossip as they looked at her child: "Who takes such children seriously? People only shrug their shoulders at them!" Then she thought of Tholomyès, who had shrugged his shoulders at his own child and had not taken that innocent little being seriously. Her heart grew dark toward him. But what was she to do? She no longer knew where to turn. She had done wrong, but, as will be remembered, modesty and virtue were at the core of her nature. She dimly felt that she stood on the edge of poverty and might soon slip into something even worse. She needed courage. She had it, and she held firm. The idea came to her of returning to her native town of M. sur M. There, perhaps, someone might know her and give her work. Yes—but she would have to hide her fault. In a confused way, she understood that this meant a separation even more painful than the first. Her heart tightened, but she made her decision. As we shall see, Fantine had the fierce courage to go on living. She had already bravely given up her finery. She dressed herself in

plain linen and put all her silks, ornaments, ribbons, and lace on her daughter. This was the only vanity she had left, and it was a sacred one. She sold everything she owned and got two hundred francs for it. After paying her small debts, she had only about eighty francs left. At twenty-two, on a beautiful spring morning, she left Paris with her child on her back. Anyone who saw them pass would have pitied them. In all the world, this woman had no one but her child, and the child had no one but this woman. Fantine had nursed her child, and it had weakened her chest; she coughed a little.

We will have no further need to speak of M. Félix Tholomyès. Let it be enough to say that twenty years later, under King Louis Philippe, he was a prominent provincial lawyer, rich and influential, a prudent voter, and a very harsh juror; he was still a pleasure-loving man.

Around midday, after traveling part of the way from time to time in what was then called the _Petites Voitures des Environs de Paris_—the little suburban coach service—paying three or four sous a league whenever she needed to rest, Fantine arrived at Montfermeil, in the alley Boulanger.

As she passed the Thénardier inn, the sight of the two little girls, delighted on the huge swing, struck her so strongly that she stopped in front of that joyful scene.

Some things have a special charm. To this mother, those two little girls were such a charm.

She looked at them with deep emotion. The presence of angels seems to promise Paradise. She thought she could see, above

that inn, the mysterious HERE of Providence. Those two little creatures were plainly happy. She watched them and admired them with such feeling that, just as their mother paused for breath between two verses of her song, Fantine could not help making the remark we have just read:

“You have two lovely children, Madame.”

Even the fiercest creatures are softened by affection shown to their young.

The mother lifted her head, thanked her, and invited the traveler to sit on the bench by the door, while she herself remained seated on the doorstep. The two women began to talk.

“My name is Madame Thénardier,” said the mother of the two little girls. “We run this inn.”

Then, her thoughts still lingering on her romance, she went back to humming under her breath:

“It must be so; I am a knight, And I am off to Palestine.”

Madame Thénardier had a sallow complexion and a thin, angular figure—the most unpleasant version of a soldier’s wife. Oddly enough, she also had a dreamy, affected manner that came from reading romances. She was a simpering woman, yet somehow mannish as well. That is the effect old novels can have when they work on the imagination of a woman from the cookshop. She was still young, barely thirty. If this crouching woman had stood up straight, her great height and her huge fairground-giant frame might have frightened the traveler at once, shaken her trust, and prevented what we are about to

relate. Whether a person is sitting or standing can decide a destiny.

The traveler told her story, changing it only a little.

She said that she was a working woman; that her husband was dead; that she had lost her work in Paris and was going elsewhere, back toward her native region, to look for more; that she had left Paris on foot that morning; that because she was carrying her child and had grown tired, she had taken the Villemomble coach when it came by; that from Villemomble she had walked to Montfermeil; that the little one had walked a little too, but not much, because she was so young; and that in the end she had had to carry her, and the darling had fallen asleep.

At that word, she gave her daughter a passionate kiss, and it woke her. The child opened her eyes—large blue eyes like her mother's—and looked at what? At nothing, with that grave and sometimes almost stern expression little children have, a mysterious sign of their shining innocence in the presence of our dim virtue. One might think they feel themselves to be angels and know that we are only men. Then the child began to laugh, and though her mother held on to her, she slipped down to the ground with the irresistible energy of a little creature eager to run. Suddenly she saw the other two in the swing, stopped short, and stuck out her tongue in admiration.

Mother Thénardier let go of her daughters, helped them down from the swing, and said:

"Now all three of you go and play."

At that age, children get to know one another quickly, and within a minute the little Thénardiers were playing with the newcomer, making holes in the ground, which was a source of enormous delight.

The newcomer was full of cheerful energy. A good mother's kindness showed in the child's happiness. She had grabbed a scrap of wood to use as a shovel and was busily digging a hole big enough for a fly. Even grave-digging becomes something to laugh at when a child is doing it.

The two women went on talking.

"What is your little girl's name?"

"Cosette."

Cosette was really called Euphrasie. That was the child's given name. But her mother had turned Euphrasie into Cosette through that sweet, graceful instinct shared by mothers and ordinary people, the instinct that changes Josepha into Pepita and Françoise into Sillette. It is a kind of variation that throws all the science of etymologists into confusion. We once knew a grandmother who managed to turn Theodore into Gnon.

"How old is she?"

"She is nearly three."

"That is the age of my oldest."

Meanwhile, the three little girls stood together in a state of deep anxiety and delight. Something important had happened: a large worm had come up out of the ground. They were frightened of

it, and at the same time completely fascinated.

Their bright foreheads touched. It looked as though the three heads were enclosed in a single halo.

“How quickly children become friends!” exclaimed Mother Thénardier. “You would think they were three sisters!”

That remark was probably the opening the other mother had been waiting for. She took Thénardier’s hand, looked straight at her, and said:

“Will you keep my child for me?”

Thénardier made one of those gestures of surprise that means neither yes nor no.

Cosette’s mother went on:

“You see, I cannot take my daughter with me into the country. My work will not allow it. A woman with a child cannot find a position. People in the country are absurd about such things. It was God’s will that I passed your inn. When I saw your little girls, so pretty, so clean, and so happy, I was overcome. I said to myself, ‘Here is a good mother. This is exactly what I need. They will make three sisters.’ And besides, it will not be long before I come back. Will you keep my child for me?”

“I’ll have to think about it,” replied the Thénardier.

“I’ll give you six francs a month.”

At that moment, a man’s voice called out from the back of the cook-shop:

“Not for less than seven francs. And six months in advance.”

“Six times seven is forty-two,” said the Thénardier.

“I’ll pay it,” said the mother.

“And fifteen francs more for initial expenses,” the man’s voice added.

“That makes fifty-seven francs in all,” said Madame Thénardier. Then she hummed vaguely over the figures:

“It must be so, said a warrior.”

“I’ll pay it,” said the mother. “I have eighty francs. I’ll still have enough left to get to the country if I go on foot. I’ll earn money there, and as soon as I have a little, I’ll come back for my darling.”

The man’s voice spoke again:

“Does the little one have clothes?”

“That’s my husband,” said the Thénardier.

“Of course she has clothes, poor little darling. I understood perfectly well that it was your husband. And beautiful clothes too—far too many, everything by the dozen, and silk dresses like a lady’s. They’re here, in my carpet-bag.”

“You’ll have to hand them over,” the man’s voice cut in again.

“Of course I’ll give them to you,” said the mother. “It would be very strange if I left my daughter completely naked!”

The master’s face appeared.

“Good,” he said.

The bargain was settled. The mother spent the night at the inn, handed over her money, and left her child there. She packed up her carpet-bag again, now smaller because the clothes had been taken out, and lighter from then on. The next morning she set off, planning to return soon. People make departures like this calmly enough, but they are full of despair.

A neighbor of the Thénardiers saw the mother as she was leaving and came back saying:

“I’ve just seen a woman in the street crying hard enough to break your heart.”

After Cosette’s mother had gone, the man said to the woman:

“That will cover the hundred-and-ten-franc note I have due tomorrow; I was fifty francs short. Do you realize a bailiff would have been after me, and I’d have had a formal protest besides? You set the trap very neatly with your little ones.”

“Without meaning to,” said the woman.

CHAPTER II—FIRST PORTRAIT OF TWO UNATTRACTIVE FIGURES

The mouse that had been caught was a miserable little creature; but even a skinny mouse delights the cat.

Who were these Thénardiers?

Let us say a few words about them now. We can fill in the portrait later.

They belonged to that mixed class made up of coarse people who have prospered and intelligent people who have fallen in the world. It lies between what is called the “middle” class and what is called the “lower” class. It combines some of the faults of the latter with nearly all the vices of the former, while having neither the generous instincts of the workingman nor the respectable orderliness of the bourgeois.

They were the sort of stunted natures that can easily turn monstrous if some dull fire happens to warm them. In the woman there was a layer of brute instinct; in the man, the makings of a scoundrel. Both were highly capable of that dreadful kind of development that moves only toward evil. There are souls like crabs, always backing into darkness, retreating through life instead of moving forward, using experience only to make themselves more misshapen, growing steadily worse, and taking on more and more blackness. This man and woman had souls of that kind.

Thénardier in particular was a troubling subject for anyone who reads faces. Some men inspire distrust the moment you look at them, because you feel darkness in them on every side. They seem furtive behind and threatening in front. There is something unknowable about them. You can no more answer for what they have done than for what they may do. The shadow in their eyes gives them away. Just hearing them speak a word or seeing them make a gesture lets you glimpse dark secrets in their past and dark mysteries in their future.

According to his own account, Thénardier had been a soldier—a sergeant, he claimed. He had probably served in the 1815 campaign and seems to have shown a fair amount of courage. Later we shall see how much of that was true. The sign on his inn referred to one of his supposed military exploits. He had painted it himself, because he knew a little about everything—and did all of it badly.

This was during the period when the old classical romance—once represented by _Clélie_, and now reduced to nothing more than _Lodoïska_—still retained a certain nobility even as it grew more and more vulgar, declining from Mademoiselle de Scudéri to Madame Bournon-Malarme, and from Madame de Lafayette to Madame Barthélemy-Hadot. These novels set the loving hearts of Parisian portresses on fire and even spread some havoc through the suburbs. Madame Thénardier was just clever enough to read that kind of book. She lived on them. Whatever mind she had, she drowned in them. As a result, when she was young—and even for a while afterward—she had a sort of dreamy manner with her husband,

who was a scoundrel of some substance: a ruffian educated as far as grammar, both coarse and sly at once, but in matters of sentiment devoted to reading Pigault-Lebrun, and, “in what concerns the sex,” as he put it in his own jargon, a complete and absolute brute. His wife was twelve or fifteen years younger than he was. Later, when her hair—arranged in a romantically drooping style—began to turn gray, and the Megæra started to emerge from the Pamela, Madame Thénardier became nothing more than a coarse, vicious woman who had dabbled in foolish novels. One does not read nonsense without consequences. That is why her eldest daughter was named Éponine. As for the younger one, the poor child came close to being called Gulnare. I do not know by what happy diversion, brought about by a romance of Ducray-Dumenil, she ended up bearing only the name Azelma.

Still, not everything in that strange period we are referring to was ridiculous or shallow. It might be called the anarchy of first names. Alongside the romantic tendency we have just pointed out, there was also a social sign. Even now, it is not unusual for a herdboy to be named Arthur, Alfred, or Alphonse, while a viscount—if any viscounts still remain—may be called Thomas, Pierre, or Jacques. This shift, which gives the “refined” name to the commoner and the rustic name to the aristocrat, is simply one swirl of equality. The unstoppable spread of a new spirit appears here as it does everywhere else. Beneath this seeming confusion lies something great and profound: the French Revolution.

CHAPTER III—THE LARK

Being wicked is not, by itself, enough to make a person prosper. The inn was doing badly.

Thanks to the traveller's fifty-seven francs, Thénardier had managed to avoid a formal protest and pay the note he had signed. The next month, they were short of money again. The woman took Cosette's clothes to Paris and pawned them for sixty francs. As soon as that money was gone, the Thénardiers got used to thinking of the little girl as a child they were supporting out of charity, and they treated her that way. Since she no longer had any clothes of her own, they dressed her in the Thénardier children's old petticoats and chemises—in other words, in rags. They fed her with whatever everyone else had left behind: a little better than the dog, a little worse than the cat. The cat and the dog were, in fact, her usual companions at meals. Cosette ate with them under the table, from a wooden bowl like theirs.

The mother, who had settled at M. sur M., as we shall see later, wrote—or rather had letters written—once a month so that she could get news of her child. The Thénardiers always replied, "Cosette is doing wonderfully well."

After the first six months ended, the mother sent seven francs for the seventh month, and after that she kept sending money fairly regularly each month. Before the year was over, Thénardier said, "She's doing us a fine favor, isn't she! What does she expect us to do with seven francs?" and he wrote to demand twelve francs. The mother, whom they had convinced

that her child was happy and “doing well,” gave in and sent the twelve francs.

Some people cannot love on one side without hating on the other. Mother Thénardier loved her two daughters passionately, and that made her hate the stranger.

It is painful to think that a mother’s love can take such cruel forms. Cosette took up so little space, yet it seemed to her as though that space had been stolen from her own children, as though that little girl reduced the very air her daughters breathed. This woman, like many women of her kind, had a daily store of caresses and a daily load of blows and insults to hand out. If Cosette had not been there, then her daughters, adored as they were, would certainly have received all of it; but the stranger did them the service of drawing the blows onto herself. Her daughters received nothing but affection. Cosette could not make a single move without bringing down on her head a storm of violent blows and undeserved punishment. She was a gentle, frail little creature, too young to understand anything about this world or about God, yet she was constantly punished, scolded, mistreated, and beaten, while beside her she saw two little beings like herself living in the light of dawn.

Madame Thénardier was cruel to Cosette. Éponine and Azelma were cruel too. At that age, children are only copies of their mother. They are just smaller.

One year passed, then another.

People in the village said:

“Those Thénardiers are good people. They are not rich, and yet they are raising a poor child who was left in their care!”

They thought Cosette’s mother had forgotten her.

Meanwhile, Thénardier had learned—by some obscure means, impossible to guess—that the child was probably illegitimate and that the mother could not acknowledge her. So he demanded fifteen francs a month, saying that “the creature” was growing and “eating,” and threatening to send her away. “She’d better not annoy me,” he cried, “or I’ll throw her brat right into the middle of her secrets. I want more money.” The mother paid the fifteen francs.

Year by year, the child grew, and her misery grew with her.

As long as Cosette was very small, she was the scapegoat for the other two children. As soon as she began to grow a little—before she was even five years old—she became the household servant.

Five years old! the reader will say. That cannot be likely. Alas, it is true. Social suffering begins at every age. Have we not recently seen the trial of a man named Dumollard, an orphan who became a bandit, and who, from the age of five, as the official records state, being alone in the world, “worked for his living and stole”?

Cosette was sent on errands, made to sweep the rooms, the courtyard, and the street, to wash the dishes, and even to carry heavy loads. The Thénardiers felt all the more entitled to treat her this way because her mother, still at M. sur M., had become

irregular in her payments. Some months she fell behind.

If this mother had returned to Montfermeil at the end of those three years, she would not have recognized her child. Cosette, so pretty and rosy when she arrived at that house, was now thin and pale. She had an indescribably anxious look. “The sly little thing,” said the Thénardiers.

Injustice had made her fretful, and misery had made her ugly. Nothing was left to her but her beautiful eyes, and even they were painful to look at, because large as they were, they seemed to hold an even greater sadness.

It was heartbreaking to see this poor child, not yet six years old, shivering in winter in her old linen rags full of holes, sweeping the street before daylight with an enormous broom in her tiny red hands and tears in her great eyes.

[Illustration: Cossette Sweeping]

People in the neighborhood called her the _Lark_. The townsfolk, who loved that kind of nickname, had given it to this timid, frightened, shivering little creature, no bigger than a bird. Every morning she was awake before anyone else in the house or the village, and she was always out in the street or the fields before dawn.

Only this little lark never sang.

CHAPTER I—THE STORY OF AN ADVANCE IN BLACK GLASS TRINKETS

Meanwhile, what had become of that mother who, according to the people of Montfermeil, seemed to have abandoned her child? Where was she? What was she doing?

After leaving her little Cosette with the Thénardiers, she went on her way and arrived at M. sur M.

This, as the reader will remember, was in 1818.

Fantine had left her province ten years earlier. M. sur M. had changed in appearance. While Fantine had slowly sunk from one misery to another, her native town had prospered.

About two years earlier, one of those industrial developments that count as major events in small districts had taken place.

This detail matters, and it is worth explaining fully; one might almost say it deserves emphasis.

From time out of mind, M. sur M.'s special industry had been the imitation of English jet and the black glass trinkets made in Germany. But the trade had always struggled because the raw material was expensive, and that drove up manufacturing costs. By the time Fantine returned to M. sur M., an extraordinary change had taken place in the production of these “black goods.” Near the end of 1815, a stranger settled in the town and came up with the idea of using gum-lac instead of resin in this

manufacturing process, and, for bracelets in particular, of using strips of sheet iron simply laid together instead of strips of sheet iron soldered together.

That very small change brought about a revolution.

This very small change had, in fact, dramatically lowered the cost of the raw material. That made it possible, first, to raise the price of the manufactured product, which benefited the country; second, to improve the quality of the workmanship, which benefited the consumer; and third, to sell it at a lower price while tripling the profit, which benefited the manufacturer.

So one idea produced three results.

In less than three years, the inventor of this process had become rich, which was good, and had made everyone around him rich, which was even better. He was a stranger in the Department. Nothing was known about his origins, and very little about the beginning of his life. People said that he had come to town with almost no money, at most a few hundred francs.

From that small amount of capital, put to work in the service of an ingenious idea and developed with method and thought, he had built his own fortune and the fortune of the whole surrounding region.

When he arrived at M. sur M., he had only the clothes, the appearance, and the speech of a workingman.

It seems that on the very day he entered the little town of M. sur M. in obscurity, at nightfall on a December evening, with a

knapsack on his back and a thorn stick in his hand, a large fire had broken out at the town hall. The man rushed into the flames and, at the risk of his own life, saved two children belonging to the captain of the gendarmerie. That is why people forgot to ask him for his passport. Later they learned his name. He was called Father Madeleine.

CHAPTER II—MADELEINE

He was a man of about fifty, with a thoughtful air, and he was good. That was all that could be said of him.

Thanks to the rapid growth of the industry he had so skillfully rebuilt, M. sur M. had become a fairly important center of trade. Spain, which used a great deal of black jet, bought enormous quantities there every year. In this line of business, M. sur M. almost competed with London and Berlin. Father Madeleine's profits were so large that by the end of the second year he was able to build a large factory with two vast workrooms, one for men and the other for women. Anyone who was hungry could come there and be sure of finding work and bread. Father Madeleine asked only this of the men: good will; of the women: pure morals; and of everyone: honesty. He had separated the workrooms to keep the sexes apart, so that the women and girls might remain modest. On this point he would not yield. It was the only matter on which he was, in a sense, intolerant. He held all the more firmly to this strictness because M. sur M. was a garrison town, where opportunities for corruption were everywhere. Still, his arrival had been a blessing, and his presence seemed heaven-sent. Before Father Madeleine came, everything in the region had been stagnant; now everything was alive with the healthy energy of work. A strong current of prosperity warmed everything and reached everywhere. Slow times and misery were unknown. There was no pocket so hidden that it did not hold a little money, and no home so humble that it did not contain some small joy.

Father Madeleine gave work to everyone. He demanded only one thing: Be an honest man. Be an honest woman.

As we have said, amid all this activity, of which he was both the cause and the center, Father Madeleine made his fortune. But, strangely for a plain businessman, it did not seem to be his main concern. He appeared to think a great deal about others and very little about himself. In 1820, it was known that he had six hundred and thirty thousand francs deposited in his name with Laffitte; but before setting aside those six hundred and thirty thousand francs, he had already spent more than a million on the town and its poor.

The hospital had very little funding, so he paid for six beds there. M. sur M. was divided into an upper town and a lower town. In the lower town, where he lived, there was only one school—a wretched shack that was falling apart. He built two schools instead, one for girls and one for boys. He paid both teachers a salary out of his own pocket, and it was twice their tiny official pay. One day, when someone expressed surprise, he said, “The two most important servants of the state are the nurse and the schoolmaster.” He also founded, at his own expense, an infant school, something then almost unknown in France, and a fund to help old and disabled workers. Because his factory became a center of activity, a new neighborhood quickly grew up around it, with many poor families living there. He set up a free clinic in that district.

At first, when people saw how he was getting started, the good souls said, “He’s a cheerful fellow who wants to make his fortune.” When they saw him making the town prosperous

before making himself rich, the good souls said, “He is an ambitious man.” That seemed even more likely because he was religious and even practiced his religion to some extent, which was looked on very favorably at that time. Every Sunday he regularly attended early low mass. The local deputy, who sniffed out rivals everywhere, soon began to feel uneasy about this display of religion. This deputy had once been a member of the Empire’s legislative body, and he shared the religious views of a Father of the Oratory better known as Fouché, Duc d’Otrante, whose follower and friend he had been. In private, behind closed doors, he liked to make mild jokes about God. But when he saw the wealthy manufacturer Madeleine going to low mass at seven in the morning, he recognized a possible candidate in him and decided to surpass him. He took a Jesuit confessor and began attending high mass and vespers. In those days, ambition, in the plainest sense of the word, was a race to the church steeple. The poor benefited from this fear, along with the good Lord, for the honorable deputy also endowed two beds in the hospital, bringing the total to twelve.

Still, one morning in 1819, a rumor spread through town that, at the prefect’s recommendation and in recognition of his service to the country, Father Madeleine was about to be appointed mayor of M. sur M. by the King. Those who had called this newcomer “an ambitious fellow” seized on the news with delight and cried, “There! Didn’t we say so!” All of M. sur M. was in an uproar. The rumor was true. A few days later, the appointment appeared in the _Moniteur_. The next day, Father Madeleine refused it.

That same year, 1819, products made by Madeleine's new process were displayed at the industrial exhibition. When the jury delivered its report, the King named the inventor a chevalier of the Legion of Honor. The little town was stirred up all over again. So that was what he wanted—the cross! Father Madeleine refused the cross.

Clearly, this man was a mystery. The worthy people solved the problem for themselves by saying, "After all, he must be some kind of adventurer."

We have seen that the country owed him a great deal; the poor owed him everything. He was so useful, and so kind, that people had no choice but to honor and respect him. His workers, especially, adored him, and he accepted that devotion with a kind of grave sadness. Once people knew he was rich, "society" bowed to him, and he began receiving invitations around town. In town, he was called Monsieur Madeleine; his workers and the children still called him Father Madeleine, and that was the title most likely to make him smile. The more he rose and prospered, the more invitations poured in. "Society" claimed him as one of its own. The neat little drawing rooms of M. sur M., which had naturally been closed at first to the artisan, now threw open both doors to the millionaire. They made every effort to welcome him. He refused.

This time the gossips had no difficulty. "He is an ignorant man, with no education. No one knows where he came from. He would not know how to behave in society. It has never even been clearly proved that he can read."

When they saw him making money, they said, “He is a businessman.” When they saw him throwing his money around, they said, “He is an ambitious man.” When he was seen refusing honors, they said, “He is an adventurer.” When they saw him turn society away, they said, “He is a brute.”

In 1820, five years after he arrived in M. sur M., the services he had rendered to the district were so remarkable, and public opinion throughout the surrounding country was so unanimous, that the King once again appointed him mayor of the town. He refused again. But the prefect would not accept his refusal, all the leading people of the town came to beg him, and people in the streets pleaded with him. The pressure was so strong that he finally accepted. People noticed that what seemed to decide him most was the almost angry remark shouted at him by an old working woman from her doorway: _“A good mayor is a useful thing. Is he shrinking from the good he can do?”_

This was the third stage of his rise. Father Madeleine had become Monsieur Madeleine. Monsieur Madeleine became Monsieur le Maire.

CHAPTER III—SUMS DEPOSITED WITH LAFFITTE

Even so, he remained as simple as he had been on the first day. He had gray hair, serious eyes, the sunburned skin of a laborer, and the thoughtful face of a philosopher. He usually wore a wide-brimmed hat and a long coat of coarse cloth buttoned up to the chin. He carried out his duties as mayor, but apart from that he lived alone. He spoke to very few people. He avoided social courtesies and slipped away quickly. He smiled so he would not have to talk, and he gave generously so he would not have to smile. The women said of him, “What a good-natured bear!” His pleasure was to wander through the fields.

He always ate alone, with an open book in front of him, reading as he ate. He had a small but carefully chosen library. He loved books; they are cold friends, but dependable ones. As wealth brought him more free time, he seemed to use it to educate himself. People had noticed that ever since he arrived at M. sur M., his speech had grown more refined, more thoughtful, and gentler with each passing year. He liked to carry a gun on his walks, but he rarely used it. When he did, his aim was so unfailingly accurate that it frightened people. He never killed a harmless animal. He never fired at a small bird.

Although he was no longer young, people believed he was still extraordinarily strong. He helped anyone who needed it. He could lift a horse, free a wheel stuck in the mud, or stop a runaway bull by the horns. Whenever he went out, his pockets were full of money; when he came back, they were empty.

When he passed through a village, ragged children ran after him happily and crowded around him like a swarm of gnats.

People thought he must once have lived in the countryside, because he knew all kinds of useful tricks that he taught to the peasants. He showed them how to get rid of scurf on wheat by sprinkling the grain and the granary, and flooding the cracks in the floor with a solution of common salt. He also taught them how to drive away weevils by hanging flowering orviot everywhere—on the walls, from the ceilings, among the grass, and in the houses.

He had "recipes" for clearing a field of blight, tares, foxtail, and every other parasitic growth that destroys wheat. He protected a rabbit warren from rats simply by placing a guinea pig in it, whose smell kept them away.

One day he saw some villagers hard at work pulling up nettles. He looked at the plants, already uprooted and dried, and said, “They’re dead. Even so, it would be worth knowing how to use them. When the nettle is young, its leaves make an excellent vegetable. When it is older, it has threads and fibres like hemp and flax. Cloth made from nettles is as good as linen. Chopped up, nettles are good for poultry; crushed, they are good for cattle. Nettle seed mixed with fodder makes animals’ coats glossy. The root, mixed with salt, produces a beautiful yellow dye. It also makes excellent hay, and it can be cut twice. And what does the nettle require? A little soil, no care, no cultivation. The only difficulty is that the seed drops as soon as it ripens, so it is hard to gather. That is all. With a little care, the nettle could be made useful; neglected, it becomes harmful. So it is

destroyed. How many men are like the nettle!" After a pause, he added, "Remember this, my friends: there are no bad plants and no bad men. There are only bad cultivators."

The children loved him because he knew how to make delightful little things out of straw and coconuts.

When he saw a church door draped in black, he went in. He sought out funerals the way other men seek out christenings. Widowhood and other people's grief drew him because of his deep gentleness. He joined the friends in mourning, the families dressed in black, and the priests chanting around a coffin. He seemed to like using these funeral psalms, filled with visions of the next world, as material for his thoughts. With his eyes turned toward heaven, he listened with a kind of longing to those mournful voices singing on the edge of death's dark abyss, where the mysteries of the infinite begin.

He did countless good deeds, hiding his part in them the way a man hides himself after doing wrong. He slipped into houses in secret, at night. He climbed staircases quietly. A poor man returning to his attic room would find that his door had been opened, sometimes even forced, while he was away. He would cry out in alarm: some thief had been there! But when he went inside, the first thing he saw was a gold coin left behind on a piece of furniture. The "thief" who had been there was Father Madeleine.

He was friendly, yet sad. People said, "Here is a rich man without any arrogance. Here is a happy man who does not look content."

Some people insisted that he was a mysterious man, and that no one ever entered his room. They described it as a true hermit's cell, furnished with winged hourglasses and made grim by skulls and bones from dead men. The story spread so widely that one day one of the polished and spiteful young women of M. sur M. came to him and said, "Monsieur le Maire, please show us your room. They say it is a grotto." He smiled and at once led them into this "grotto." Their curiosity was well punished. The room was furnished very simply, with mahogany furniture—rather ugly, like furniture of that kind generally—and paper on the walls that cost twelve sous. They found nothing remarkable there except two old-fashioned candlesticks on the mantelpiece that seemed to be silver, "because they were hallmarked," a comment that perfectly captured the small-town style of wit.

Even so, people kept saying that no one ever entered the room, and that it was a hermit's cave, a mysterious retreat, a hole, a tomb.

People also whispered that he had "immense" sums deposited with Laffitte, with the unusual advantage that he could draw on them at once. So, they added, M. Madeleine could appear at Laffitte's any morning, sign a receipt, and walk away with his two or three million francs in ten minutes. In fact, as we have said, these "two or three millions" came to no more than 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——, known as “Monseigneur Bienvenu,” who had died in the odor of sanctity at the age of eighty-two.

The Bishop of D———to add a detail the newspapers left out—had been blind for many years before his death, and had accepted his blindness calmly, since his sister was there beside him.

Let us note, in passing, that being blind and being loved is, in truth, one of the strangest and most exquisite kinds of happiness on this earth, where nothing is ever complete. To have always beside you a woman, a daughter, a sister, some charming being who is there because you need her and because she cannot do without you; to know that you are indispensable to someone who is indispensable to you; to measure your affection constantly by the amount of her presence she gives you, and to say to yourself, "Since she gives all her time to me, it is because I possess all her heart"; to see her thoughts instead of her face; to test the faithfulness of one soul while the rest of the world is darkened; to hear the rustle of a dress like the sound of wings; to hear her come and go, leave, speak, return, sing, and to think that you are the center of those footsteps and that voice; to feel your own power more deeply because of your weakness; to become, in your darkness and through your darkness, the star around which this

angel moves—few joys can equal this. The highest happiness in life is the certainty that one is loved; loved for one's own sake—or rather, loved in spite of oneself. The blind man possesses that certainty. To be cared for in suffering is to be cherished. Does he lack anything? No. One does not lose the light when one has love. And what love! A love made entirely of virtue. There is no blindness where there is certainty. Soul reaches out to soul in the dark, and finds it. And that soul, found and proven true, is a woman. A hand supports you; it is hers. A mouth lightly touches your brow; it is her mouth. You hear a breath close beside you; it is hers. To have everything from her, from her devotion to her pity; never to be abandoned; to have that gentle weakness helping you; to lean on that unshakable reed; to touch Providence with your hands, and to be able to hold it in your arms—God made tangible—what happiness! The heart, that dark and heavenly flower, opens in a mysterious bloom. One would not trade that shadow for all the light in the world. The angelic soul is there, always there. If she leaves, it is only to return. She disappears like a dream and comes back like reality. You feel warmth drawing near, and there she is. You are filled with serenity, joy, ecstasy; you become a kind of radiance in the night. And then there are a thousand little acts of care. Trifles, yet immense in that emptiness. The most indescribable tones of a woman's voice are used to soothe you, replacing the vanished universe. One is caressed by the soul. One sees nothing, yet feels that one is adored. It is a paradise of shadows.

It was from this paradise that Monseigneur Welcome passed into the next.

The local newspaper in M. sur M. reprinted the notice of his death. The next day, M. Madeleine appeared dressed entirely in black, with crape on his hat.

People in the town noticed his mourning and talked about it. It seemed to shed some light on M. Madeleine's background. They decided that he must be related in some way to the venerable Bishop. "He has gone into mourning for the Bishop of D——," people said in the drawing rooms. This greatly increased M. Madeleine's standing and won him, all at once, a certain respect in the aristocratic circles of M. sur M. The town's tiny Faubourg Saint-Germain began to consider lifting its social ban on M. Madeleine, the likely relative of a bishop. M. Madeleine noticed the rise in his position through the more frequent courtesies of the older women and the warmer smiles of the younger ones. One evening, a leading figure in that little grand world, curious by virtue of her seniority, ventured to ask him, "M. le Maire is no doubt a cousin of the late Bishop of D——?"

He said, "No, Madame."

"But," the dowager went on, "you are wearing mourning for him."

He replied, "It is because I was a servant in his household when I was young."

People also noticed something else: whenever he came across a young Savoyard wandering through the town in search of chimneys to sweep, the mayor had the boy brought to him, asked his name, and gave him money. The little Savoyards told

one another about it, and many of them passed that way.

CHAPTER V—VAGUE FLASHES ON THE HORIZON

Gradually, over time, all this opposition died away. At first, M. Madeleine had to endure the slander and smears that seem to meet anyone who rises in the world. Then that hostility shrank into mere spite, then into a few malicious comments, and finally vanished altogether. Respect for him became complete, unanimous, and heartfelt. By about 1821, in M. sur M., people spoke the words “Monsieur le Maire” in almost the same tone of reverence with which “Monseigneur the Bishop” had been spoken in D—— in 1815. People came from as far as ten leagues away to seek M. Madeleine’s advice. He settled disputes, kept lawsuits from happening, and reconciled enemies. Everyone looked to him as a judge, and with good reason. It was as if the law of nature itself lived in his soul. A kind of epidemic of admiration spread, and over six or seven years it gradually took hold of the whole district.

Only one man in the town—in the whole arrondissement—completely escaped this contagion. Whatever Father Madeleine did, this man remained opposed to him, as if some incorruptible, unshakable instinct kept him watchful and uneasy. It does seem that certain men possess a truly animal instinct—pure and honest, like all instincts—that creates likes and dislikes, that inevitably sets one nature apart from another, that never hesitates, never feels doubt, never stays silent, and never proves false to itself. Obscure though it is, it remains clear in its own way: infallible, commanding, resistant, and

stubborn against every argument of the mind and every dissolving force of reason. However fate may arrange things, it secretly warns the man-dog that the man-cat is near, and the man-fox that the man-lion is present.

It often happened that when M. Madeleine passed down a street—calm, kind, and surrounded by everyone's blessings—a tall man in an iron-gray frock coat, carrying a heavy cane and wearing a battered hat, would suddenly turn behind him and watch him until he was out of sight. He would stand there with folded arms, slowly shaking his head, his upper lip drawn up toward his nose along with the lower in a meaningful grimace that seemed to say: "What is that man, really? I am sure I have seen him somewhere before. In any case, he does not deceive me."

This man had a severe seriousness that was almost threatening. Even a quick glance at him was enough to make people stop and take notice.

His name was Javert, and he was a police officer.

In M. sur M., he served in the unpleasant but necessary role of inspector. He had not witnessed Madeleine's early rise. Javert owed his position to the patronage of M. Chabouillet, secretary to the Minister of State, Comte Anglès, who was then prefect of police in Paris. By the time Javert arrived in M. sur M., the great manufacturer had already made his fortune, and Father Madeleine had become Monsieur Madeleine.

Some police officers have a distinctive look, combining an air of meanness with an air of authority. Javert had that look, but

without the meanness.

We believe that if souls were visible, we would clearly see this strange fact: every human being corresponds to one of the animal species. Then we would easily recognize a truth that thinkers have only dimly perceived—that from the oyster to the eagle, from the pig to the tiger, every animal exists within man, and each person carries one of them inside. Sometimes a person carries several at once.

Animals are simply the outward forms of our virtues and vices wandering before our eyes, the visible ghosts of our souls. God shows them to us to make us think. But because animals are only shadows, God has not given them the full capacity for education; what would be the point? Our souls, by contrast, are real and have a purpose suited to them, so God has given them intelligence—that is, the ability to be educated. When social education is done well, it can always draw out the usefulness contained in any soul, whatever kind it may be.

Of course, this is said only from the limited point of view of visible earthly life, and without deciding the deeper question of the earlier or later identity of beings that are not human. The visible self does not in any way give the thinker the right to deny the hidden self. With that reservation made, let us continue.

Now, if the reader will accept for a moment that every person has some animal element in them, it becomes easy to explain what Police Officer Javert was like.

The peasants of Asturias believe that in every litter of wolves there is one pup that is really a dog, and that the mother kills it

because otherwise, when it grows up, it would devour the other cubs.

Put a human face on this dog-born son of a wolf, and you have Javert.

Javert had been born in prison, the child of a fortune-teller whose husband was serving in the galleys. As he grew up, he came to believe that he stood outside society, and he gave up hope of ever being allowed back into it. He saw that society shows no mercy to two kinds of people: those who attack it and those who defend it. He could belong only to one of those two groups. At the same time, he felt within himself an indescribable core of stiffness, order, and honesty, mixed with a deep hatred for the tribe of wanderers from which he had come. He joined the police and did well there. By the age of forty, he was an inspector.

In his youth, he had worked in the convict prisons of the South.

Before going any further, we should be clear about the words "human face," which we have just used for Javert.

Javert's human face had a flat nose with two deep nostrils, and huge whiskers climbing his cheeks toward them. The first time one saw those two thickets and those two caverns, it was unsettling. When Javert laughed—and his laugh was rare and frightening—his thin lips drew back and showed not only his teeth but his gums, and around his nose there appeared a flat, savage crease, like the muzzle of a wild animal. When serious, Javert was a watchdog; when he laughed, he was a tiger. Otherwise, he had very little forehead and a great deal of jaw.

His hair hid his forehead and hung over his eyebrows. Between his eyes sat a constant vertical frown, like a mark stamped there by anger. His gaze was dark, his mouth tight and alarming, and his whole manner suggested fierce authority.

This man was made up, comparatively speaking, of two very simple and very worthy feelings. But he nearly turned them into vices by taking them to extremes: respect for authority and hatred of rebellion. In his eyes, murder, theft, and every other crime were simply forms of rebellion. He placed a deep, unquestioning faith in anyone who held a public office, from the prime minister down to the village policeman. And he treated with scorn, revulsion, and contempt anyone who had ever crossed the legal line into wrongdoing. He was absolute in his views and allowed no exceptions. On one side, he said, "An official cannot be mistaken; a magistrate is never wrong." On the other, he said, "These men are beyond saving. Nothing good can come from them." He fully shared the belief of those extreme minds who give human law some strange power to create—or, if the reader prefers, to certify—demons, and who imagine a Styx at the foundation of society. He was stoic, grave, and austere: a melancholy dreamer, both humble and proud, like all fanatics. His gaze was like a drill, cold and piercing. His whole life depended on two words: vigilance and surveillance. He had imposed a straight line on the most crooked thing in the world. He believed deeply in his own usefulness, treated his duties like a religion, and was a spy the way other men are priests. Woe to anyone who fell into his hands. He would have arrested his own father if he had escaped from the galleys, and he would have informed on his mother if she had broken her

ban. And he would have done it with that inward satisfaction that comes from believing oneself virtuous. Yet his life was one of deprivation, solitude, self-denial, and chastity, without a single distraction. It was duty without mercy: the police as the Spartans understood Sparta—a pitiless watch, a savage honesty, an informer of marble, Brutus in Vidocq.

Javert's whole appearance suggested a man who watches others while keeping himself out of sight. The mystical followers of Joseph de Maistre, who in those days dressed up the ideas of the ultra newspapers with grand theories about the universe, would certainly have called Javert a symbol. His forehead could not be seen; it vanished beneath his hat. His eyes were hidden under his brows. His chin disappeared into his cravat. His hands were tucked up in his sleeves. Even his cane was out of sight, carried under his coat. But when the moment came, all that shadow seemed to open like an ambush, and out of it suddenly appeared a narrow, angular forehead, a sinister stare, a menacing chin, huge hands, and a monstrous cudgel.

In his rare moments of leisure, he read, though he hated books. That at least kept him from being completely illiterate. You could hear it in the occasional emphasis of his speech.

As we have said, he had no vices. When he was particularly pleased with himself, he allowed himself a pinch of snuff. That was the extent of his connection with ordinary human weakness.

The reader will easily understand that Javert was the terror of the whole class that the annual statistics of the Ministry of

Justice list under the heading “Vagrants.” The mere mention of Javert’s name sent them fleeing; the sight of his face left them rigid with fear.

Such was this formidable man.

Javert was like an eye constantly fixed on M. Madeleine—an eye full of suspicion and dark guesses. M. Madeleine had finally noticed it, but it seemed to matter little to him. He never questioned Javert. He neither sought him out nor avoided him. He endured that troubling, almost oppressive stare without seeming to notice it. He treated Javert with the same calm ease and courtesy that he showed to everyone else.

From a few remarks Javert let slip, people guessed that he had secretly investigated all the earlier traces Father Madeleine might have left elsewhere. He pursued this with the kind of curiosity natural to his sort, driven as much by instinct as by intention. He seemed to know—and sometimes hinted indirectly—that someone had gathered certain information in a certain area about a family that had disappeared. Once, while talking to himself, he happened to say, “I think I have him!” Then he fell into thought for three days and did not speak a word. It seemed that the clue he believed he had found had slipped away.

Still, to qualify the overly absolute meaning those words might suggest, nothing human can ever be truly infallible. The nature of instinct is that it can become confused, lose the trail, and fail. If that were not so, instinct would be superior to intelligence, and animals would have been given a better guide than man.

Javert was clearly somewhat unsettled by M. Madeleine’s complete ease and calm.

One day, however, his strange manner seemed to make an impression on M. Madeleine. It happened on the following occasion.

CHAPTER VI—FATHER FAUCHELEVENT

One morning M. Madeleine was walking through an unpaved lane in M. sur M. when he heard a noise and saw a crowd some distance ahead. He went over. An old man named Father Fauchelevent had just fallen under his cart after his horse stumbled.

At that time, this Fauchelevent was one of the few men who bore M. Madeleine ill will. When Madeleine first arrived in the district, Fauchelevent—an ex-notary and a peasant with a little education—had a business already beginning to fail. He had watched this plain workman become rich while he himself, a man of law, was being ruined. That filled him with jealousy, and whenever he had the chance, he did all he could to harm Madeleine. Then bankruptcy came. Since the old man had nothing left but a cart and a horse, and had neither family nor children, he became a carter.

The horse had broken both its legs and couldn't get up. The old man was trapped in the wheels. The accident had gone so badly that the full weight of the cart was pressing on his chest. The cart was heavily loaded. Father Fauchelevent was making a dreadful rattling sound in his throat. They had tried to pull him out, but without success. Any clumsy or poorly timed attempt, any wrong movement, could kill him. The only way to free him was to lift the cart off him. Javert, who had arrived just as the accident happened, had sent for a jack-screw.

M. Madeleine arrived. The crowd stepped back respectfully.

“Help!” cried old Fauchelevent. “Who will be kind enough to save the old man?”

M. Madeleine turned to the people there:

“Is there a jack-screw anywhere nearby?”

“Someone has gone to fetch one,” the peasant answered.

“How long will it take?”

“They’ve gone to the nearest place, Flachot’s, where there’s a farrier. But that changes nothing. It will take a good quarter of an hour.”

“A quarter of an hour!” exclaimed Madeleine.

It had rained the night before, and the ground was soaked.

The cart was sinking deeper into the mud with every passing moment, crushing the old carter’s chest more and more. It was clear that in five minutes his ribs would be broken.

“We can’t wait another quarter of an hour,” Madeleine said to the peasants, who were staring at him.

“We have to!”

“But by then it will be too late! Can’t you see the cart is sinking?”

“Well?”

“Listen,” Madeleine went on. “There’s still enough space under the cart for a man to crawl underneath and lift it with his back. Just for half a minute, and the poor man can be pulled out. Is there anyone here with a strong back and enough courage? There are five louis d’or to be earned!”

Not one man in the crowd moved.

“Ten louis,” said Madeleine.

The people there lowered their eyes. One of them muttered, “A man would have to be terribly strong. And even then, he might get crushed!”

“Come,” Madeleine said again, “twenty louis.”

No one answered.

“It isn’t willingness that’s missing,” said a voice.

M. Madeleine turned around and recognized Javert. He had not noticed him when he arrived.

Javert went on:

“It’s a matter of strength. A man would have to be extraordinarily strong to do a thing like that—to lift a cart on his back.”

Then, staring hard at M. Madeleine, he continued, stressing every word:

“Monsieur Madeleine, I have only ever known one man capable of doing what you’re asking.”

Madeleine shuddered.

Javert added, sounding indifferent but never taking his eyes off Madeleine:

“He was a convict.”

“Ah!” said Madeleine.

“In the galleys at Toulon.”

Madeleine went pale.

Meanwhile, the cart kept sinking slowly. Father Fauchelevent was choking and cried out:

“I’m suffocating! My ribs are breaking! A jack! Something! Ah!”

Madeleine looked around him.

“Isn’t there anyone here who wants to earn twenty louis and save this poor old man’s life?”

No one moved. Javert went on:

“I have only ever known one man who could serve in place of a jack, and he was that convict.”

“Ah! It’s crushing me!” cried the old man.

Madeleine lifted his head and met Javert’s hawk-like stare, still fixed on him. He looked at the peasants standing motionless and smiled sadly. Then, without a word, he dropped to his knees, and before the crowd even had time to cry out, he was under the cart.

A dreadful moment of silence and suspense followed.

They saw Madeleine, nearly flat on his stomach beneath that terrible weight, make two useless attempts to draw his knees and elbows together. People shouted to him, “Father Madeleine, come out!” Old Fauchelevent himself said, “Monsieur Madeleine, go away! You can see I’m meant to die! Leave me! You’ll be crushed too!” Madeleine did not answer.

Everyone watching was gasping for breath. The wheels kept sinking deeper, and it was becoming almost impossible for Madeleine to get out from under the cart.

Suddenly the huge mass trembled. The cart rose slowly, and the wheels came halfway out of the ruts. Then they heard a muffled voice cry, “Quick! Help!” It was Madeleine, making one last effort.

They rushed forward. One man’s selfless courage had given strength and bravery to them all. Twenty arms lifted the cart. Old Fauchelevent was saved.

Madeleine stood up. He was pale and drenched in sweat. His clothes were torn and smeared with mud. Everyone was weeping. The old man kissed his knees and called him the good God. As for Madeleine, his face bore an indescribable look of joyful, almost heavenly suffering, and he fixed his calm eyes on Javert, who was still staring at him.

CHAPTER VII—FAUCHELEVENT BECOMES A GARDENER IN PARIS

Fauchelevent had dislocated his kneecap in the fall. Father Madeleine had him taken to an infirmary he had set up for his workers in the factory itself, where two Sisters of Charity cared for the patients. The next morning, the old man found a thousand-franc banknote on his bedside table, with these words in Father Madeleine's handwriting: _"I purchase your horse and cart."_ The cart was wrecked, and the horse was dead. Fauchelevent recovered, but his knee stayed stiff. On the recommendation of the Sisters of Charity and his priest, M. Madeleine found the good man a position as gardener at a convent for women in the Rue Saint-Antoine in Paris.

Some time later, M. Madeleine was appointed mayor. The first time Javert saw M. Madeleine wearing the sash that marked his authority over the town, he felt the kind of shudder a watchdog might feel if it caught the scent of a wolf in its master's clothes. From then on, he avoided him whenever he could. When duty absolutely required it, and he had no choice but to meet the mayor, he spoke to him with deep respect.

The prosperity Father Madeleine created in M. sur M. showed itself in another way besides the visible signs we have already mentioned. This sign was invisible, but no less important. It never fails. When people are suffering, when work is scarce, and trade is dead, taxpayers fall behind because they are poor.

They use up every delay they are allowed and go beyond it, and the state spends a great deal forcing payment and collecting taxes. But when work is plentiful and the country is prosperous and content, taxes are paid easily and cost the state almost nothing to collect. You could say that the one unfailing measure of public poverty or wealth is the cost of tax collection. Over seven years, the expense of collecting taxes in the arrondissement of M. sur M. fell by three-quarters, and for that reason M. de Villèle, then Minister of Finance, often pointed to this arrondissement as an example above all the others.

This was the state of the town when Fantine returned. No one remembered her. Fortunately, the door of M. Madeleine's factory was as welcoming as a friend's face. She went there and was taken into the women's workshop. The work was completely new to Fantine, so she could not be very skilled at it, and she earned little from a day's labor. But it was enough. The problem was solved: she was earning her own living.

CHAPTER VIII—MADAME VICTURNIEN SPENDS THIRTY FRANCS ON MORALITY

When Fantine saw that she could support herself, she felt happy for a moment. To live honestly by her own work—what a mercy from heaven! Her desire to work truly came back to her. She bought a mirror and enjoyed looking at her youth, her beautiful hair, and her fine teeth. She forgot many things. She thought only of Cosette and of what the future might bring, and she was almost happy. She rented a small room and furnished it on credit, trusting in the work she expected to have—a last trace of her old improvidence. Since she could not say that she was married, she was very careful, as we have seen, never to mention her little girl.

At first, as the reader has seen, she paid the Thénardiers promptly. Since she knew only how to sign her name, she had to use a public letter-writer to write for her.

She wrote letters often, and people noticed. Soon, in hushed voices in the women's workroom, they began saying that Fantine "wrote letters" and that "she had ways about her."

No one watches other people more closely than those who have nothing to do with their affairs. Why does that gentleman come only at dusk? Why does Mr. So-and-So never hang his key on its hook on Tuesday? Why does he always take the side streets? Why does Madame always get out of her hackney-coach before it reaches her house? Why does she

send someone to buy six sheets of writing paper when she already has “a whole stationer’s shop full of it?” And so on. There are people who, just to find the answer to riddles that do not concern them in the least, spend more money, waste more time, and take more trouble than would be needed for ten good deeds. And they do it for nothing, purely for their own amusement, with no reward for their curiosity except curiosity itself. They will trail a man or a woman for entire days. They will stand watch for hours on street corners, under archways at night, in cold and rain. They will bribe errand-porters, get hackney-coach drivers and lackeys drunk, buy off a waiting-maid, and corrupt a porter. Why? For no reason. Simply from a passion for seeing, knowing, and prying into things. Simply from an itch to talk. And often, once these secrets are uncovered, once these mysteries are exposed and these riddles dragged into daylight, the result is catastrophe: duels, bankruptcies, ruined families, shattered lives. And all this to the great delight of those who have “found out everything,” though they had no stake in the matter at all and acted only on instinct. A sad thing.

Some people are malicious simply because they need to talk. Their conversation—the chatter of the drawing-room, the gossip of the anteroom—is like a fire that burns through wood quickly: it needs constant fuel, and that fuel is supplied by their neighbors.

So Fantine was kept under watch.

Besides, many were jealous of her golden hair and her white teeth.

People noticed that in the workroom, even in the middle of the others, she would often turn away to wipe a tear from her eyes. Those were the moments when she was thinking of her child, and perhaps also of the man she had loved.

Breaking free from the dark bonds of the past is a sorrowful task.

People noticed that she wrote at least twice a month and always paid the postage on her letters. They managed to get the address: _Monsieur, Monsieur Thénardier, innkeeper at Montfermeil_. The local letter-writer, a kindly old man who could never drink red wine without also spilling his secrets, was coaxed into talking at the wine shop. In the end, they found out that Fantine had a child. “She must be a fine kind of woman.” They found an old gossip who made the trip to Montfermeil, spoke with the Thénardiers, and came back saying, “For my thirty-five francs, I have set my mind at rest. I have seen the child.”

The gossip who carried out this errand was a gorgon named Madame Victurnien, the self-appointed guardian and gatekeeper of everyone’s virtue. Madame Victurnien was fifty-six, and age only added another mask to her ugliness. She had a trembling voice and an eccentric mind. This old woman had once been young—astonishing as that seems. In her youth, in ’93, she had married a monk who had fled his cloister in a red cap and gone over from the Bernardines to the Jacobins. She

was dry, harsh, irritable, cutting, fault-finding, almost poisonous. She was all of this in memory of her monk, whose widow she was, and who had dominated her completely and bent her to his will. She was like a nettle with the rustle of a cassock still clinging to it. At the Restoration she became a zealot, and so fiercely that the priests forgave her for her monk. She owned a small property, which she ostentatiously left to a religious community. She stood high in favor at the episcopal palace of Arras. So this Madame Victurnien went to Montfermeil and came back with the words, “I have seen the child.”

All this took time. Fantine had been working 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 at the shop, and asked her, in the mayor’s name, to leave the area.

This happened in the very month when the Thénardiers, after demanding twelve francs instead of six, had just gone on to demand fifteen instead of twelve.

Fantine was devastated. She could not leave the area; she owed money for her rent and her furniture. Fifty francs was not enough to pay off that debt. She stammered a few pleading words, but the superintendent ordered her to leave the shop at once. Besides, Fantine was only a fairly average worker. Crushed by shame even more than by despair, she left the shop and went back to her room. So now everyone knew about her fault.

She no longer felt strong enough to speak. People advised her to go to the mayor, but she did not dare. The mayor had given her fifty francs because he was kind, and had dismissed her because he was just. She accepted the decision.

CHAPTER IX—MADAME VICTURNIEN'S SUCCESS

So the monk's widow was useful after all.

But M. Madeleine had heard nothing about any of this. Life is full of such coincidences. M. Madeleine almost never went into the women's workroom.

He had put an elderly unmarried woman in charge of the room, someone the priest had recommended to him, and he trusted this superintendent completely. She was truly respectable: firm, fair, upright, and full of the kind of charity that gives. But she had much less of the kind that understands and forgives. M. Madeleine relied on her entirely. Even the best men often have to delegate their authority. Armed with that full power, and convinced that she was doing the right thing, the superintendent had brought the case against Fantine, judged her, condemned her, and carried out the sentence.

As for the fifty francs, she had taken them from a fund M. Madeleine had entrusted to her for charitable uses and for helping the women workers, a fund for which she gave no account.

Fantine tried to find work as a servant in the area, going from house to house. No one would hire her. She could not leave town. The secondhand dealer she owed money to for her furniture—and what miserable furniture it was!—told her, "If you leave, I'll have you arrested as a thief." The landlord, to whom she also owed rent, said, "You are young and pretty; you can

pay." She split the fifty francs between the landlord and the furniture dealer, gave the dealer back three-quarters of his goods, kept only the bare necessities, and was left with no work, no trade, nothing but her bed, and still about fifty francs in debt.

She began sewing coarse shirts for the soldiers in the garrison and earned twelve sous a day. Her daughter cost her ten. It was then that she began sending money to the Thénardiers irregularly.

Still, the old woman who lit her candle for her when she came home at night taught her how to live in misery. Beyond living on very little, there is living on nothing at all. They are like two rooms: the first is dark, the second is black.

Fantine learned how to get through the winter with no fire at all; how to give up keeping a bird that ate half a farthing's worth of millet every two days; how to turn a petticoat into a coverlet and a coverlet into a petticoat; how to save candlelight by eating her meals in the light from the window across the way. No one knows all that certain frail creatures, grown old in poverty and honesty, can make out of a single sou. In the end, it becomes a kind of talent. Fantine acquired that tragic skill and recovered a little courage.

At that time she said to a neighbor, "Bah! I tell myself that if I sleep only five hours and spend all the rest of the time sewing, I can almost always manage to earn my bread. And besides, when one is sad, one eats less. So then, suffering, anxiety, a little bread on one side, trouble on the other—all that will keep

me going."

It would have been a great comfort to have her little girl with her in this misery. She thought about bringing her back. But then what? Was she to make the child share her own destitution? And besides, she was in debt to the Thénardiers. How could she pay them? And the journey—how could she pay for that?

The old woman who taught her what might be called the life of poverty was a saintly spinster named Marguerite. She was genuinely devout, poor herself, and generous to the poor—and even to the rich. She could write just well enough to sign her name, Marguerite, and she believed in God, which is a kind of knowledge.

There are many virtuous people like that in this world below; one day they will be in the world above. This life has a tomorrow.

At first, Fantine was so ashamed that she did not dare go out.

When she was in the street, she felt that people turned to look behind her and pointed her out. Everyone stared at her, and no one greeted her. The cold, bitter scorn of passersby cut into her flesh and soul like an icy wind.

In small towns, it seems as if an unfortunate woman stands completely exposed beneath everyone's mockery and curiosity. In Paris, at least, no one knows you, and that anonymity is a kind of clothing. Oh, how she longed to go to Paris! But it was impossible.

She had to get used to disgrace, just as she had gotten used to poverty. Little by little, she made up her mind. After two or three months, she cast off her shame and began to go about as if nothing were wrong. “It is all the same to me,” she said.

She came and went with her head held high and a bitter smile, aware that she was growing shameless.

Madame Victurnien sometimes saw her passing from her window. She noticed the misery of “that creature” who, “thanks to her,” had been “put back in her proper place,” and she congratulated herself. The happiness of the wicked is dark.

Too much work wore Fantine down, and the little dry cough that troubled her grew worse. Sometimes she said to her neighbor Marguerite, “Just feel how hot my hands are!”

And yet, when she combed her beautiful hair in the morning with an old broken comb, and it fell around her like silk, she felt a brief moment of pleased vanity.

CHAPTER X—RESULT OF SUCCESS

She had been dismissed near the end of winter. Summer went by, and then winter came again. The days were short, and there was less work. Winter meant no warmth, no light, no real midday at all; evening seemed to run straight into morning. There was fog and half-light. The window stayed gray, and you could hardly see through it. The sky looked like nothing but an air hole. The whole day felt like a cave. The sun itself seemed like a beggar. A dreadful season. Winter turns the water of heaven and the heart of man to stone. Her creditors harassed her.

Fantine earned too little, and her debts had grown. The Thénardiers, never paid quickly enough, kept writing her letters. What they said drove her to despair, and the postage cost ruined her. One day they wrote that her little Cosette was completely naked in the cold weather, that she needed a woolen skirt, and that her mother must send at least ten francs. Fantine received the letter and spent the whole day crushing it in her hands. That evening she went into a barber's shop at the corner of the street and took out her comb. Her magnificent golden hair fell to her knees.

"What beautiful hair!" the barber exclaimed.

"How much will you give me for it?" she asked.

"Ten francs."

“Cut it off.”

She bought a knitted petticoat and sent it to the Thénardiers. The petticoat only made them furious. What they wanted was money. They gave the petticoat to Éponine. The poor Lark went on shivering.

Fantine thought, “My child is not cold anymore. I have clothed her with my hair.” She began wearing small round caps that hid her shorn head, and she was still pretty in them.

Dark thoughts took hold of Fantine’s heart.

When she saw that she could no longer do her hair, she began to hate everyone around her. For a long time she had shared the general reverence for Father Madeleine. But by telling herself over and over that he was the one who had dismissed her, that he was the cause of her misery, she came to hate him too, and him most of all. When she passed the factory during working hours, with the workers standing at the door, she would pretend to laugh and sing.

An old workwoman who once saw her laughing and singing like that said, “That girl will come to a bad end.”

She took a lover—the first man who came along. She did not love him. She chose him out of defiance, with anger in her heart. He was a wretched scoundrel, a kind of wandering musician and idle beggar. He beat her, and in the end he left her, just as she had taken him: in disgust.

She adored her child.

The farther she fell, the darker everything around her became. But the little angel at the bottom of her heart shone all the more brightly. She would say, “When I am rich, I will have my Cosette with me,” and then she would laugh. Her cough never went away, and her back was drenched with sweat.

One day she received a letter from the Thénardiers written in these terms: “Cosette is ill with a sickness that is going around the neighborhood. They call it a miliary fever. Costly medicines are needed. It is ruining us, and we can no longer afford them. If you do not send us forty francs before the end of the week, the little one will be dead.”

She burst out laughing and said to her old neighbor, “Ah, they are good! Forty francs! Imagine that! That is two napoleons! Where do they think I am supposed to get them? These peasants really are stupid.”

Even so, she went to a dormer window on the staircase and read the letter again. Then she went back down the stairs and ran out, still laughing, skipping as she went.

Someone met her and said, “What has made you so cheerful?”

She answered, “Some country people have written me a fine piece of nonsense. They are asking me for forty francs. Good luck to you, peasants!”

As she crossed the square, she saw a large crowd gathered around a strangely shaped carriage. On top of it stood a man dressed in red, making a speech. He was a traveling quack dentist, offering the public complete sets of teeth, opiates,

powders, and elixirs.

Fantine joined the crowd and began laughing with the others at the speech, which mixed slang for the common people with grand-sounding jargon for respectable folk. The tooth-puller noticed the beautiful girl laughing and suddenly cried out, “You there, girl with the lovely teeth—if you want to sell me your palettes, I will give you a gold napoleon for each one.”

“What are my palettes?” Fantine asked.

“The palettes,” the dental professor replied, “are the front teeth—the two upper ones.”

“How horrible!” Fantine cried.

“Two napoleons!” muttered a toothless old woman who was there. “That girl’s in luck!”

Fantine ran off and covered her ears so she would not hear the man’s hoarse voice calling after her: “Think it over, my beauty! Two napoleons—they may come in handy. If your heart tells you to, come this evening to the inn of the _Tillac d’Argent_; you’ll find me there.”

Fantine went home. She was furious, and she told her good neighbor Marguerite what had happened: “Can you imagine such a thing? Isn’t he a disgusting man? How can they let people like that wander around the country! Pull out my two front teeth! Why, I’d look horrible! My hair will grow back, but my teeth! Ah, what a monster of a man! I’d rather throw myself headfirst onto the pavement from the fifth floor! He told me he would be at the _Tillac d’Argent_ this evening.”

“And what did he offer you?” Marguerite asked.

“Two napoleons.”

“That comes to forty francs.”

“Yes,” said Fantine. “That comes to forty francs.”

She fell silent, deep in thought, and went back to work. After a quarter of an hour, she put down her sewing and went to read the Thénardiers’ letter once again on the staircase.

When she came back, she said to Marguerite, who was working beside her:

“What is miliary fever? Do you know?”

“Yes,” the old maid answered. “It’s a disease.”

“Does it take a lot of medicine?”

“Oh yes, dreadful medicines.”

“How do people get it?”

“It’s an illness people get without knowing how.”

“So it affects children?”

“Children especially.”

“Can people die from it?”

“They can,” said Marguerite.

Fantine left the room and went to read her letter once more on the staircase.

That evening she went out, and people saw her heading toward the Rue de Paris, where the inns were.

The next morning, before daylight, Marguerite went into Fantine's room. They always worked together and shared a single candle between them. She found Fantine sitting on her bed, pale and stiff with cold. She had not gone to bed at all. Her cap had slipped onto her knees. Her candle had burned through the whole night and was almost gone. Marguerite stopped in the doorway, stunned by such terrible waste, and cried out:

"Good Lord! The candle has burned almost all the way down! Something has happened."

Then she looked at Fantine, who turned toward her a head stripped of its hair.

Fantine looked ten years older than she had the night before.

"Jesus!" said Marguerite. "What is the matter with you, Fantine?"

"Nothing," Fantine replied. "On the contrary. My child will not die of that dreadful illness for lack of help. I am content."

As she spoke, she showed the old maid two napoleons glittering on the table.

"Ah! Dear God!" cried Marguerite. "Why, that is a fortune! Where did you get those gold coins?"

"I got them," Fantine replied.

At the same time, she smiled. The candle lit her face. It was a bloody smile. Reddish saliva stained the corners of her lips, and

there was a black gap in her mouth.

The two teeth had been pulled out.

She sent the forty francs to Montfermeil.

In fact, it was only a trick by the Thénardiers to get money. Cosette was not ill.

Fantine threw her mirror out the window. Long before this, she had left her room on the second floor for an attic beside the roof, secured only by a latch. It was one of those attics where the far end slopes down to meet the floor and keeps striking your head. The poor person who lives there can reach the end of the room, just as he can reach the end of his destiny, only by bending lower and lower.

She no longer had a bed. All she had left was a rag she called a blanket, a mattress on the floor, and a chair with no seat. A little rosebush she had owned had dried up where it had been forgotten in one corner. In the other stood a butter pot for water. In winter the water froze, and the changing levels stayed marked for a long time by rings of ice. She had lost her sense of shame; she also lost her wish to look attractive. That was the final sign. She went out wearing dirty caps. Whether because she had no time or because she no longer cared, she stopped mending her linen. When the heels of her stockings wore through, she pulled them down into her shoes. You could tell by the straight wrinkles. She patched her old, worn-out bodice with bits of calico that tore at the slightest movement. The people she owed money to made scenes and gave her no peace. She ran into them in the street and met them again on the stairs.

Many nights she spent weeping and thinking. Her eyes were unnaturally bright, and she felt a constant pain high in her shoulder, near the left shoulder blade. She coughed a great deal. She bitterly hated Father Madeleine, but she made no complaint. She sewed for seventeen hours a day; but a prison-work contractor, who had prisoners work for less, suddenly drove prices down and reduced the daily earnings of working women to nine sous. Seventeen hours of labor, and nine sous a day! Her creditors became more merciless than ever. The second-hand dealer, who had already taken back almost all her furniture, kept saying to her, “When will you pay me, you slut?” What did they want from her, good God? She felt hunted, and something like the instinct of a wild animal began to grow in her. Around the same time, Thénardier wrote that he had already been far too patient and that he must have a hundred francs at once. Otherwise, he would throw little Cosette out into the cold and the streets, even though she was still recovering from her serious illness, and Fantine could do as she pleased with her and let her die if she wanted. “A hundred francs,” thought Fantine. “In what kind of work can anyone earn a hundred sous a day?”

“Come,” she said, “let’s sell what is left.”

The unfortunate girl became a prostitute.

CHAPTER XI—CHRISTUS NOS LIBERAVIT

What is the story of Fantine? It is society buying a slave.

From whom? From misery.

Out of hunger, cold, loneliness, and poverty comes a terrible bargain: a soul traded for a piece of bread. Misery makes the offer; society accepts it.

The holy law of Jesus Christ rules our civilization, but it has not yet truly sunk into it. People say slavery has vanished from European civilization. That is a mistake. It still exists, but now it falls only on women, and it is called prostitution.

It falls on woman—that is, on grace, weakness, beauty, and motherhood. This is one of man's deepest disgraces.

At this point in the sad drama we have reached, nothing remains in Fantine of what she once was.

She has turned to marble by sinking into the mud. Anyone who touches her feels only cold. She passes by; she puts up with your presence; she does not see you. She is a stern, dishonored figure. Life and society have spoken their final word over her. Everything that could happen to her has happened. She has felt everything, endured everything, known everything, suffered everything, lost everything, and mourned everything. She is resigned, with a resignation that looks like indifference, just as death looks like sleep. She avoids nothing now. Let every cloud break over her, let the whole ocean roll across her—what does

it matter to her? She is like a sponge already soaked through.

At least, that is what she believes. But it is a mistake to think fate can ever be used up, or that anyone has truly reached the bottom of anything.

Alas, what are all these fates, rushing forward in confusion? Where are they going? Why are they like this?

Whoever knows the answer sees the whole darkness.

He is alone. His name is God.

CHAPTER XII—M. BAMATABOIS DOES NOTHING

In every small town—and especially in M. sur M.—there is a type of young man who chips away at an income of fifteen hundred francs with the same swagger his Parisian model shows while burning through two hundred thousand a year. They belong to that broad, neuter class of human beings: weak men, parasites, nonentities, with a little land, a little country house, and a little wit. In a drawing room they would seem like country bumpkins, yet in a tavern they imagine themselves gentlemen. They say, “My fields, my peasants, my woods.” They hiss actresses at the theatre to show their refined taste, and pick quarrels with army officers to show they are men of action. They hunt, smoke, yawn, drink, smell of tobacco, play billiards, and stare at travelers getting down from the stagecoach. They spend their time at the café, dine at the inn, keep a dog that gnaws bones under the table, and a mistress who consumes what is on the table. They haggle over a sou, exaggerate every fashion, admire tragedy, despise women, wear their old boots into the ground, imitate London as filtered through Paris, and Paris as filtered through Pont-à-Mousson. They grow old as fools, never work, are useful for nothing, and do no great harm.

M. Félix Tholomyès, if he had stayed in his own province and never seen Paris, would have been one of these men.

If they had more money, people would call them dandies; if they had less, people would call them idlers. In truth, they are simply men with nothing to do. Among these unemployed men are bores, bored men, dreamers, and a few rogues.

At that time, a dandy was made up of a high collar, a large cravat, and a watch hung with trinkets. He wore three waistcoats of different colors, one over another, with the red and blue underneath. He had on a short-waisted olive coat with a tail like a codfish, and two tight rows of silver buttons running all the way up to the shoulder. His trousers were a lighter shade of olive, decorated along both seams with a vague but always uneven number of stripes, anywhere from one to eleven, and never more. Add 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 sprinkled with Potier-style puns. Over all this came spurs and a moustache. In those days, a moustache marked a bourgeois, and spurs marked a man who went on foot.

The provincial dandy wore the longest spurs and the fiercest moustache of all.

This was during the struggle between the South American republics and the King of Spain, between Bolivar and Morillo. Narrow-brimmed hats marked a royalist and were called _morillos_; liberals wore wide-brimmed hats known as _bolivars_.

Eight or ten months after the events described in the previous pages, near the beginning of January 1823, on a snowy evening, one of these dandies—one of these idle men, a "right thinker," since he wore a morillo—was amusing himself by tormenting a woman wandering about in a ball gown, her neck bare and flowers in her hair, in front of the officers' café. He was also wrapped in one of those large cloaks that completed fashionable winter dress. And he was smoking, because that, too, was thoroughly in style.

Every time the woman passed in front of him, he blew cigar smoke at her and tossed out what he took for clever, funny remarks: "How ugly you are!—Will you get out of my sight?—You have no teeth!" and so on. This gentleman was known as M. Bamatabois. The woman, a sad, bedraggled figure moving back and forth through the snow, did not answer him. She did not even look at him. Still she kept pacing in silence, with a dark, mechanical regularity that brought her back within range of his mockery every five minutes, like a condemned soldier returning under the lash. The little effect he was having no doubt irritated this loafer. So, taking advantage of a moment when her back was turned, he crept up behind her like a wolf and, choking back his laughter, bent down, scooped up a handful of snow from the pavement, and suddenly shoved it down her back between her bare shoulders. The woman let out

a roar, spun around, sprang like a panther, and threw herself at the man, digging her nails into his face and shouting the most dreadful insults, the kind that fall from the guardroom into the gutter. These curses, poured out in a voice made harsh by brandy, came hideously enough from a mouth missing its two front teeth. It was Fantine.

At the sound of the commotion, officers came pouring out of the café, passersby gathered, and soon a large, cheerful ring of people had formed around the whirlwind of two figures. The crowd hooted and applauded. It was hard at first to tell that the two were a man and a woman: the man was struggling, his hat on the ground; the woman was kicking and punching, bareheaded, screaming, without hair or teeth, purple with rage, dreadful to look at.

Suddenly a tall man stepped briskly out of the crowd, grabbed the woman by her mud-stained satin bodice, and said, “Follow me!”

The woman lifted her head. Her furious voice stopped at once. Her eyes turned dull and fixed; she went pale instead of flushed, and she shook with fear. She had recognized Javert.

The dandy used the moment to slip away.

CHAPTER XIII—THE ANSWER TO SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT THE MUNICIPAL POLICE

Javert shoved the onlookers aside, broke through the circle, and strode toward the police station at the far end of the square, dragging the miserable woman behind him. She followed mechanically. Neither of them said a word. The crowd came after them, joking and laughing in a frenzy of delight. Utter misery had become an excuse for obscenity.

When they reached the police station—a low room heated by a stove, with a glass-paned, barred door opening onto the street and watched by a guard detail—Javert opened the door, went in with Fantine, and shut it behind him. The curious onlookers were bitterly disappointed. They rose on tiptoe and stretched their necks in front of the station's thick glass, trying to see inside. Curiosity is a kind of greed. To see is to consume.

As soon as she entered, Fantine collapsed into a corner, silent and motionless, crouched like a frightened dog.

The sergeant of the guard brought a lit candle to the table. Javert sat down, took a sheet of stamped paper from his pocket, and began to write.

By law, this group of women is left completely at the mercy of the police. The police do as they like: they punish them however they see fit, and they seize, whenever they choose, the two pitiful things these women call their work and their freedom.

Javert remained impassive; his stern face showed no emotion at all. Even so, he was seriously and deeply absorbed. This was one of those moments when he exercised his formidable discretionary power without restraint, though still under all the scruples of a severe conscience. At that moment, he felt that the police agent's stool was a court. He was passing judgment. He judged and condemned. He gathered every idea his mind could supply around the great act he believed he was carrying out. The more he considered what this woman had done, the more appalled he became. To him, it was clear that he had just witnessed a crime. Out there in the street, he had just seen society itself—represented by a property owner and a voter—insulted and attacked by a creature outside the bounds of society. A prostitute had tried to kill a citizen. He, Javert, had seen it. He wrote in silence.

When he had finished, he signed the paper, folded it, and handed it to the sergeant of the guard. "Take three men and escort this creature to jail," he said.

Then he turned to Fantine. "You are sentenced to six months." The unhappy woman trembled.

"Six months! Six months in prison!" she cried. "Six months when I have to earn seven sous a day! But what will happen to Cosette? My daughter! my daughter! And I still owe the Thénardiers more than a hundred francs; do you know that, Monsieur Inspector?"

She dragged herself across the damp floor among the muddy boots of all those men. She did not rise, but moved forward on

her knees with her hands clasped.

“Monsieur Javert,” she said, “I beg you to have mercy. I promise you, I was not the one at fault. If you had seen how it started, you would know. I swear before God that I was not to blame. That gentleman, that bourgeois, whom I do not know, shoved snow down the back of my dress. Does anyone have the right to do that when we are simply walking along peacefully and harming no one? I am not well, as you can see. And for a long time he had been saying rude things to me: ‘You are ugly! You have no teeth!’ I know very well that I no longer have those teeth. I did nothing. I said to myself, ‘The gentleman is amusing himself.’ I behaved properly toward him; I did not answer him. It was then that he put the snow down my back. Monsieur Javert, dear Monsieur Inspector, is there no one here who saw it and can tell you that this is the truth? Perhaps I was wrong to lose my temper. You know that at the first moment one cannot always control oneself. One gives way to anger, especially when someone puts something cold down your back when you are not expecting it. I was wrong to ruin that gentleman’s hat. Why did he leave? I would ask his pardon. Oh, my God, it makes no difference to me whether I ask his pardon. Please do me this favor today, just this once, Monsieur Javert. Listen—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 all one earns. And imagine it: I must pay one hundred francs, or my little girl will be sent back 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 child? I will tell you. It is the Thénardiers, innkeepers, peasants, and people like that are

unreasonable. They want money. Do not send me to prison! You see, there is a little girl who will be thrown out into the street in the middle of winter and left to fend for herself, and you must pity such a child, my good Monsieur Javert. If she were older, she might be able to earn her living, but at that age it is impossible. I am not a bad woman at heart. It was not laziness or greed that made me what I am. If I have drunk brandy, it was out of misery. I do not love it, but it dulls the senses. When I was happy, you only had to look in my cupboards to see that I was not a vain or disorderly woman. I had linen, a great deal of linen. Have pity on me, Monsieur Javert!"

She spoke like this, torn apart, shaking with sobs, blinded by tears, her neck bare, twisting her hands, coughing in short, dry bursts, and stammering in a voice full of pain. Great sorrow is a terrible, divine light that transforms the miserable. In that moment, Fantine became beautiful again. From time to time she stopped and gently kissed the police agent's coat. She could have melted a heart of stone; but a heart of wood cannot be melted.

"Come," said Javert. "I've heard everything you have to say. Are you finished now? You'll get six months. Move along! Even the Eternal Father himself could do no more."

At those solemn words, _"the Eternal Father himself could do no more,"_ she understood that her fate was decided. She collapsed, murmuring, "Mercy!"

Javert turned away.

The soldiers grabbed her by the arms.

A few moments earlier, a man had come in, but no one had noticed him. He shut the door, leaned against it, and listened to Fantine's desperate pleas.

The moment the soldiers put their hands on the unfortunate woman, who refused to stand, he stepped out of the shadows and said:

"One moment, if you please."

Javert looked up and recognized M. Madeleine. He took off his hat and, with a stiff, uneasy sort of respect, said:

"Excuse me, Mr. Mayor—"

The words "Mr. Mayor" had a strange effect on Fantine. She sprang to her feet in a single leap, like a ghost rising from the ground, shoved the soldiers aside with both arms, and went straight to M. Madeleine before anyone could stop her. Staring hard at him in confusion, she cried:

"Ah! So you are M. le Maire!"

Then she burst out laughing and spat in his face.

M. Madeleine wiped his face and said:

“Inspector Javert, release this woman.”

Javert felt as if he were about to lose his mind. In that moment, one shock after another hit him almost all at once, more violently than anything he had ever felt in his life. Seeing a woman of the streets spit in the mayor’s face was so monstrous that, even in his wildest imaginings, he would have thought it almost sacrilegious to believe such a thing could happen. And yet, deep in his mind, he drew a dreadful comparison between what this woman was and what this mayor might be. With horror, he caught sight of some simple explanation for this extraordinary attack. But when he saw that mayor, that magistrate, calmly wipe his face and say, "Set this woman free," he was overcome by a kind of drunken amazement. He could neither think nor speak. His capacity for astonishment had been pushed beyond its limit. He stood there speechless.

Those words had an equally strange effect on Fantine. She lifted her bare arm and gripped the stove’s damper like someone about to fall. Even so, she looked around her and began to speak in a low voice, as if she were talking to herself:

“Free? You’re going to let me go? I’m not being sent to prison for six months? Who said that? That can’t be possible. I must have heard wrong. That monster of a mayor couldn’t have said it! Was it you, Monsieur Javert, who said I was to be set free? Oh, listen! I’ll explain everything, and then you’ll let me go. That

monster of a mayor, that wretched mayor, is the cause of it all. Just think, Monsieur Javert—he dismissed me! All because of a pack of nasty women gossiping in the workroom. If that isn't terrible, what is? To throw out a poor girl who was honestly doing her work! After that, I couldn't earn enough, and all this misery came from it. To begin with, there is one thing these gentlemen of the police ought to fix: they should stop prison contractors from cheating poor people. I'll explain it to you. You earn twelve sous making shirts, then the price drops to nine sous, and that isn't enough to live on. Then you have to become whatever you can. As for me, I had my little Cosette, and I was actually forced to become a bad woman. Now you see how that scoundrel of a mayor caused all this trouble. After that, I stamped on that gentleman's hat in front of the officers' café, but he had ruined my whole dress with snow. We women have only one silk dress for evening wear. You can see I didn't do wrong on purpose—truly, Monsieur Javert. And everywhere I look, I see women far worse than I am, and they are much happier. Oh, Monsieur Javert, it was you who gave the order to set me free, wasn't it? Ask around, speak to my landlord. I'm paying my rent now. They'll tell you I'm perfectly honest. Ah! My God, forgive me—I touched the stove damper without meaning to, and it made the stove smoke."

M. Madeleine listened with deep attention. While she spoke, he felt in his waistcoat, took out his purse, and opened it. It was empty. He put it back in his pocket and said to Fantine, "How much did you say you owed?"

Fantine, who had been looking only at Javert, turned toward him:

“Was I speaking to you?”

Then she turned to the soldiers:

“Say, boys, did you see me spit in his face? Ah, you miserable old mayor, you came here to scare me, but I’m not afraid of you. I’m afraid of Monsieur Javert. I’m afraid of my good Monsieur Javert!”

With that, she turned back to the inspector:

“Still, you see, Mr. Inspector, we must be fair. I understand that you are fair, Mr. Inspector. It’s really very simple: a man entertains himself by shoving snow down a woman’s back, and that makes the officers laugh. People have to amuse themselves somehow. And we—well, of course, we are here for them to amuse themselves with! Then you arrive. Naturally, you have to keep order, so you take away the woman who is in the wrong. But then, after thinking it over, because you are a good man, you say I am to be set free. It is for the sake of the little one, because six months in prison would keep me from supporting my child. ‘Only don’t do it again, you hussy!’ Oh, I won’t do it again, Monsieur Javert! They can do whatever they like to me now; I will not move. But today, you see, I cried because it hurt. 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. It feels as though I 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’s here.”

She was no longer crying. Her voice had turned gentle. She took Javert’s rough hand, placed it on her delicate white throat, and looked at him with a smile.

Suddenly she quickly straightened her rumpled clothes, let down the folds of her skirt, which had been pulled up almost to her knees as she dragged herself along, and moved toward the door. In a low voice, with a friendly nod, she said to the soldiers:

“Children, Monsieur l’Inspecteur says I am to be released, and I am going.”

She put her hand on the door latch. One more step and she would be out in the street.

Until that moment, Javert had remained standing stiff and still, his eyes fixed on the ground, dropped into the middle of this scene like a statue set in the wrong place, waiting to be removed.

The sound of the latch woke him. He lifted his head with an air of absolute authority—made even more disturbing because that kind of authority, when it rests so low, is savage in a wild beast and monstrous in a man of no standing.

“Sergeant!” he shouted. “Don’t you see that that hussy is getting away? Who told you to let her go?”

“I did,” said Madeleine.

Fantine trembled at the sound of Javert’s voice and let go of the latch, the way a thief drops what he has stolen. At the sound of Madeleine’s voice, she turned around. From that moment on, she did not say a word. She hardly even dared to breathe. Her eyes kept moving from Madeleine to Javert, and from Javert back to Madeleine, depending on which one was speaking.

It was clear that Javert must have been furious beyond all measure before he allowed himself to speak to the sergeant as he had, after the mayor had suggested that Fantine should be released. Had he reached the point of forgetting that the mayor was there? Had he finally convinced himself that no real authority could have given such an order, and that the mayor must simply have misspoken, saying one thing when he meant

another? Or, after the outrageous things he had witnessed over the past two hours, had he decided that extreme action was necessary—that the lesser authority must become the greater, that the police spy must turn himself into a magistrate, that the policeman must become a judge, and that, in this extraordinary crisis, order, law, morality, government, society itself, were all embodied in him, Javert?

Be that as it may, when M. Madeleine spoke that word, "I," as we have just heard, Police Inspector Javert turned toward the mayor. He was pale and cold, with blue lips and a look of despair. His whole body shook with a faint tremor. Then, in something entirely unprecedented, he said to him, eyes lowered but voice steady:

"Mr. Mayor, that cannot be."

"Why not?" said M. Madeleine.

"This wretched woman has insulted a citizen."

"Inspector Javert," the mayor replied in a calm, conciliatory voice, "listen to me. You are an honest man, so I have no hesitation in explaining this to you. Here is what really happened: I was crossing the square just as you were taking this woman away. There were still groups of people standing around, so I asked what had happened and learned the whole story. It was the townsman who was at fault, and in a properly run police force, he is the one who should have been arrested."

Javert shot back:

"This creature has just insulted Monsieur le Maire."

“That is my concern,” said M. Madeleine. “The insult was directed at me, and I believe that gives me the right to deal with it as I choose.”

“I beg Monsieur le Maire’s pardon. The insult was not to him, but to the law.”

“Inspector Javert,” replied M. Madeleine, “the highest law is conscience. I have heard this woman, and I know what I am doing.”

“And I, Mr. Mayor, do not understand what I am seeing.”

“Then be satisfied to obey.”

“I am obeying my duty. My duty requires that this woman serve six months in prison.”

M. Madeleine answered gently:

“Mark my words: she will not serve a single day.”

At those decisive words, Javert dared to look the mayor straight in the face and say, still in a deeply respectful tone:

“I am sorry to oppose Monsieur le Maire. It is the first time in my life that I have done so. But I hope he will allow me to point out that I am acting within my authority. Since Monsieur le Maire wishes it, I will keep to the matter of the gentleman. I was there. This woman threw herself on Monsieur Bamatabois, who is an elector and the owner of that fine house with the balcony on the corner of the esplanade—the three-story one built entirely of cut stone. Such things do exist in this world! In any case, Monsieur le Maire, this is a matter of street police regulations. It falls under my responsibility, and I will keep this woman, Fantine, in custody.”

Then M. Madeleine folded his arms and spoke in a stern voice that no one in the town had ever heard from him before:

“The matter you’re referring to falls under the municipal police. Under articles nine, eleven, fifteen, and sixty-six of the code of criminal procedure, I am the judge. I order that this woman be released.”

Javert made one last attempt.

“But, Mr. Mayor—”

“I refer you to article eighty-one of the law of December 13, 1799, concerning arbitrary detention.”

“Monsieur le Maire, allow me—”

“Not another word.”

“But—”

“Leave the room,” said M. Madeleine.

Javert took the blow standing straight, full in the face and chest, like a Russian soldier. He bowed all the way to the ground before the mayor and left the room.

Fantine stepped aside from the door and stared at him in astonishment as he passed.

And yet she too was caught in a strange confusion. She had just seen herself become the subject of a struggle between two opposing powers. Before her very eyes, she had watched two men—who held her freedom, her life, her soul, and her child in their hands—fight over her. One was pulling her toward darkness; the other was leading her back into the light. Through the distortions of terror, the two men had seemed to her like giants. One spoke like her demon, the other like her good angel. The angel had defeated the demon. And, strangely enough, what made her shudder from head to foot was that this angel, this savior, was the very man she hated: that mayor whom she had so long believed was the cause of all her misery, that Madeleine! At the very moment when she had insulted him so horribly, he had saved her. Had she been mistaken, then? Did she have to change everything in her heart? She did not know.

She trembled. She listened in confusion and watched in fear, and with every word M. Madeleine spoke, she felt the dark weight of hatred inside her break apart and melt away, while something warm and beyond words—something that was at once joy, trust, and love—began to rise in her heart.

After Javert had gone, M. Madeleine turned to her and said in a steady voice, like a serious man trying not to weep and finding it hard to speak:

“I’ve heard you. I knew nothing about any of this. I believe it’s true, and I feel that it’s true. I didn’t even know you had left my shop. Why didn’t you come to me? But listen: I will pay your debts. I will send for your child, or you may go to her. You shall live here in Paris, or wherever you wish. I will take care of both you and your child. You will not have to work anymore unless you want to. I will give you all the money you need. You shall be honest and happy once again. And listen to me! I tell you that if everything is as you say—and I do not doubt it—you have never stopped being virtuous and holy in the sight of God. Oh, poor woman.”

This was more than Fantine could endure. To have Cosette back! To leave this life of shame behind! To live free, comfortable, happy, and respected with Cosette; to see all these heavenly hopes suddenly bloom in the middle of her misery. She stared blankly at the man speaking to her and could only break into two or three sobs: “Oh! Oh! Oh!”

Her legs gave way beneath her. She fell to her knees before M. Madeleine, and before he could stop her, he felt her seize his

hand and press her lips to it.

Then she fainted.

CHAPTER I—THE BEGINNING OF REST

M. Madeleine had Fantine taken to the infirmary he had set up in his own house. He placed her in the care of the sisters, who put her to bed. A high fever had come over her. She spent part of the night delirious and rambling. At last, however, she fell asleep.

The next day, around midday, Fantine woke. She heard someone breathing close to her bed. She pulled back the curtain and saw M. Madeleine standing there, looking at something above her head. His face was full of pity, anguish, and pleading. She followed his gaze and saw that he was looking at a crucifix fastened to the wall.

From that moment on, M. Madeleine seemed transformed in Fantine's eyes. To her, he looked as though he were clothed in light. He seemed lost in a kind of prayer. She watched him for a long time, not daring to interrupt. At last she said timidly:

"What are you doing?"

M. Madeleine had been there for an hour. He had been waiting for Fantine to wake. He took her hand, felt her pulse, and replied:

"How are you feeling?"

"Well, I've slept," she replied. "I think I'm better. It's nothing."

He answered the first question she had asked him, as if he had only just heard it:

“I was praying to the martyr up above.”

And he added to himself, “For the martyr down here.”

M. Madeleine had spent the night and morning making inquiries. By now he knew everything. He knew Fantine’s story in all its heartbreaking detail. He went on:

“You have suffered greatly, poor mother. Oh, do not complain; you now have the portion of the blessed. This is how people are changed into angels. It is not their fault that they do not know any other way to do it. You see, this hell you have just come out of is the first form of heaven. It was necessary to begin there.”

He sighed deeply. But she smiled at him with that radiant smile in which two teeth were missing.

That same night, Javert wrote a letter. The next morning he went and mailed it himself at the post office of M. sur M. It was addressed to Paris, and the inscription read: _To Monsieur Chabouillet, Secretary to Monsieur le Préfet of Police_. Since the incident at the station-house had become widely known, the postmistress and several others who saw the letter before it was sent, and who recognized Javert’s handwriting on the envelope, thought he was sending in his resignation.

M. Madeleine quickly wrote to the Thénardiers. Fantine owed them one hundred and twenty francs. He sent them three hundred francs, telling them to take what they were owed from that amount and bring the child at once to M. sur M., where her

sick mother needed her with her.

This astonished Thénardier. “The devil!” the man said to his wife. “We mustn’t let the child go. This little game is about to turn into a milch cow. I can see what’s going on. Some fool has taken a liking to the mother.”

He sent back a carefully prepared bill for five hundred and a few francs. On this statement, two unquestionable charges came to more than three hundred francs—one for the doctor, the other for the apothecary who had treated and medicated Éponine and Azelma through two long illnesses. Cosette, as we have already said, had not been sick. It was simply a matter of switching the names. At the bottom of the bill Thénardier had written, _Received on account, three hundred francs_.

M. Madeleine immediately sent three hundred francs more and wrote, “Hurry and bring Cosette.”

“By heaven!” said Thénardier, “let’s not give up the child.”

Meanwhile, Fantine did not get better. She remained in the infirmary.

At first, the sisters had taken in and cared for “that woman” with disgust. Anyone who has seen the bas-reliefs at Rheims will remember the way the wise virgins curl their lower lips as they look at the foolish virgins. The ancient contempt of the vestals for the ambubajæ is one of the deepest instincts of feminine dignity; the sisters felt it with the added force of religion. But within a few days Fantine won them over. She spoke with great humility and gentleness, and the mother in her stirred their tenderness. One day, in her fever, the sisters heard her say: “I have been a sinner; but when I have my child beside me, it will be a sign that God has forgiven me. While I was living a bad life, I would not have wanted my Cosette with me; I could not have endured her sad, astonished eyes. It was for her sake that I did wrong, and that is why God forgives me. I will feel the blessing of the good God when Cosette is here. I shall look 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 yet fallen off.”

M. Madeleine went to see her twice a day, and each time she asked him:

“Will I see my Cosette soon?”

He answered:

“Perhaps tomorrow. She may arrive at any moment. I am expecting her.”

And the mother’s pale face lit up.

“Oh!” she said, “how happy I am going to be!”

We have already said that she did not regain her health. In fact, she seemed to grow worse with each passing week. That handful of snow pressed against the bare skin between her shoulder blades had suddenly stopped her perspiration. As a result, the illness that had been smoldering inside her for years finally broke out with violence. At that time, people were beginning to follow Laënnec’s important ideas in studying and treating diseases of the chest. The doctor listened to Fantine’s chest and shook his head.

M. Madeleine said to the doctor:

“Well?”

“Doesn’t she have a child she longs to see?” said the doctor.

“Yes.”

“Then hurry and bring the child here!”

M. Madeleine shuddered.

Fantine asked:

“What did the doctor say?”

M. Madeleine forced a smile.

“He said your child must be brought here quickly. That it would help restore your health.”

“Oh!” she replied. “He is right! But why are those Thénardiers keeping my Cosette from me? Oh, she is coming. At last, happiness is close at hand!”

Meanwhile, Thénardier would not “let go of the child” and offered a hundred weak excuses. Cosette was not quite well enough to travel in winter. Besides, there were still a few small but urgent debts in the neighborhood, and they were gathering the money for them, and so on, and so on.

“I will send someone to fetch Cosette!” said Father Madeleine. “If necessary, I will go myself.”

He wrote the following letter as Fantine dictated it, and had her sign it:

“MONSIEUR THÉNARDIER: You will hand Cosette over to this person. You will be paid for all the little expenses. I have the honor to remain, respectfully yours. FANTINE.”

Meanwhile, a serious event took place. However we may carve the mysterious block from which our life is made, the dark vein of destiny always shows through again.

CHAPTER II—HOW JEAN MAY BECOME CHAMP

One morning, M. Madeleine was in his study, getting some urgent mayoral business in order ahead of time in case he decided to make the trip to Montfermeil, when he was told that Police Inspector Javert wished to speak with him. At the sound of that name, Madeleine felt an immediate uneasiness. Since the incident at the police station, Javert had avoided him more than ever, and M. Madeleine had not seen him.

“Show him in,” he said.

Javert came in.

M. Madeleine remained seated by the fire, pen in hand, his eyes on the file he was turning over and marking up. It contained the proceedings of the highways commission concerning violations of police regulations. He made no movement for Javert’s sake. He could not stop thinking about poor Fantine, and the coldness of his manner suited his mood.

Javert gave the mayor a respectful salute, though the mayor had his back to him. The mayor did not look at him, but continued making notes on the file.

Javert took two or three steps into the study and stopped, still without breaking the silence.

If a student of faces had known Javert well—if he had spent years studying this fierce servant of civilization, this strange blend of Roman, Spartan, monk, and drill sergeant, this informer

who could not lie, this spotless police officer—if he had known Javert's long-hidden hatred of M. Madeleine, his clash with the mayor over Fantine, and then looked at him at that moment, he would have asked himself, "What has happened?" Anyone familiar with that clear, rigid, sincere, honest, austere, and ferocious conscience could see at once that Javert had just passed through some great inner struggle. Nothing lived in Javert's soul that did not also show on his face. Like many violent men, he was prone to sudden reversals of feeling. Never had his expression seemed so strange and striking. When he entered, he bowed to M. Madeleine with a look that held neither bitterness, nor anger, nor suspicion. He stopped a few steps behind the mayor's armchair and stood there perfectly straight, almost like a man under orders, with the cold, plain roughness of someone who had never been gentle and had always been patient. He waited without speaking and without moving, in real humility and quiet resignation—calm, grave, hat in hand, eyes lowered, wearing an expression halfway between a soldier before his officer and a criminal before his judge—until the mayor chose to turn around. Every feeling and every memory one might have expected to see in him had vanished. That face, as unreadable and simple as granite, showed nothing now but a melancholy heaviness. His whole bearing conveyed humility, firmness, and a brave despair that was impossible to describe.

At last the mayor set down his pen and turned halfway around.

"Well? What is it, Javert? What's the matter?"

Javert was silent for a moment, as if gathering his thoughts. Then he spoke in a voice marked by a kind of sad solemnity, though it was still simple and direct.

“This is the matter, Mr. Mayor: a wrongful act has been committed.”

“What act?”

“A minor officer of the law has shown grave disrespect to a magistrate. I have come to report it to you, because it is my duty.”

“Who is the officer?” asked M. Madeleine.

“I am,” said Javert.

“You?”

“Me.”

“And which magistrate has reason to complain of this officer?”

“You, Mr. Mayor.”

M. Madeleine straightened in his armchair. Javert continued, stern-faced, his eyes still lowered.

“Mr. Mayor, I have come to ask you to have me dismissed.”

M. Madeleine opened his mouth in astonishment. Javert cut him off:—

“You may say I could simply resign, but that is not enough. Resigning is honorable. I have failed in my duty. I deserve punishment. I must be thrown out.”

After a pause, he added:—

“Mr. Mayor, the other day you were hard on me, and unfairly so. Be hard on me today, and this time with justice.”

“Come now, why?” cried M. Madeleine. “What nonsense is this? What do you mean? What offense have you committed against me? What have you done to me? In what way have you wronged me? You accuse yourself; you want to be removed—”

“Thrown out,” said Javert.

“Thrown out, then, if you like. Very well. I still do not understand.”

“You will, Mr. Mayor.”

Javert let out a deep sigh and went on, still in the same cold, sorrowful tone:—

“Mr. Mayor, six weeks ago, after that scene over the woman, I was furious, and I reported you.”

“Reported me!”

“To the Prefecture of Police in Paris.”

M. Madeleine, who laughed no more often than Javert did, burst out laughing now:—

“As a mayor who had overstepped the bounds of the police?”

“As an ex-convict.”

The mayor went pale.

Javert, without lifting his eyes, continued:—

“I thought as much. I’d suspected it for a long time: a resemblance; the inquiries you had made at Faverolles; the strength in your build; the business with old Fauchelevant; your skill with a gun; the slight drag in your leg—I hardly know what else. Nonsense, really. But in any case, I took you for a certain Jean Valjean.”

“A certain—what did you say the name was?”

“Jean Valjean. He was a convict I used to see twenty years ago, when I was assistant guard over the convicts at Toulon. After leaving the galleys, this Jean Valjean, it seems, robbed a bishop. Then he committed another robbery, with violence, on the public road against a little Savoyard boy. He disappeared eight years ago; no one knows how, and I believed he was still being searched for. In short, I did it. Anger drove me to it; I reported you to the Prefecture!”

M. Madeleine, who had picked up the file again a few moments earlier, replied in a tone of complete indifference:

“And what answer did you get?”

“That I was mad.”

“Well?”

“Well, they were right.”

“It is fortunate that you admit it.”

“I have to, since the real Jean Valjean has been found.”

The paper M. Madeleine was holding slipped from his hand. He lifted his head, looked steadily at Javert, and said in his indescribable accent:

“Ah!”

Javert went on:

“Here is how it happened, Mr. Mayor. It seems there was an old man in the country near Ailly-le-Haut-Clocher called Father Champmathieu. He was a miserable creature. No one paid any attention to him. No one knows what people like that live on. Recently, last autumn, Father Champmathieu was arrested for stealing some cider apples from—well, never mind; a theft had been committed, a wall had been climbed, and branches had been broken off the trees. My Champmathieu was arrested. He still had the apple-tree branch in his hand. The rascal was locked up. Up to that point, it was only a minor offense. But this is where Providence stepped in.”

“Because the jail was in poor condition, the examining magistrate decided it would be best to transfer Champmathieu to Arras, where the departmental prison is located. In that prison

at Arras there is a former convict named Brevet, held there for some reason I do not know, who has been made the prison turnkey because of his good conduct. Mr. Mayor, the moment Champmathieu arrived, Brevet cried out: 'Eh! Why, I know that man! He's a _fagot_![4] Get a good look at me, my good fellow! You are Jean Valjean!' 'Jean Valjean! Who is Jean Valjean?' Champmathieu pretends to be astonished. 'Don't act innocent,' says Brevet. 'You are Jean Valjean! You were in the galleys at Toulon; that was twenty years ago; we were there together.' Champmathieu denies it. Of course, you understand. The matter was investigated. The whole thing was thoroughly examined for my benefit. This is what they found out: Thirty years ago, this Champmathieu had been a tree-pruner in several places, especially at Faverolles. After that, all trace of him disappeared. Much later he was seen again in Auvergne, then in Paris, where he is said to have worked as a wheelwright and to have had a daughter who was a laundress, though that has not been proved. Now before Jean Valjean was sent to the galleys for theft, what was he? A tree-pruner. Where? At Faverolles. There is another point. This Valjean's first name was Jean, and his mother's family name was Mathieu. What could be more natural than to suppose that, after leaving the galleys, he took his mother's name to hide himself and called himself Jean Mathieu? He goes to Auvergne. In the local pronunciation, _Jean_– becomes _Chan_–—so he is called Chan Mathieu. The man does not object, and there he is, turned into Champmathieu. You are following me, are you not? Inquiries were made at Faverolles. Jean Valjean's family is no longer there. No one knows where they went. You know how families in that class often vanish. A

search was made, and nothing was found. When such people are not mud, they are dust. And since the beginning of the story goes back thirty years, there is no longer anyone in Faverolles who knew Jean Valjean. Inquiries were also made at Toulon. Besides Brevet, only two convicts still living had seen Jean Valjean: Cochepaille and Chenildieu, both serving life sentences. They were brought from the galleys and confronted with the supposed Champmathieu. They did not hesitate. To them, just as to Brevet, he was Jean Valjean. The same age—he is fifty-four—the same height, the same appearance, the same man; in short, it is he. It was at exactly that moment that I sent my denunciation to the Prefecture in Paris. I was told that I had lost my senses, and that Jean Valjean was at Arras, in the hands of the authorities. You can imagine how astonished I was, since I believed I had that very same Jean Valjean here. I wrote to the examining judge; he summoned me; Champmathieu was brought before me—"

"Well?" M. Madeleine cut in.

Javert replied, his face as stern and melancholy as ever:

"Mr. Mayor, the truth is the truth. I am sorry, but that man is Jean Valjean. I recognized him too."

In a very low voice, M. Madeleine went on:

"Are you certain?"

Javert began to laugh, with that sad laugh that comes from deep conviction.

"Oh, certain!"

He stood there thinking for a moment, absently taking pinches of powdered wood from the wooden bowl on the table to blot the ink, and then added:

"And now that I have seen the real Jean Valjean, I cannot imagine how I could ever have thought otherwise. I beg your pardon, Mr. Mayor."

As Javert spoke these grave, pleading words to the man who, six weeks earlier, had humiliated him in front of the whole station house and told him to "leave the room"—Javert, proud as he was, was unconsciously full of simplicity and dignity—M. Madeleine answered his appeal only with this abrupt question:

"And what does this man say?"

“Ah! Yes, Mr. Mayor, it’s a serious matter. If he is Jean Valjean, his past conviction counts against him. Climbing a wall, breaking a branch, stealing apples—those are naughty tricks in a child. In a man, they are offenses. In a convict, they become crimes. Theft and breaking into a house—it is all there. This is no longer a matter for the correctional police; it belongs before the Court

of Assizes. It is no longer a question of a few days in prison; it means the galleys for life. And then there is the business with the little Savoyard, who, I hope, will come back. The devil! There is plenty to argue over in all this, isn't there? Yes, for anyone except Jean Valjean. But Jean Valjean is a cunning dog. That is how I recognized him. Any other man would have felt the danger closing in on him; he would fight, he would shout out—the kettle sings before the fire; he would not be Jean Valjean, and so on. But he does not seem to understand; he says, 'I am Champmathieu, and I will not say otherwise!' He looks astonished; he pretends to be stupid; that is much better. Oh, the rogue is clever! But it changes nothing. The proof is there. Four people have identified him; the old scoundrel will be convicted. The case has gone to the Assizes at Arras. I will go there to give my testimony. I have been summoned."

M. Madeleine had turned back to his desk. He picked up his file and calmly turned the pages, reading and writing in turn like a busy man. Then he turned to Javert:

"That's enough, Javert. To tell the truth, these details interest me very little. We are wasting time, and we have urgent business to deal with. Javert, go at once to the house of the woman Buseaupied, who sells herbs at the corner of Rue Saint-Saulve. Tell her she must file a complaint against the carter Pierre Chesnelong. The man is a brute. He nearly crushed the woman and her child. He must be punished. Then go to M. Charcellay, on Rue Montre-de-Champigny. He has complained that a gutter on the neighboring house is pouring rainwater onto his property and weakening the foundations of his house. After

that, check the violations of the police regulations that have been reported to me in Rue Guibourg, at Widow Doris's, and in Rue du Garraud-Blanc, at Madame Renée le Bossé's, and prepare the necessary documents. But I am giving you a great deal of work. Aren't you to be away? Didn't you tell me you were going to Arras about that matter in a week or ten days?"

"Sooner than that, Mr. Mayor."

"What day, then?"

"Why, I thought I had told Monsieur le Maire that the case is to be tried tomorrow, and that I am leaving by diligence tonight."

M. Madeleine made a slight movement.

“And how long will the case last?”

“One day at most. The judgment will be given tomorrow evening at the latest. But I shall not wait for the sentence, since it is certain. I shall return here as soon as my deposition has been taken.”

“Very well,” said M. Madeleine.

And he dismissed Javert with a wave of his hand.

Javert did not leave.

“Excuse me, Mr. Mayor,” he said.

“What is it now?” M. Madeleine asked.

“Mr. Mayor, there is still something I must remind you of.”

“What is it?”

“That I must be dismissed.”

M. Madeleine stood up.

“Javert, you are an honorable man, and I respect you. You are exaggerating your fault. Besides, this is an offense that concerns me. Javert, you deserve promotion rather than demotion. I want you to keep your post.”

Javert looked at M. Madeleine with open, straightforward eyes, and in their depths you could see his conscience—limited in understanding, perhaps, but pure and unbending. Then he said calmly:

“Mr. Mayor, I cannot allow that.”

“I repeat,” M. Madeleine replied, “that this matter concerns me.”

But Javert, listening only to his own thoughts, went on:

“As for exaggeration, I am not exaggerating. This is how I see it: I suspected you unjustly. That by itself is nothing. We have a right to be suspicious, though suspicion aimed at those above us is an abuse. But without proof, in a burst of anger, and for the sake of revenge, I denounced you as a convict—you, an honorable man, a mayor, a magistrate! That is serious, very serious. In your person, I insulted authority, I who am an officer of the law! If one of my subordinates had done what I have done, I would have declared him unfit for the service and dismissed him. Well then? Wait, Mr. Mayor, one word more. I have often been harsh with others in the course of my life. That was right. I did well. But if I were not harsh with myself, then all the justice I have done would turn into injustice. Should I spare myself more than I spare others? No! What? Am I fit only to

punish others and not myself? Why, I would be a scoundrel! Those who said, 'That scoundrel Javert!' would be right. Mr. Mayor, I do not want you to treat me kindly. Your kindness stirred up enough bitterness in me when you showed it to others. I want none of it for myself. The kind of kindness that supports a woman of the streets against a citizen, a police officer against the mayor, the man who has fallen against the man who has risen in the world—that is what I call false kindness. That is the kind of kindness that throws society into disorder. Good God, it is very easy to be kind; the hard thing is to be just. Come now, if you had been what I took you for, I would not have been kind to you, not I! You would have seen that! Mr. Mayor, I must treat myself as I would treat any other man. When I have brought criminals to heel, when I have gone after villains with force, I have often said to myself, 'If you ever weaken, if I ever catch you at fault, then you are finished!' I have weakened. I have caught myself at fault. So much the worse! Very well—dismissed, stripped of rank, expelled! That is as it should be. I have my arms. I will work the land; it is all the same to me. Mr. Mayor, the good of the service requires an example. I ask only for the dismissal of Inspector Javert."

He said all this in a tone that was proud, humble, despairing, and yet utterly convinced, and it gave this strange, honest man an indescribable greatness.

"We shall see," said M. Madeleine.

And he held out his hand to him.

Javert drew back and said in a strained voice:

“Forgive me, Mr. Mayor, but that must not happen. A mayor does not offer his hand to a police informer.”

Then he added through clenched teeth:

“A police informer, yes. From the moment I abused my authority as a policeman, that is all I am.”

Then he bowed deeply and turned toward the door.

There he turned around, still keeping his eyes lowered:

“Mr. Mayor,” he said, “I will go on serving until someone replaces me.”

He left. M. Madeleine stood listening thoughtfully to the firm, steady sound of his footsteps as they faded along the corridor pavement.

CHAPTER I—SISTER SIMPLICE

Not all of the events the reader is about to read were known in M. sur M. But the small part that did become known left such a deep impression on the town that this book would have a serious omission if we did not tell them in full detail. Among those details, the reader will come across two or three unlikely incidents, which we keep out of respect for the truth.

On the afternoon after Javert's visit, M. Madeleine went to see Fantine, as he usually did.

Before he entered Fantine's room, he sent for Sister Simplice.

The two nuns who served as nurses in the infirmary, Lazarist sisters like all sisters of charity, were called Sister Perpétue and Sister Simplice.

Sister Perpétue was an ordinary village woman, a Sister of Charity of the roughest kind, who had entered God's service much as someone might enter any other line of work. She was a nun in the same way other women were cooks. This type is not at all uncommon. Religious orders readily take in this heavy peasant clay, which can easily be shaped into a Capuchin or an Ursuline. These country women are put to the hard labor of devotion. The change from cattle drover to Carmelite is not especially drastic; one becomes the other with little effort. The same deep ignorance found in both village life and the cloister serves as a ready preparation, and puts the peasant at once on the same level as the monk: make the smock a little fuller, and it becomes a robe. Sister Perpétue was a strong, sturdy nun from

Marines near Pontoise. She chattered in her local dialect, droned, complained, sweetened medicine according to the invalid's bigotry or hypocrisy, and handled her patients bluntly and roughly. She was harsh with the dying, almost thrust God in their faces, and pelted their death agony with prayers muttered in anger. She was bold, honest, and rosy-cheeked.

Sister Simplice was pale, with a wax-like complexion. Next to Sister Perpétue, she was like a taper beside a candle. Vincent de Paul gave a beautiful description of the Sister of Charity in these admirable words, blending freedom and obedience: "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." Sister Simplice seemed the living embodiment of that ideal. She had never seemed young, and it was hard to imagine her ever growing old. No one could have said how old Sister Simplice was. She was a person—we hardly dare say a woman—who was gentle, austere, refined, reserved, and utterly incapable of lying. She was so gentle that she seemed delicate, yet she was firmer than granite. She touched the suffering with hands of remarkable purity and grace. There was, in a sense, silence even in the way she spoke. She said only what was needed, and her voice had a quality that would have been equally fitting in a confessional or charming in a drawing room. That refinement adapted itself to the coarse serge gown, finding in its roughness a constant reminder of heaven and of God. One detail must be stressed. Never to have lied, never to have said, for any reason at all,

even out of indifference, a single thing that was not the truth—the sacred truth—was Sister Simplice's defining trait. It was the very mark of her virtue. She was almost famous within the congregation for this unshakable truthfulness. The Abbé Sicard mentions Sister Simplice in a letter to the deaf-mute Massieu. However pure and sincere we may be, most of us carry some small flaw in our honesty in the form of a harmless little lie. She did not. A little lie, an innocent lie—does such a thing really exist? To lie is evil in its absolute form. One cannot lie only a little; whoever lies, lies completely. Lying is the very face of the demon. Satan has two names: he is called Satan and Lying. That was what she believed, and she lived accordingly. The result was the whiteness we have already mentioned—a whiteness that seemed to fill even her lips and eyes with light. Her smile was white; her gaze was white. There was not a single cobweb, not a speck of dust, on the clear window of that conscience. When she entered the order of Saint Vincent de Paul, she chose the name Simplice deliberately. Simplice of Sicily, as we know, is the saint who preferred to have both her breasts torn off rather than say she had been born at Segesta when in fact she had been born at Syracuse—a lie that would have saved her. This patron saint was perfectly suited to this soul.

When Sister Simplice first entered the order, she had two faults that she gradually overcame: she was fond of delicacies, and she liked getting letters. She never read anything except a prayer book printed in Latin, in large coarse type. She did not understand Latin, but she understood the book.

This devout woman had grown attached to Fantine, perhaps because she sensed some hidden goodness in her, and she had devoted herself almost entirely to caring for her.

M. Madeleine drew Sister Simplice aside and entrusted Fantine to her care in a peculiar tone that the sister remembered later.

After leaving the sister, he went over to Fantine.

Fantine waited for M. Madeleine to appear each day the way one waits for a touch of warmth and happiness. She said to the sisters, “I only live when Monsieur le Maire is here.”

She had a high fever that day. As soon as she saw M. Madeleine, she asked:

“And Cosette?”

He answered with a smile:

“Soon.”

M. Madeleine behaved with Fantine just as he usually did. The only difference was that he stayed an hour instead of half an hour, to Fantine’s great joy. He repeatedly urged everyone not to let the sick woman lack anything. People noticed that at one moment his face grew very dark. But that was explained later, when it became known that the doctor had leaned over and whispered in his ear, “She is failing fast.”

He then returned to the town hall, and the clerk noticed him carefully studying a road map of France hanging in his office. He wrote a few numbers on a scrap of paper with a pencil.

CHAPTER II—MASTER SCAUFFLAIRE'S SHREWDNESS

From the town hall he went to the far edge of town, to see a Fleming named Master Scaufflaer, or in French, Scaufflaire, who rented out "horses and cabriolets as desired."

The quickest way to reach Scaufflaire was through a rarely used street where the parsonage of M. Madeleine's parish stood. People said the curé was a worthy, respectable, sensible man. Just as M. Madeleine came in front of the parsonage, there was only one other person in the street, and that passer-by noticed this: after the mayor had gone past the priest's house, he stopped and stood still. Then he turned back and walked to the parsonage door, which had an iron knocker. He quickly put his hand on the knocker and raised it. But he paused again, as if thinking, and after a few seconds, instead of letting it fall sharply, he set it down gently and went on his way, now with a kind of haste he had not shown before.

M. Madeleine found Master Scaufflaire at home, busy restitching a harness.

“Master Scaufflaire,” he asked, “do you have 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 that can travel twenty leagues in a day.”

“Good Lord!” said the Fleming. “Twenty leagues!”

“Yes.”

“Hitched to a cabriolet?”

“Yes.”

“And how long can it rest at the end of the trip?”

“It must be able to set out again the next day, if necessary.”

“To travel the same road?”

“Yes.”

“Good Lord! Good Lord! And it’s twenty leagues?”

M. Madeleine took from his pocket the paper on which he had written a few figures in pencil. He showed it to the Fleming. The figures were 5, 6, 8½.

“You see,” he said, “that makes nineteen and a half in all; you might as well call it twenty leagues.”

“Mr. Mayor,” the Fleming replied, “I have exactly what you need. My little white horse—you may have seen him go by now and then—is a small animal from Lower Boulonnais. He is full of spirit. At first they tried to turn him into a riding horse. Bah! He reared, he kicked, he threw everyone to the ground. People thought he was vicious, and no one knew what to do with him. I bought him and put him in harness. That was what he wanted, sir. He is as gentle as a girl and runs like the wind. Ah, but he must not be ridden. He does not believe in being a saddle-horse. Everyone has his ambition. ‘Pull? Yes. Carry? No.’ That, we must suppose, is what he said to himself.”

“And he can make the trip?”

“Your twenty leagues at a full trot, and in less than eight hours. But there are conditions.”

“Name them.”

“First, you must give him half an hour to breathe halfway along the road. He will eat then, and someone must stay with him while he eats, so the inn’s stable boy does not steal his oats. I have noticed that at inns the oats are more often drunk by the stable hands than eaten by the horses.”

“Someone will stay with him.”

“Second—is the cabriolet for Monsieur le Maire?”

“Yes.”

“Does Monsieur le Maire know how to drive?”

“Yes.”

“Then Monsieur le Maire must travel alone and without baggage, so as not to overburden the horse.”

“Agreed.”

“But since Monsieur le Maire will have no one with him, he will have to see for himself that the oats are not stolen.”

“Understood.”

“I am to have thirty francs a day. The rest days are to be paid as well—not one farthing less—and the animal’s feed will be at Monsieur le Maire’s expense.”

M. Madeleine took three napoleons from his purse and set them on the table.

“Here is payment for two days in advance.”

“Fourth, for a journey like this, a cabriolet would be too heavy and would tire the horse. Monsieur le Maire must agree to travel in a small tilbury that I own.”

“I agree.”

“It’s light, but it has no cover.”

“That makes no difference to me.”

“Has Monsieur le Maire considered that we’re in the middle of winter?”

M. Madeleine did not answer. The Fleming went on:

“That it’s very cold?”

M. Madeleine said nothing.

Master Scaufflaire continued:

“That it might rain?”

M. Madeleine lifted his head and said:

“The tilbury and the horse will be at my door tomorrow morning at half past four.”

“Certainly, Monsieur le Maire,” Scaufflaire replied. Then, scratching at a mark in the table with his thumbnail, he went on in that casual manner the Flemings know so well how to blend with shrewdness:

“But here is what I’m thinking 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 conversation began, but he did not know why he had not dared to ask the question.

“Are your horse’s forelegs sound?” said M. Madeleine.

“Yes, Monsieur le Maire. You have to hold him in a little when going downhill. Are there many slopes between here and the place you’re going?”

“Don’t forget to be at my door tomorrow morning at exactly half past four,” replied M. Madeleine; and he left.

The Fleming remained, as he himself said later, “completely stupid.”

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, preoccupied expression.

“Monsieur Scaufflaire,” he said, “what do you estimate the horse and tilbury you are to let me to be worth—the one carrying the other?”

“The one pulling the other, Monsieur le Maire,” said the Fleming with a broad smile.

“Very well. Well?”

“Does Monsieur le Maire wish to buy them or me?”

“No, but I want to make sure you’re covered no matter what. You can pay me back when I return. What do you value your horse and cabriolet at?”

“Five hundred francs, Monsieur le Maire.”

“Here it is.”

M. Madeleine placed a banknote on the table, then left the room; and this time, he did not come back.

Master Scaufflaire was seized with bitter regret that he had not asked for a thousand francs. Besides, the horse and tilbury together were worth only a hundred crowns.

The Fleming called his wife and told her what had happened. “Where the devil can Monsieur le Maire be going?” They talked it over together. “He’s 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 was lying on the mantelpiece. The Fleming picked it up and examined it. “Five, six, eight and a half? That must mean the posting relays.” He turned to his wife and said:

“I’ve figured it out.”

“What?”

“It’s five leagues from here to Hesdin, six from Hesdin to Saint-Pol, and eight and a half from Saint-Pol to Arras. He’s going to Arras.”

Meanwhile, M. Madeleine had returned home. He had taken the longest route back from Master Scaufflaire’s, as though the parsonage door had been a temptation and he had wanted to avoid it. He went up to his room and shut himself in, which was

not unusual, since he liked to go to bed early. Even so, the factory porter's wife, who was also M. Madeleine's only servant, noticed that his light went out at half past eight. When the cashier came home, she mentioned it to him and added:

"Is Monsieur le Maire ill? I thought he looked rather strange."

The cashier had a room directly below M. Madeleine's. He paid no attention to what the portress had said, and went to bed and fell asleep. Around midnight he woke with a start. In his sleep, he had heard a noise above him. He listened. It was the sound of footsteps moving back and forth, as if someone were walking in the room overhead. He listened more closely and recognized M. Madeleine's step. That seemed strange to him. Usually, no sound came from M. Madeleine's room until he got up in the morning. A moment later, the cashier heard a noise like a cupboard opening and then closing. Then a piece of furniture was moved out of place. Then there was a pause. Then the pacing began again. The cashier sat up in bed, now fully awake, and stared ahead. Through his windowpanes he saw the reddish glow of a lit window reflected on the wall opposite. From the angle of the light, it could only be coming from M. Madeleine's room. The reflection flickered, as if it came from a fire that had been lit rather than from a candle. The shadow of the window frame did not appear, which showed that the window was wide open. That the window should be open in such cold weather was surprising. The cashier fell asleep again. An hour or two later he woke once more. The same footsteps were still moving slowly and steadily back and forth overhead.

The reflection was still visible on the wall, but now it was faint and steady, like the light from a lamp or a candle. The window was still open.

This is what had happened in M. Madeleine’s room.

CHAPTER III—A STORM IN A SKULL

The reader has no doubt already guessed that M. Madeleine is none other than Jean Valjean.

We have already looked into the depths of this conscience; now the time has come to look again. We do so with emotion and fear. Nothing is more terrible than this kind of vision. Nowhere does the eye of the spirit find brighter light or deeper shadow than in a human being. It can rest on nothing more formidable, more complex, more mysterious, or more boundless. There is a sight grander than the sea: it is the sky. There is a sight grander than the sky: it is the deepest part of the soul.

To write the poem of human conscience, even if it were only about one man—even the lowest kind of man—would be to gather all epics into one final and greater epic. Conscience is a chaos of fantasies, desires, and temptations. It is a furnace of dreams, a den of ideas we are ashamed of, a pandemonium of false reasoning, a battlefield of passions. At certain moments, look past the pale face of a person deep in thought. Look behind it. Look into that soul, into that darkness. There, beneath the outward silence, giant struggles are taking place, like those in Homer; battles of dragons, hydras, and swarms of phantoms, as in Milton; visionary circles, as in Dante. How solemn is that infinity each person carries within, and measures in despair against the whims of the mind and the actions of life!

One day, Alighieri came upon a sinister-looking door and hesitated before it. Here is such a door before us, and we hesitate on its threshold. Let us go in nonetheless.

There is little to add to what the reader already knows about what happened to Jean Valjean after the episode with Little Gervais. From that moment on, as we have seen, he became a completely different man. He carried out what the Bishop had hoped to make of him. It was more than a transformation; it was a transfiguration.

He managed to disappear. He sold the Bishop's silver, keeping only the candlesticks as a remembrance. He moved quietly from town to town, crossed France, and came to M. sur M. There he formed the plan we have mentioned and carried out what we have already told. He succeeded in making himself safe from arrest and beyond reach. From then on, settled at M. sur M., he lived in peace, reassured and full of hope. He was happy to feel his conscience made sorrowful by the past, and to see the second half of his life deny the first. From then on, he had only two thoughts: to hide his name and make his life holy; to escape men and return to God.

These two ideas were so tightly bound together in his mind that they had become almost one. Both were equally urgent and all-consuming, and they governed even his smallest actions. Most of the time, they worked together to shape the way he lived. They drew him toward a somber life, made him gentle and humble, and urged him in the same direction. Sometimes, though, they clashed. And when that happened, as the reader will remember, the man whom everyone in M. sur M. called M.

Madeleine never hesitated to sacrifice the first to the second—his safety to his virtue. So, despite all his caution and self-restraint, he had kept the Bishop's candlesticks, mourned for him, called in and questioned every little Savoyard who passed through, gathered information about the families at Faverolles, and saved old Fauchelevent's life despite Javert's troubling hints. As we have already said, he seemed to believe, like all those who have been wise, holy, and just, that his first duty was not to himself.

At the same time, it must be admitted that nothing quite like this had happened before.

Never had the two ideas that ruled the unhappy man whose suffering we are telling of come into such a serious conflict. He sensed this at once—dimly, yet deeply—from the very first words Javert spoke when he entered the study. The moment that name, buried under so many layers, was spoken so strangely aloud, he was stunned, almost dizzy from the dark strangeness of his fate. And through that shock he felt the tremor that comes before a great blow. He bent like an oak before a storm, like a soldier bracing for an attack. It was as if clouds full of thunder and lightning were gathering over his head. As he listened to Javert, his first thought was to leave at once, run and give himself up, take that Champmathieu out of prison, and put himself there instead. The thought was as sharp and painful as a cut into living flesh. Then it faded, and he said to himself, "We shall see. We shall see." He forced down that first generous impulse and shrank back from heroism.

It would certainly have been beautiful if, after the Bishop's holy words, after so many years of repentance and self-denial, in the midst of a penitence so nobly begun, this man had not faltered for even a moment before so dreadful a possibility, but had kept walking steadily toward that gaping precipice with heaven at the bottom. That would have been beautiful. But that is not what happened. We must give an honest account of what was happening in his soul, and we can only say what was there. At first, the instinct of self-preservation swept him away. He hastily gathered his thoughts, smothered his feelings, considered Javert's presence—that great danger—put off any decision with the grim firmness of fear, pushed aside the question of what he ought to do, and regained his outward calm the way a warrior snatches up his shield.

He stayed in that state for the rest of the day: a whirlwind inside, deep calm on the outside. He took no "precautionary measures," if that is what they should be called. Everything in his mind was still confused and crashing together. His distress was so great that he could not clearly make out the shape of a single thought, and the only thing he could have said about himself was that he had been struck by a terrible blow.

As usual, he went to Fantine's sickbed and stayed longer than usual, prompted by kindness. He told himself that he ought to do so, and that he should commend her carefully to the sisters in case he had to be away. He had a vague sense that he might have to go to Arras; and though he had not in the least decided on the journey, he told himself that, since he was beyond the slightest suspicion, there would be nothing improper in

witnessing what was about to happen. So he hired Scaufflaire's tilbury, so that he would be ready whatever happened.

He ate dinner with a fairly good appetite.

When he returned to his room, he began to wrestle with his own thoughts.

He looked at the situation and saw that it was unlike anything he had ever faced before. It was so unprecedented that, in the middle of his brooding, he suddenly rose from his chair, driven by some unexplainable surge of anxiety, and bolted the door. He was afraid something more might come in. He was trying to barricade himself against every possibility.

A moment later, he put out the light; it troubled him.

It seemed to him that someone might see him.

Seen by whom?

Alas, what he wanted to shut out had already come in; what he wanted to blind was staring him in the face—his conscience.

His conscience—that is to say, God.

Even so, at first he deceived himself. He felt safe and alone. Once he had drawn the bolt, he thought no one could reach him; once he had put out the candle, he felt invisible. Then he pulled himself together. He set his elbows on the table, rested his head on one hand, and began to think in the dark.

"Where do I stand? Am I dreaming? What have I heard? Can it really be true that I saw Javert, and that he spoke to me like that? Who can this Champmathieu be? So he looks like me! Can

that be possible? When I think that yesterday I was so calm, so far from suspecting anything! What was I doing yesterday at this hour? What does this whole affair mean? How will it end? What am I to do?"

This was the torment he was in. His mind had lost the power to hold onto any thought; ideas rolled through it like waves, and he pressed both hands to his forehead as if he could stop them.

Out of this turmoil, which overwhelmed both his will and his reason, and from which he tried to draw certainty and a decision, nothing emerged but anguish.

His head was burning. He went to the window and threw it wide open. There were no stars in the sky. He came back and sat down at the table.

The first hour passed like this.

Gradually, though, vague shapes began to take form and settle in his mind, and he was able to see part of the reality clearly—not the whole situation, but at least some of its details. He began by realizing that, however critical and extraordinary the situation was, he had complete control over it.

That realization only deepened his shock.

Quite apart from the stern, religious purpose he had given his life, everything he had built up until then had really been nothing more than a place to bury his name. What he had always feared most, in his moments of self-examination and during his sleepless nights, was hearing that name spoken aloud. He told himself that if that ever happened, everything would be over for

him; that the day his name reappeared, his new life would disappear around him, and—who knows?—perhaps even his new soul would vanish as well. The very thought made him shudder. Certainly, if anyone had told him in those moments that the time would come when that name would sound in his ears, when the dreadful words Jean Valjean would suddenly come out of the darkness and stand before him, when that terrible light, capable of sweeping away the mystery in which he had wrapped himself, would suddenly flare above his head—and that the name would not threaten him, that the light would only make the darkness deeper, that the torn veil would only make the mystery greater, that the earthquake would strengthen what he had built, that this astonishing event would have no other result for him, if he chose it so, than to make his life at once clearer and more impenetrable, and that from his encounter with the ghost of Jean Valjean the good and worthy citizen Monsieur Madeleine would emerge more honored, more peaceful, and more respected than ever—if anyone had told him that, he would have shaken his head and taken the speaker for a madman. And yet that was exactly what had just happened. That whole heap of impossibilities was now a fact, and God had allowed those wild imaginings to become reality.

His thoughts kept growing clearer. Little by little, he came to understand his situation.

It seemed to him that he had just awakened from some strange dream and found himself sliding down a slope in the middle of the night, upright, trembling, struggling in vain to stop, right at the edge of an abyss. In the darkness he could clearly make out

a stranger, a man he did not know, whom destiny had mistaken for him and was pushing into the gulf in his place. For the gulf to close again, one of them had to fall into it—either himself or the other man. He had only to let events take their course.

The truth became completely clear to him, and he admitted it to himself: his place in the galleys stood empty. No matter what he did, it was still waiting for him. The theft from little Gervais had led him back to it. That empty place would keep waiting and keep drawing him in until he filled it. It was unavoidable; it was fate. Then he told himself that, for the moment, someone else stood in his place. It seemed that a certain Champmathieu had the misfortune to be that substitute. As for himself, if he was present in the galleys through the person of Champmathieu, while remaining in society under the name of M. Madeleine, then he had nothing more to fear—so long as he did not stop men from sealing over Champmathieu's head that stone of disgrace which, like the stone over a tomb, falls once and never rises again.

All this was so strange and so overwhelming that it suddenly stirred something in him almost impossible to describe, a movement of the soul that comes to a man no more than two or three times in his life. It was like a convulsion of conscience, shaking up everything uncertain in the heart. It held irony, joy, and despair all at once, and it might be called a burst of inward laughter.

He quickly lit his candle again.

“Well then, what is it?” he said to himself. “What am I afraid of? Why should any of this trouble me? I am safe. It is all over. There was only one half-open door through which my past could break into my life, and now that door is sealed forever. That Javert, who has tormented me for so long—that terrible instinct of his that seemed to recognize me, that did recognize me—good God!—and followed me everywhere; that dreadful bloodhound, always tracking me, has lost the scent. He is occupied elsewhere, completely led away from the trail. From now on, he is satisfied. He will leave me in peace. He has his Jean Valjean. Who knows? He may even decide to leave town. And all of this has happened without any help from me. I had nothing to do with it. Ah, but where is the disaster in that? To look at me, anyone would think some terrible calamity had struck me! Besides, if this harms someone, it is not my fault at all. Providence has done it. Clearly, it is what Providence wants. Do I have the right to undo what it has done? What am I asking for now? Why should I interfere? It does not concern me. What? I am still not satisfied? What more do I want? The goal I have longed for all these years, the dream of my nights, the object of my prayers to Heaven—security—I have it now. God wills it. I can do nothing against the will of God. And why does God will it? So that I may go on with what I have begun, so that I may do good, so that one day I may be a great and heartening example, so that at last it may be said that some measure of happiness was joined to the punishment I have endured and to the virtue to which I have returned. Truly, I do not understand why I was afraid a little while ago to go into that good curé’s house and ask his advice. This is plainly what he would have told me: It is

decided. Let things follow their course. Let the good God do as he pleases!"

This was how he spoke to himself in the deepest part of his conscience, leaning over what might be called his own abyss. He rose from his chair and began to walk up and down the room. "Come," he said, "let us think no more about it. My decision is made." But he felt no joy.

Quite the opposite.

A person can no more keep the mind from returning to an idea than stop the sea from coming back to the shore. The sailor calls it the tide; the guilty man calls it remorse. God stirs the soul just as he stirs the ocean.

After a few moments had passed, he could not help returning to that dark inner dialogue, where he was both the speaker and the listener. He said what he would rather not have known, and heard what he would rather not have heard, giving way to that mysterious force that told him, "Think!" just as it told another condemned man, two thousand years ago, "March on!"

Before going any further, and to make ourselves fully clear, we must emphasize one necessary point.

It is certain that people do speak to themselves; there is no living person who has not done so. One might even say that words are never more mysterious or magnificent than when they pass from thought to conscience within a person, and then return from conscience to thought. It is only in this sense that the phrases so often used in this chapter, $_{\text{he}}$ said, he

exclaimed_, should be understood. A person speaks to himself, talks to himself, exclaims to himself, without breaking the outward silence. There is a great uproar within; everything around us speaks except the mouth. The realities of the soul are no less real because they cannot be seen or touched.

So he asked himself where he stood. He examined that “settled resolve.” He admitted to himself that everything he had just worked out in his mind was monstrous, and that “letting things take their course, letting the good God do as he pleased,” was simply horrible. To allow this mistake of fate and of men to be carried through, not to stop it, to cooperate with it through his silence, to do nothing—in short, to do everything! It was hypocrisy of the worst kind. It was a vile, cowardly, sneaking, abject, hideous crime.

For the first time in eight years, the wretched man had just tasted the bitter flavor of an evil thought and an evil deed.

He spat it out in disgust.

He kept questioning himself. Harshly, he asked what he had meant by saying, “My object is attained!” He told himself that his life did indeed have a purpose—but what purpose? To hide his name? To mislead the police? Was it for something so small that he had done everything he had done? Did he not have another, greater purpose—the true one: not to save his body, but his soul; to become honest and good again; to become a just man? Was that not, above all else, the one thing he had always wanted, the one thing the Bishop had commanded him—to shut the door on his past? But he was not shutting it. Great God, he

was opening it again by committing a shameful act. He was becoming a thief once more, and the vilest kind of thief. He was stealing another man's existence, his life, his peace, his place in the sun. He was becoming a murderer. He was killing a miserable man morally. He was condemning him to that dreadful living death, that death under the open sky, called the galleys. On the other hand, if he gave himself up to save that man, ruined by such a tragic mistake—if he took back his own name and once more became, out of duty, the convict Jean Valjean—then he would truly complete his resurrection and close forever the hell he had only just escaped. To seem to fall back into it would, in reality, be to escape it. This had to be done. If he did not do it, he had done nothing; his whole life was worthless; all his repentance had been wasted. There was no longer any point in asking, "What is the use?" He felt that the Bishop was there, that the Bishop was all the more present because he was dead, that the Bishop was looking steadily at him, and that from this moment Mayor Madeleine, with all his virtues, would be hateful in the Bishop's eyes, while the convict Jean Valjean would be pure and admirable. Men saw his mask, but the Bishop saw his face. Men saw his life, but the Bishop saw his conscience. So he had to go to Arras, free the false Jean Valjean, and accuse the real one. Alas, this was the greatest sacrifice, the most painful victory, the final step he had to take—but it had to be done. Sad destiny: he would enter holiness only in the eyes of God by returning to disgrace in the eyes of men.

“Very well,” he said. “Let us decide. Let us do our duty. Let us save this man.” He spoke the words aloud without realizing that he had done so.

He took out his books, checked them, and arranged them in order. He threw into the fire a bundle of bills owed to him by small tradesmen who were struggling financially. He wrote a letter, sealed it, and addressed it. If anyone had been in his room at that moment, they could have read on the envelope: _To Monsieur Laffitte, Banker, Rue d’Artois, Paris_. Then he took from his desk a pocketbook containing several banknotes and the passport he had used earlier that year when he went to the elections.

Anyone who had watched him carry out these various tasks, all of them marked by such serious thought, would have had no idea what was happening inside him. Only now and then did his lips move. At other moments he lifted his head and stared at a spot on the wall, as if something were there that he wanted to understand or question.

When he had finished the letter to M. Laffitte, he put it in his pocket with the pocketbook and began walking again.

His thoughts had not changed course. He still saw his duty clearly, written in blazing letters before his eyes, shifting as he turned his gaze:

“Go! Tell them your name! Give yourself up!”

In the same way, he saw before him, as if they had taken visible form, the two ideas that had until then governed his soul: hiding

his name and making his life holy. For the first time, they appeared to him as completely separate, and he understood the distance between them. He saw that one of these ideas was necessarily good, while the other could become evil; that the first was self-sacrifice, and the second was self-interest; that one said, _my neighbour_, and the other said, _myself_; that one came from the light, and the other from darkness.

They stood opposed to each other. He saw them in conflict. The more he reflected, the larger they grew in his mind. They had now become colossal, and it seemed to him that, within himself, in that infinity we were speaking of a moment ago, amid darkness and light, he saw a goddess and a giant struggling against each other.

He was filled with terror, but it seemed to him that the good thought was winning.

He felt he was standing at the edge of the second great turning point in his conscience and in his fate. The Bishop had marked the first stage of his new life; Champmathieu marked the second. After the great crisis came the great test.

But the fever, calmed for a moment, gradually took hold of him again. A thousand thoughts ran through his mind, yet all of them only strengthened his resolve.

At one moment he told himself that perhaps he was taking the matter too seriously; that, after all, this Champmathieu was of no particular importance, and that he really had committed theft.

He answered himself: "If this man really stole a few apples, that means a month in prison. That is a long way from the galleys. And who knows? Did he steal them? Has it been proved? The name Jean Valjean crushes him and seems to make proof unnecessary. Is this not how the Crown prosecutors always proceed? He is assumed to be a thief because he is known to be a convict."

A moment later, another thought came to him: when he gave himself up, perhaps they would take the heroism of his act into account, along with the honest life he had lived for the past seven years and all he had done for the district, and perhaps they would show him mercy.

But that hope disappeared almost at once, and he smiled bitterly as he remembered that the theft of the forty sous from little Gervais placed him in the position of a man guilty of a second offence after conviction. That matter would certainly be brought up, and under the exact terms of the law, it would make him liable to penal servitude for life.

He turned away from every illusion. He detached himself more and more from the world and looked elsewhere for strength and comfort. He told himself that he had to do his duty; that perhaps he would be no more miserable after doing it than after avoiding it; that if he let things take their own course, if he stayed at M. sur M., then his standing, his good name, his good deeds, the respect and reverence people showed him, his charity, his wealth, his popularity, and his virtue would all be tainted by a crime. And what would all those sacred things be worth if they were tied to something so monstrous? Whereas, if he made the

sacrifice, then even the galleys, the post, the iron collar, the green cap, endless labor, and merciless shame would be joined to something heavenly.

At last he told himself that this was how it had to be, that this was the destiny assigned to him, and that he had no right to change what had been decided on high. In any case, he had to choose: virtue on the outside and horror within, or holiness within and disgrace without.

These dark thoughts did not destroy his courage, but they exhausted his mind. In spite of himself, he began thinking about other things, trivial things.

The veins in his temples throbbed violently. He kept pacing back and forth. Midnight struck, first at the parish church and then at the town hall. He counted all twelve strokes from both clocks and compared the sound of the two bells. That made him remember that a few days earlier he had seen an old clock for sale in an ironmonger's shop, with the name Antoine-Albin de Romainville written on it.

He was cold, so he lit a small fire. It never occurred to him to shut the window.

Meanwhile, he had sunk back into his dazed state. He had to make a fairly strong effort to remember what he had been thinking about before midnight struck. At last, he managed it.

"Ah, yes," he said to himself. "I had decided to denounce myself."

Then, all at once, he thought of Fantine.

“Wait,” he said, “what about that poor woman?”

At that moment, a new crisis began.

Fantine’s sudden appearance in his thoughts was like an unexpected beam of light. It seemed to him that everything around him was changing its appearance, and he cried out:

“Ah! Until now I have thought of no one but myself. Should I keep silent or accuse myself? Hide who I am or save my soul? Be a contemptible yet respected magistrate, or a disgraceful yet honored convict? It is all about me, always me, nothing but me. But good God, all of this is selfishness. These are only different forms of selfishness, and selfishness all the same. What if I thought a little about other people? The highest holiness is to think of others. Come, let us look at it that way. If the I– is set aside, if the I– is erased, if the I– is forgotten, what then? If I accuse myself, I am arrested. This Champmathieu is set free. I am sent back to the galleys. Very well—and after that? What is happening here? Ah! Here is a country, a town, factories, an industry, workers, men and women, old grandfathers, children, poor people! I have built all this. I provide all these people with their livelihood. Wherever a chimney smokes, it is I who have put fire on the hearth and meat in the pot. I have created comfort, movement, credit. Before me there was nothing. I have raised up, revived, animated, made fruitful, stirred, enriched the whole countryside. Without me, the soul is gone. If I leave, everything dies. And that woman, who has suffered so much, who has so much worth despite her fall—the woman whose misery I have, without meaning to, caused! And that child whom I meant to go and find, whom I promised to her mother—do I not

also owe something to this woman, to make amends for the wrong I have done her? If I disappear, what happens? The mother dies. The child becomes whatever it can. That is what will happen if I accuse myself. And if I do not accuse myself? Come, let us see what happens if I do not accuse myself."

After asking himself this question, he stopped. For a moment he seemed to waver and tremble. But it did not last long, and he answered himself calmly:

"So this man is going to the galleys. True enough. But what the devil—he stole! There is no point in pretending he did not commit theft, because he did. I stay here. I continue my work. In ten years I will have made ten million francs, and I will spread that wealth across the country. I keep nothing for myself—what does that matter? I am not doing it for my own sake. Prosperity keeps growing for everyone. Industry wakes up and thrives. Factories and shops multiply. Families—a hundred families, a thousand families—live in happiness. The district fills with people. Villages rise where there were once only farms. Farms appear where there was nothing at all. Misery disappears, and with misery go debauchery, prostitution, theft, and murder. All vice vanishes, all crime. And that poor mother raises her child. An entire region becomes rich and honest! Ah, I was a fool! I was absurd! What was I saying about turning myself in? I really must be careful and not act rashly. What? Just because it would flatter me to play the noble and generous man? That is pure melodrama. Just because I would be thinking only of myself—what vanity! To save someone from a punishment that may be somewhat excessive, perhaps, but is just at bottom—to

save who, exactly? A thief, a worthless man, obviously—and for that, an entire countryside must be ruined? A poor woman must die in the hospital? A poor little girl must die in the street like a dog? Ah, that is monstrous! And the mother would not even have seen her child one last time; the child would scarcely have known her mother. And all that for the sake of a wretched old apple thief who has surely earned the galleys for something else, if not for that. Fine scruples indeed—scruples that save a guilty man and sacrifice the innocent, that save an old vagabond with only a few years left to live, who would likely be no more miserable in the galleys than in his hovel, and that sacrifice a whole population: mothers, wives, children. And that poor little Cosette, who has no one in the world but me, and who is no doubt shivering with cold this very moment in the den of those Thénardiers—they are scoundrels. And I was about to neglect my duty to all these poor people. I was going to turn myself in. I was on the verge of committing that unspeakable folly! Let us assume the worst: suppose there is something wrong in what I am doing, and suppose my conscience reproaches me for it one day. To accept those reproaches for the sake of others, when they fall on me alone—to accept this bad action, which endangers only my own soul—that is self-sacrifice. In that, and in that alone, there is virtue."

He got up and started walking again. This time, he seemed satisfied.

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 descending into those depths and groping for so long

through the darkest shadows, he had finally found one of those diamonds, one of those truths. He felt as though he held it in his hand now, and its brilliance dazzled him as he looked at it.

“Yes,” he thought, “this is right; I am on the right path; I have the answer; I must finally hold firm to something; my decision is made; let things follow their course; let us stop wavering; let us stop holding back; this is in everyone’s interest, not my own; I am Madeleine, and Madeleine I will remain. Woe to the man who is Jean Valjean! I am no longer that man; I do not know him; I know nothing of him anymore; if someone is Jean Valjean at this moment, let him take care of himself; that is no concern of mine; it is a fatal name drifting through the night; if it stops and settles on someone’s head, so much the worse for him.”

He looked into the small mirror hanging above the chimney-piece and said:

“There! Making up my mind has relieved me; I am a different man now.”

He went a few steps farther, then stopped suddenly.

“Come,” he said, “I must not shrink from any of the consequences of the decision I have made; there are still ties connecting me to that Jean Valjean, and they must be cut; even in this room there are things that could betray me, silent objects that could testify against me; it is decided; all these things must disappear.”

He felt in his pocket, took out his purse, opened it, and removed a small key. He put the key into a lock whose opening was

almost impossible to see, so carefully was it hidden in the darkest parts of the wallpaper pattern. A secret compartment opened—a kind of false cupboard built into the corner between the wall and the chimney-piece. In this hiding place were some rags: a blue linen blouse, an old pair of trousers, an old knapsack, and a huge thorn cudgel tipped with iron at both ends. Anyone who had seen Jean Valjean when he passed through D—— in October 1815 would easily have recognized every piece of this wretched outfit.

He had kept them, just as he had kept the silver candlesticks, to remind himself constantly where he had begun. But he hid everything that came from the galleys, while he let the candlesticks from the Bishop remain in sight.

He shot a furtive glance at the door, as if afraid it might open despite the bolt. Then, in one quick, abrupt motion, he gathered everything into his arms at once. He did not give so much as a look to the things he had guarded so devoutly and at such risk for so many years. He hurled them all into the fire—the rags, the cudgel, the knapsack.

[Illustration: Candlesticks Into the Fire]

He closed the hidden cupboard again and, with even greater precautions—though they were now pointless, since it was empty—he hid the door behind a heavy piece of furniture that he pushed in front of it.

A few seconds later, the room and the wall opposite were lit by a fierce, red, flickering glow. Everything was burning. The thorn cudgel cracked and sent sparks flying into the middle of the

room.

As the knapsack burned, along with the hideous rags inside it, something began to glitter in the ashes. If anyone had bent down to look, they would easily have recognized a coin—no doubt the forty-sou piece stolen from the little Savoyard.

He did not look at the fire. He paced back and forth with the same steady step.

Suddenly his eye fell on the two silver candlesticks, dimly shining on the chimney-piece through the glow.

"Wait," he thought. "All of Jean Valjean is still in them. They must be destroyed too."

He seized the two candlesticks.

There was still enough fire left to melt them out of shape and turn them into some unrecognizable bar of metal.

He bent over the hearth and warmed himself for a moment. He felt a genuine sense of comfort. "How good warmth is!" he said.

He stirred the glowing coals with one of the candlesticks.

A minute later, both of them were in the fire.

At that moment, it seemed to him that he heard a voice inside him crying out: "Jean Valjean! Jean Valjean!"

His hair stood on end. He looked like a man listening to something terrible.

“Yes, that’s it! Go on! Finish it!” said the voice. “Complete what you’re doing! Smash those candlesticks! Wipe out this reminder!

Forget the Bishop! Forget everything! Destroy this Champmathieu, go on! That's right! Congratulate yourself! So it's decided, settled, fixed, agreed: here is an old man who does not know what is wanted from him, who has perhaps done nothing, an innocent man whose whole misfortune is your name, a name that weighs on him like a crime. He is about to be taken for you. He will be condemned. He will end his days in misery and terror. Good! Be an honest man yourself; remain Monsieur le Maire; remain honorable and honored; enrich the town; feed the poor; raise the orphan; live happy, virtuous, and admired. And all the while, while you are here surrounded by joy and light, there will be a man wearing your red blouse, bearing your name in disgrace, and dragging your chain in the galleys. Yes, it is all arranged very well that way. Ah, wretch!"

Sweat streamed down his brow. He stared wildly at the candlesticks. But the thing inside him that had spoken was not finished. The voice went on:

"Jean Valjean, many voices will surround you. They will make a great noise, speak very loudly, and bless you. But there will be only one voice that no one will hear, and it will curse you in the dark. Well then, listen, infamous man! All those blessings will fall away before they reach heaven, and only the curse will rise to God."

At first the voice had been faint, coming from the darkest depths of his conscience. Little by little it had grown shocking and terrible, and now he seemed to hear it in his very ear. It felt to him as though it had separated itself from him and was now speaking from outside him. He heard the last words so clearly

that he looked around the room in terror.

“Is anyone here?” he asked aloud, completely bewildered.

Then he went on, with a laugh like an idiot’s:

“How stupid I am! There can’t be anyone!”

There was someone there; but it was one of those beings the human eye cannot see.

He set the candlesticks on the mantelpiece.

Then he began again his dull, mournful pacing. The sound disturbed the sleeping man below and woke him with a start.

Pacing back and forth calmed him and unsettled him at the same time. In moments of crisis, people sometimes seem to move around as if they were asking advice from whatever they might encounter simply by changing places. After a few minutes, he no longer knew where he stood.

Now he shrank back in equal terror from both decisions he had reached, one after the other. The two ideas urging him on seemed equally disastrous. What a cruel twist of fate—that Champmathieu should have been mistaken for him, and that he should be crushed by the very means Providence had seemed at first to use to strengthen his position!

For a moment, he thought about the future. Denounce himself? Great God—turn himself in? In overwhelming despair, he faced everything he would have to give up and everything he would have to take on again. He would have to say goodbye to that life which was so good, so pure, so full of light—to the respect of

everyone, to honor, to freedom. Never again would he walk in the fields. Never again would he hear the birds singing in May. Never again would he give alms to little children. Never again would he know the sweetness of grateful, loving eyes turned toward him. He would have to leave that house he had built, that little room. At that moment, everything seemed precious to him. Never again would he read those books. Never again would he write at that little white wooden table. His old porteress, the only servant he kept, would never again bring him his morning coffee. Great God! And instead of all that—the convict gang, the iron collar, the red waistcoat, the chain on his ankle, hard labor, the cell, the camp bed, all those horrors he knew so well. At his age, after having become what he was! If only he were young again. But in his old age, to be addressed as “thou” by anyone who felt like it; to be searched by the prison guard; to endure the galley-sergeant’s beatings; to wear iron-shod shoes on his bare feet; to have to stretch out his leg morning and night for the hammer of the roundsman inspecting the gang; to submit to the curiosity of strangers, who would be told, “That man over there is the famous Jean Valjean, who was mayor of M. sur M.”; and at night, dripping with sweat, crushed by exhaustion, their green caps pulled down over their eyes, to climb back up the ladder-staircase of the galleys two by two under the sergeant’s whip. Oh, what misery! Can fate really be as cruel as if it were a thinking being, and become as monstrous as the human heart?

And whatever he did, he always came back to the heartbreaking dilemma at the center of his thoughts: should he stay in paradise and become a demon? Or return to hell and become an angel?

What was he to do? Great God, what was he to do?

The torment he had escaped only with great difficulty broke loose inside him again. His thoughts grew confused once more. They took on the numb, mechanical quality that belongs to despair. The name Romainville kept returning to his mind, along with two lines from a song he had once heard. He imagined Romainville as a little grove near Paris where young lovers go to pick lilacs in April.

He wavered not only inwardly but outwardly as well. He walked like a small child just allowed to toddle on its own.

From time to time, as he fought his exhaustion, he tried to regain control of his mind. He tried one last time to face the question that had, in a sense, left him collapsed with fatigue: should he give himself up? Should he remain silent? He could no longer see anything clearly. The dim outlines of every line of reasoning his thoughts had traced trembled and disappeared, one after another, like smoke. He felt only this: whatever he decided, something in him would have to die. That was unavoidable. There was no escape from it. Whether he turned right or left, he was entering a tomb. He was passing through a death agony—the death agony of his happiness, or the death agony of his virtue.

Alas, all his uncertainty had taken hold of him again. He was no farther along than he had been at the beginning.

So this unhappy soul struggled in its anguish. Eighteen hundred years before this unfortunate man, the mysterious Being who gathers into Himself all the holiness and all the suffering of humanity had also long pushed away with His hand the terrible cup that appeared before Him, dripping with darkness and brimming with shadows, while the olive trees trembled in the wild wind of the infinite beneath the star-filled sky.

CHAPTER IV—THE FORMS SUFFERING TAKES IN SLEEP

Three o'clock in the morning had just struck. He had been walking like this for five hours, almost without stopping, when at last he let himself sink into his chair.

There he fell asleep and dreamed.

Like most dreams, this one had nothing to do with the actual situation except in its painful, heartbreaking quality, but it left a deep mark on him. The nightmare affected him so strongly that he wrote it down afterward. It survives among the papers in his own handwriting that he left to us. We believe we have reproduced it here exactly as the text stands.

Whatever this dream may have been, any account of that night would be incomplete without it: it is the dark episode of a suffering soul.

Here it is. On the envelope appears this line: "The Dream I had that Night."

"I was on a plain, a vast, dark plain where no grass grew. It seemed to me to be neither day nor night.

"I was walking with my brother, the brother from my childhood, the brother of whom, I must say, I never think and now barely remember.

"We were talking as we walked, and we met some passersby. We were speaking of a former neighbor of ours, who had

always worked with her window open from the time she came to live on our street. As we spoke, we felt cold because of that open window.

“There were no trees on the plain. We saw a man pass close by us. He was completely naked, ash-colored, and riding a horse the color of earth. The man had no hair; we could see his skull and the veins upon it. In his hand he held a switch, supple as a vine shoot and heavy as iron. This horseman passed without saying a word to us.

“My brother said to me, ‘Let us take the sunken road.’

“There was a hollow road where not a single shrub or blade of moss could be seen. Everything was the color of dust, even the sky. After I had gone a few steps, I got no answer when I spoke. I realized that my brother was no longer with me.

“I entered a village that I caught sight of. I thought it must be Romainville. (Why Romainville?)5

“The first street I entered was deserted. I went into a second street. Behind the corner where the two streets met, a man was standing upright against the wall. I said to this man:—

“‘What country is this? Where am I?’ The man did not answer. I saw the door of a house standing open, and I went in.

“The first room was empty. I went into the second. Behind its door, a man was standing straight against the wall. I asked him, ‘Whose house is this? Where am I?’ The man did not reply.”

“The house had a garden. I left the house and went into it. The garden was deserted. Behind the first tree, I found a man standing upright. I said to him, ‘What garden is this? Where am I?’ The man did not answer.”

“I walked on into the village and saw that it was really a town. Every street was deserted, and every door stood open. Not a single living being passed through the streets, moved through the rooms, or wandered in the gardens. But behind every corner of a wall, behind every door, behind every tree, there stood a silent man. I could see only one at a time. These men watched me as I went by.”

“I left the town and began wandering through the fields.”

“After some time, I turned around and saw a great crowd coming up behind me. I recognized all the men I had seen in that town. Their heads were strange. They did not seem to be hurrying, yet they moved faster than I did. They made no sound as they walked. In a moment, the crowd had caught up with me and surrounded me. Their faces were the color of earth.”

“Then the first man I had seen and questioned when I entered the town said to me:—

“‘Where are you going? Don’t you know that you have been dead a long time?’

“I opened my mouth to answer, and saw that no one was near me.”

He woke up. He was icy cold. A chill wind, like the breeze before dawn, was rattling the leaves of the window, which had

been left open on its hinges. The fire had gone out. The candle was almost finished. It was still deep night.

He got up and went to the window. There were still no stars in the sky.

From his window he could see the yard of the house and the street. A sharp, harsh sound rang up from the ground and made him look down.

Below him he saw two red stars, their rays strangely lengthening and shrinking in the darkness.

His thoughts were still half lost in the haze of sleep. “Wait,” he said, “there are no stars in the sky. They are on the earth now.”

But the confusion cleared. A second sound, like the first, woke him fully. He looked and realized that the two stars were the lanterns of a carriage. In their light he could make out the shape of the vehicle. It was a tilbury drawn by a small white horse. The noise he had heard was the horse’s hooves striking the pavement.

“What carriage is that?” he said to himself. “Who could be coming here so early in the morning?”

At that moment, there was a light knock at his chamber door.

He shuddered from head to foot and cried out in a dreadful voice:

“Who is there?”

Someone answered:

“It is I, Monsieur le Maire.”

He recognized the voice of the old woman who served as his portress.

“Well,” he replied, “what is it?”

“Monsieur le Maire, it is exactly five o’clock in the morning.”

“What does that matter to me?”

“The cabriolet is here, Monsieur le Maire.”

“What cabriolet?”

“The tilbury.”

“What tilbury?”

“Did Monsieur le Maire not order a tilbury?”

“No,” he said.

“The coachman says he has come for Monsieur le Maire.”

“What coachman?”

“M. Scaufflaire’s coachman.”

“M. Scaufflaire?”

That name made him shudder, as if a flash of lightning had passed before his face.

“Ah! yes,” he said again. “M. Scaufflaire!”

If the old woman had been able to see him at that moment, she would have been terrified.

A fairly long silence followed. He stared blankly at the candle flame, then pinched off some melted wax from around the wick and rolled it between his fingers. The old woman waited. At last she dared to speak again:

“What am I to say, Monsieur le Maire?”

“Tell him it is all right, and that I am coming down.”

CHAPTER V—HINDRANCES

At that time, the route from Arras to M. sur M. was still served by the small mail wagons used in the days of the Empire. They were two-wheeled cabriolets, lined inside with fawn-colored leather and mounted on springs, with only two seats: one for the postboy and one for the traveler. Their wheels had those long, awkward axles that forced other vehicles to keep their distance and can still be seen on roads in Germany. The dispatch box, a huge rectangular chest, was fixed behind the carriage as part of it. The chest was painted black, and the cabriolet was yellow.

These vehicles, which have no modern equivalent, had a crooked, humpbacked look. Seen from a distance as they climbed a road toward the horizon, they resembled the insects called, I think, termites, which have only a small body in front and drag a large mass behind them. But they moved very quickly. The mail wagon that left Arras every night at one o'clock, after the Paris mail had passed through, reached M. sur M. a little before five in the morning.

That night, as the wagon came down the Hesdin road toward M. sur M., it struck a small tilbury drawn by a white horse at a street corner just as it was entering the town. The tilbury was heading the other way, and it carried only one person, a man wrapped in a cloak. One of the tilbury's wheels took a hard blow. The postman shouted for the man to stop, but the traveler ignored him and kept going at a full gallop.

"That man is in a damned hurry!" said the postman.

The man rushing on like this was the same one we have just seen writhing in convulsions that certainly deserve pity.

Where was he going? He could not have said. Why was he hurrying? He did not know. He was driving blindly, straight ahead. Where to? To Arras, no doubt; but he might just as well have been going somewhere else. At moments he realized this, and he shuddered. He plunged into the night as if into an abyss. Something was pushing him forward; something was pulling him on. No one could have said exactly what was happening inside him, yet everyone will understand. Who has not entered, at least once in life, that dark cavern of the unknown?

Yet he had settled nothing, decided nothing, made no plan, done nothing. His conscience had not led him to any firm action. He was, more than ever, exactly where he had been at the first moment.

Why was he going to Arras?

He repeated to himself what he had already said when he hired Scaufflaire's cabriolet: whatever the outcome, there was no reason not to see things with his own eyes and judge for himself. In fact, that was the sensible course. He needed to know what happened. No decision could be made without first observing and examining the facts. From a distance, everything seemed exaggerated. Besides, once he had seen that Champmathieu—some miserable fellow—his conscience would probably feel much easier about letting him go to the galleys in his place. Javert would certainly be there, and so would Brevet, Chenildieu, and Cochepaille, old convicts who had known him.

But surely they would not recognize him. Bah! What a thought. Javert was a hundred leagues from suspecting the truth. All suspicion, all conjecture, was fixed on Champmathieu, and nothing is more stubborn than conjecture once it takes hold. So there was no danger.

No doubt this was a dark moment, but he would come through it. After all, he held his fate, however terrible it might be, in his own hands. He was master of it. He clung to that thought.

Deep down, to tell the whole truth, he would have preferred not to go to Arras.

Even so, he was going there.

As he thought, he urged his horse on. It kept up that fine, steady, even trot that covers two and a half leagues an hour.

The farther the cabriolet went, the more he felt something inside him pulling back.

At daybreak he was out in the open country; the town of M. sur M. lay far behind him. He watched the horizon turn white. He looked at all the cold shapes of a winter dawn passing before his eyes, but he did not really see them. Morning has its ghosts as much as evening does. He did not see them, and yet, without knowing it, through a kind of perception that was almost physical, those dark outlines of trees and hills added something gloomy and sinister to the turmoil in his soul.

Every time he passed one of those lonely houses that sometimes stand beside the road, he said to himself, “And yet there are people inside, asleep!”

The horse's trot, the harness bells, and the wheels on the road made a soft, steady sound. Such things are delightful when you are happy, and mournful when you are sad.

It was full daylight when he reached Hesdin. He stopped in front of the inn to let the horse catch its breath and be given some oats.

The horse was, just as Scaufflaire had said, one of those small Boulonnais animals, with too much head, too much belly, and too little neck and shoulder, but with a broad chest, a large croup, fine slender legs, and strong hooves—a plain-looking but sturdy and healthy breed. The excellent animal had covered five leagues in two hours and did not have a drop of sweat on its flanks.

He did not get out of the tilbury. The stableman who brought the oats suddenly bent down and looked at the left wheel.

"Are you going much farther with it in this condition?" the man said.

He answered, as though he had not fully come out of his thoughts:

"Why?"

"Have you come a long way?" the man continued.

"Five leagues."

"Ah!"

"Why do you say, 'Ah'?"

The man bent down again and stayed silent for a moment, his eyes fixed on the wheel; then he straightened up and said:

“Because even though this wheel has gone five leagues, it certainly will not go another quarter of a league.”

He jumped out of the tilbury.

“What are you saying, my friend?”

“I’m saying it’s a miracle you came five leagues without you and your horse ending up in a ditch by the roadside. Just look here!”

The wheel really was badly damaged. The blow from the mail coach had split two spokes and twisted the hub, so the nut no longer held firmly.

“My friend,” he said to the stableman, “is there a wheelwright here?”

“Certainly, sir.”

“Please do me a favor and go get him.”

“He’s only a few steps away. Hey! Master Bourgaillard!”

Master Bourgaillard, the wheelwright, was standing in his doorway. He came over, looked at the wheel, and made a face like a surgeon who has decided a limb is broken.

“Can you fix this wheel right away?”

“Yes, sir.”

“When can I leave again?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow!”

“It’s a full day’s work. Are you in a hurry, sir?”

“A very great hurry. I have to be on the road again within an hour at the latest.”

“Impossible, sir.”

“I’ll pay whatever you ask.”

“Impossible.”

“Then in two hours.”

“Not today. I have to make two new spokes and a hub. Monsieur won’t be able to leave before tomorrow morning.”

“This can’t wait until tomorrow. What if you replaced the wheel instead of repairing it?”

“How do you mean?”

“You’re a wheelwright?”

“Certainly, sir.”

“Don’t you have a wheel you can sell me? Then I could leave again at once.”

“A spare wheel?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t have a wheel on hand that would fit your cabriolet. Wheels come in pairs. You can’t just match two wheels at random.”

“Then sell me a pair of wheels.”

“Not every wheel fits every axle, sir.”

“Try anyway.”

“There’s no point, sir. The only wheels I have for sale are cart wheels. This is only a poor country district.”

“Do you have a cabriolet you can let me have?”

The wheelwright had seen at once that the tilbury was a hired vehicle. He shrugged.

“You certainly take good care of the cabriolets people rent to you! If I had one, I wouldn’t let you have it!”

“Then sell it to me.”

“I don’t have one.”

“What! Not even a spring cart? As you can see, I’m not hard to satisfy.”

“We live in a poor country. There is, in fact,” the wheelwright added, “an old calash under that shed over there. It belongs to a townsman who left it in my care and only uses it on the thirty-sixth of the month—that is to say, never. I could rent it to you; it makes no difference to me. But the owner must not see it going by. And besides, it’s a calash; it would need two horses.”

“I’ll take two post horses.”

“Where is Monsieur going?”

“To Arras.”

“And Monsieur wants to get there today?”

“Yes, of course.”

“With two post horses?”

“Why not?”

“Would it matter if Monsieur arrived at four o’clock tomorrow morning instead?”

“Certainly not.”

“There is one thing to consider, though. If Monsieur takes post horses—does Monsieur have his passport?”

“Yes.”

“Well, even with post horses, Monsieur cannot reach Arras before tomorrow. We’re on a side road. The relays are poorly supplied, and the horses are out in the fields. Plowing season is just beginning. Heavy teams are needed, and horses are being taken everywhere, from the post stations as well as elsewhere. Monsieur will have to wait at least three or four hours at every relay. And then they only travel at a walk. There are many hills to climb.”

“Then I’ll go on horseback. Unharness the cabriolet. Surely someone nearby can sell me a saddle.”

“No doubt. But can this horse carry a saddle?”

“That’s true; you’re right to remind me. He can’t carry one.”

“Then—”

“But surely I can hire a horse in the village?”

“A horse that can go all the way to Arras without stopping?”

“Yes.”

“That would take the kind of horse you simply won’t find in these parts. To begin with, you would have to buy one, because no one here knows you. But you won’t find one to buy or rent, not for five hundred francs, nor for a thousand.”

“What am I supposed to do?”

“The best thing is to let me fix the wheel properly and send you on your way tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow will be too late.”

“The devil!”

“Isn’t there a mail-wagon that goes to Arras? When does it come through?”

“Tonight. Both mail coaches pass at night, the one going and the one coming.”

“What! It will take you a whole day to repair this wheel?”

“A day, and a long one at that.”

“What if you put two men on it?”

“Even if I put ten men on it.”

“What if the spokes were tied together with ropes?”

“That might work for the spokes, but not for the hub; and the felly is in bad shape too.”

“Is there anyone in this village who rents out teams?”

“No.”

“Is there another wheelwright?”

The stableman and the wheelwright answered together, tossing their heads.

“No.”

He felt a surge of immense joy.

It was clear that Providence was stepping in. It was Providence that had broken the tilbury’s wheel and stopped him on the road. He had not given in to that first warning. He had done everything he possibly could to keep going. He had honestly and carefully tried every means. He had not been held back by the season, by fatigue, or by the cost. He had nothing to blame himself for. If he could go no farther, it was not his fault. The matter no longer concerned him. It was no longer his responsibility. This was not the work of his own conscience, but the work of Providence.

He could breathe again. For the first time since Javert’s visit, he drew a full, free breath. It seemed to him that the iron hand that had gripped his heart for the last twenty hours had finally let go.

It seemed to him that God was now on his side and was making His will known.

He told himself that he had done everything he could, and that now all that remained was to turn back quietly.

If his conversation with the wheelwright had happened in a room at the inn, there would have been no witnesses. No one would have heard him. The matter would have ended there, and we probably would not have to tell the events the reader is about to read. But the conversation took place in the street. A conversation in the street always draws a crowd. There are always people only too happy to stop and watch. While he was questioning the wheelwright, several passersby stopped and gathered around them. After listening for a few minutes, a young boy, whom no one had noticed, slipped away from the group and ran off.

Just as the traveler, after the inner struggle we have just described, decided to turn back, the boy returned. He had brought an old woman with him.

“Sir,” said the woman, “my boy tells me you want to hire a cabriolet.”

Those simple words, spoken by an old woman led there by a child, made sweat run down his body. It seemed to him as though the hand that had loosened its grip had appeared again in the darkness behind him, ready to seize him once more.

He replied:

“Yes, my good woman. I am looking for a cabriolet to hire.”

And he quickly added:

“But there isn’t one in this place.”

“There certainly is,” said the old woman.

“Where?” the wheelwright broke in.

“At my house,” replied the old woman.

He shuddered. The fatal hand had seized him again.

The old woman did indeed have, in her shed, a kind of spring-cart with a basket body. The wheelwright and the stableman, dismayed at the thought that the traveler might slip out of their hands, stepped in.

“It was a dreadful old contraption. It sat flat on the axle. In fact, the seats inside hung from leather straps. Rain came in through it. The wheels were rusted and warped by damp. It would not go much farther than the tilbury. It was a completely broken-down old wagon. The gentleman would be making a serious mistake if he trusted himself to it,” and so on, and so on.

All of that was true. But this trap, this rickety old vehicle—this thing, whatever it was—still ran on two wheels and could get to Arras.

He paid the asking price, left the tilbury with the wheelwright to be repaired so he could pick it up on his way back, had the white horse hitched to the cart, climbed in, and set out again on the road he had been following since morning.

As the cart started moving, he admitted to himself that, a moment earlier, he had felt a certain pleasure at the thought that he might not go where he was now headed. He examined that

feeling with a kind of anger and found it absurd. Why should he feel glad about turning back? After all, he was making this trip of his own free will. No one was forcing him.

And certainly nothing would happen except what he chose.

As he was leaving Hesdin, he heard a voice shouting after him, “Stop! Stop!” He pulled the cart to a halt with a sharp movement, feverish and convulsive, almost like hope.

It was the old woman’s little boy.

“Monsieur,” the boy said, “I’m the one who got the cart for you.”

“Well?”

“You haven’t given me anything.”

A man who gave so freely to everyone else found this demand excessive, almost offensive.

“Ah, so it’s you, you little rascal?” he said. “You’ll get nothing.”

He whipped the horse and drove off at full speed.

He had lost a great deal of time at Hesdin and wanted to make it up. The little horse was brave and pulled like two horses. But it was February, it had rained, and the roads were bad. Besides, this was no longer the tilbury. The cart was very heavy, and there were many uphill stretches.

It took him nearly four hours to travel from Hesdin to Saint-Pol—four hours for five leagues.

At Saint-Pol, he stopped at the first inn he came to, had the horse unharnessed and led to the stable, and, as he had

promised Scaufflaire, stood beside the manger while the horse ate. He was thinking about sad, confused things.

The innkeeper's wife came into the stable.

"Does Monsieur not wish to have breakfast?"

"Why, yes, that's true; I do have a good appetite."

He followed the woman, whose face was rosy and cheerful. She led him into the common room, where tables were covered with waxed cloth.

"Hurry!" he said. "I must be on my way again. I'm in a hurry."

A large Flemish servant girl quickly set out his knife and fork. Looking at her gave him a feeling of comfort.

"That was what was wrong with me," he thought. "I hadn't eaten breakfast."

His breakfast was brought to him. He grabbed the bread and took a bite, then slowly set it back on the table and did not touch it again.

At another table, a carter was eating. He said to the man:

"Why is the bread so bitter here?"

The carter was German and did not understand him.

He went back to the stable and stayed near the horse.

An hour later he had left Saint-Pol and was heading toward Tinques, which is only five leagues from Arras.

What did he do during that journey? What was he thinking about? As he had that morning, he watched the trees, the thatched roofs, and the plowed fields go by, and saw how the landscape, broken up at every bend in the road, disappeared from view. This kind of watching can sometimes be enough for the soul and almost free it from thought. What is sadder or deeper than seeing a thousand things for both the first and the last time? To travel is to be born and to die every moment. Perhaps, in the dimmest part of his mind, he was comparing the shifting horizon to human life: everything in life is always slipping away from us; dark stretches and bright ones are mixed together; after a flash of brilliance comes an eclipse. We look, we hurry, we reach out our hands to catch what is passing. Every event is a turn in the road, and suddenly we are old. We feel a jolt. Everything goes dark. We make out a shadowy door. The gloomy horse of life, which has been pulling us along, stops, and we see a veiled, unknown figure unharnessing it in the shadows.

Twilight was falling when the children coming out of school saw this traveler enter Tinques; it is true that the days were still short. He did not stop at Tinques. As he was leaving the village, a laborer repairing the road with stones looked up and said to him:

“That horse is extremely tired.”

The poor animal was, in fact, moving at a walk.

“Are you headed to Arras?” the road-mender added.

“Yes.”

“At that pace, you won’t get there very early.”

He stopped his horse and asked the laborer:

“How far is it from here to Arras?”

“Almost seven full leagues.”

“How can that be? The posting guide says only five and a quarter leagues.”

“Ah!” said the road-mender. “Then you don’t know the road is being repaired. About a quarter of an hour from here, you’ll find it blocked. You can’t go any farther that way.”

“Really?”

“Take the road to the left, toward Carency. Cross the river. When you get to Camblin, turn right. That’s the road to Mont-Saint-Éloy, and it leads to Arras.”

“But it’s night, and I’ll lose my way.”

“You’re not from around here?”

“No.”

“And besides, it’s all crossroads. Wait, sir,” the road-mender went on. “Let me give you some advice. Your horse is tired. Go back to Tinques. There’s a good inn there. Spend the night, and you can get to Arras tomorrow.”

“I have to be there this evening.”

“That changes things. But go to the inn anyway and get another horse. The stable-boy can guide you through the crossroads.”

He took the road-mender’s advice, turned back, and half an hour later passed the same spot again, this time at full speed behind a strong horse. A stable-boy, who called himself a postilion, sat on the shaft of the cariole.

Even so, he felt he had lost time.

Night had completely fallen.

They turned onto the crossroad. The road became terribly rough. The cart pitched from one rut to another, and he said to the postilion:

“Keep it at a trot, and I’ll pay you double.”

During one violent jolt, the whiffle-tree snapped.

“The whiffletree’s broken, sir,” said the postilion. “I don’t know how to harness my horse now. This road is very bad at night. If you’d like to turn back and sleep at Tinques, we could be in Arras early tomorrow morning.”

He replied, “Do you have a piece of rope and a knife?”

“Yes, sir.”

He cut a branch from a tree and made a new whiffletree out of it.

That cost them another twenty minutes, but they set off again at a gallop.

The plain was dark and bleak. Low, black, ragged fog drifted over the hills and tore loose again like smoke. Pale flashes showed in the clouds. A strong wind blowing in from the sea filled every edge of the horizon with a sound like someone moving furniture. Everything in sight seemed to take on an air of fear. How many things tremble under those vast breaths of the night!

He was numb with cold. He had eaten nothing since the night before. He dimly remembered his other nighttime journey across the great plain near D—— eight years earlier, and it felt as if it had happened only yesterday.

A distant tower struck the hour, and he asked the boy:

“What time is it?”

“Seven o’clock, sir. We’ll reach Arras at eight. We only have three leagues left to go.”

At that moment, for the first time, he let himself think something that struck him as strange, since it had not occurred to him sooner: all the effort he was making might be useless. He did not even know what time the trial was set for. At the very least, he should have found that out. It was foolish to press on like this without knowing whether he could be of any help. Then he began working it out in his mind. Court of Assizes sessions usually began at nine in the morning. It could not be a long case. The theft of the apples would take very little time. After that, only the question of identity would remain, with four or five depositions and very little for the lawyers to say. He might arrive after everything was already over.

The postilion lashed the horses on. They had crossed the river and left Mont-Saint-Éloy behind them.

The night grew deeper.

CHAPTER VI—SISTER SIMPLICE IS PUT TO THE TEST

But at that moment, Fantine was happy.

She had had a terrible night. Her cough was dreadful. Her fever had grown twice as severe, and she had been dreaming. In the morning, when the doctor came to see her, she was delirious. He looked alarmed and ordered that he be told the moment M. Madeleine arrived.

All morning she was sad. She said very little and kept making pleats in her sheets, murmuring under her breath calculations that sounded like measurements of distance. Her eyes were hollow and fixed. At times they seemed almost to go dark, then they lit up again and shone like stars. It is as though, when a certain dark hour draws near, the light of heaven fills those who are leaving the light of earth.

Whenever Sister Simplice asked how she felt, she always gave the same answer: “Well. I should like to see M. Madeleine.”

A few months earlier, when Fantine had just lost her last trace of modesty, her last shame, and her last joy, she had been only the shadow of herself. Now she was her own ghost. Physical suffering had finished what moral suffering had begun. This woman of twenty-five had a wrinkled forehead, slack cheeks, pinched nostrils, teeth with receding gums, a lead-colored complexion, a bony neck, jutting shoulder blades, fragile limbs, and skin like clay. Her golden hair was growing in streaked with gray. Alas, how quickly illness invents old age!

At midday the doctor came back, gave a few instructions, asked whether the mayor had appeared at the infirmary, and shook his head.

M. Madeleine usually came to see the sick woman at three o’clock. Since punctuality is a form of kindness, he was always punctual.

At about half past two, Fantine began to grow restless. Within 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 could usually hardly even turn over, but now she clasped her yellow, fleshless hands together in a kind of convulsion, and the nun heard her let out one of those deep sighs that seem to cast off despair. Then Fantine turned and looked at the door.

No one came in. The door did not open.

She stayed like that for fifteen minutes, eyes fixed on the door, perfectly still and seeming not to breathe. The sister did not dare speak to her. The clock struck a quarter past three. Fantine sank back onto her pillow.

She said nothing, but began braiding the sheets again.

Half an hour passed, then a full hour, and no one came. Each time the clock struck, Fantine would start up and look toward the door, then sink back again.

It was easy to see what she was thinking, but she spoke no name, made no complaint, and blamed no one. But she coughed sadly. It seemed as though something dark were settling over her. She was deathly pale, and her lips were blue. Now and then she smiled.

Five o'clock struck. Then the sister heard her say, very softly and gently, "He is wrong not to come today, since I am leaving tomorrow."

Sister Simplice herself was surprised that M. Madeleine was so late.

Meanwhile, Fantine kept staring at the canopy over her bed. She seemed to be trying to remember something. Suddenly she began to sing in a voice as faint as a breath. The nun listened. This is what Fantine sang:

"We will buy lovely things as we walk through the faubourgs. Roses are pink, cornflowers are blue, I love my love, cornflowers are blue.

"Last night the Virgin Mary came near my stove, dressed in an embroidered mantle, and said to me, 'Here, hide beneath my veil the child you once begged me for. Hurry to the city, buy linen, buy a needle, buy thread.'

"We will buy lovely things as we walk through the faubourgs.

"Dear Holy Virgin, beside my stove I have placed a cradle trimmed with ribbons. God may give me his loveliest star; I would rather have the child you granted me. 'Madam, what shall I do with this fine linen?'—'Make clothes from it for your

newborn child.'

"Roses are pink and cornflowers are blue, I love my love, and cornflowers are blue.

"'Wash this linen.'—'Where?'—'In the stream. Make from it, without staining it or spoiling it, a pretty petticoat with a fine bodice, which I will embroider and cover with flowers.'—'Madam, the child is no longer here; what is to be done?'—'Then make from it a shroud in which to bury me.'

"We'll buy lovely things as we stroll through the faubourgs. Roses are pink, cornflowers are blue. I love my love, cornflowers are blue."

It was an old lullaby she had once used to rock her little Cosette to sleep, and in the five years since she had been separated from her child, it had never come back to her mind. She sang it in such a sad voice, and to such a gentle tune, that it could have made anyone weep, even a nun. The sister, used as she was to a life of austerity, felt tears rise to her eyes.

The clock struck six. Fantine did not seem to hear it. She no longer appeared to notice anything around her.

Sister Simplice sent a maid to ask the factory porter's wife whether the mayor had returned and whether he would be coming to the infirmary soon. The girl came back a few minutes later.

Fantine still did not move and seemed lost in her thoughts.

In a very low voice, the servant told Sister Simplice that the mayor had left that morning before six o'clock in a small tilbury drawn by a white horse, despite the cold. He had gone alone, without even a driver, and no one knew which road he had taken. Some said they had seen him turn onto the road to Arras; others claimed they had met him on the road to Paris. When he left, he had been as gentle as ever and had simply told the porter's wife not to expect him that night.

While the two women whispered together with their backs turned to Fantine's bed—the sister asking questions, the servant guessing at answers—Fantine, with the feverish energy that sometimes comes with certain illnesses, combining the easy movement of health with the dreadful thinness of death, had raised herself onto her knees in bed. Her shriveled hands rested on the bolster, her head pushed through the opening in the curtains, and she was listening. Suddenly she cried out:

"You're talking about M. Madeleine! Why are you speaking so quietly? What is he doing? Why doesn't he come?"

Her voice was so sudden and so harsh that the two women thought they were hearing a man's voice; they spun around in fright.

"Answer me!" Fantine cried.

The servant stammered:

"The portress told me he couldn't come today."

"Be calm, my child," said the sister. "Lie down again."

Without changing position, Fantine went on in a loud voice, with a tone that was both commanding and heartbreaking:

“He can’t come? Why not? You know why. You’re whispering about it among yourselves. I want to know.”

The maid hurried to whisper in the nun’s ear, “Say he’s busy with the city council.”

Sister Simplice blushed slightly, because the maid had just suggested a lie.

At the same time, she felt that telling the sick woman the truth would almost certainly deal her a terrible blow, and in Fantine’s condition that was a grave matter. Her blush quickly faded. The sister lifted her calm, sorrowful eyes to Fantine and said, “Monsieur le Maire has gone away.”

Fantine sat up and drew herself onto her heels in the bed. Her eyes shone, and an indescribable joy lit up her sorrowful face.

“Gone!” she cried. “He has gone to fetch Cosette.”

Then she lifted her arms to heaven, and her pale face became radiant beyond words. Her lips moved; she was praying softly.

When she had finished praying, she said, “Sister, I’m willing to lie down again. I’ll do whatever you want. I was naughty just now. I beg your pardon for speaking so loudly. 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 fetch my little Cosette.”

With the nun's help, she lay down again, helped her arrange the pillow, and kissed the little silver cross she wore around her neck, which Sister Simplice had given her.

"My child," said the sister, "try to rest now, and don't talk anymore."

Fantine took the sister's hand in her damp hands, and the sister was distressed to feel the sweat on them.

"He left for Paris this morning. In fact, he may not even need to go through Paris; Montfermeil is a little to the left on the way from there. Do you remember what he said to me yesterday when I spoke to him about Cosette—_Soon, soon?_ He wants to surprise me, you know! He had me sign a letter so she could be taken away from the Thénardiers. They cannot object, can they? They will give Cosette back, because they have been paid. The authorities will not let them keep the child once they have received their money. Don't signal to me not to talk, sister! I am so happy. I am getting well. I am not ill anymore. I am going to see Cosette again. I am even quite hungry. It has been almost five years since I last saw her. You cannot imagine how attached one becomes to children, and besides, she will be so pretty—you'll see! If you only knew what lovely little pink fingers she had! To begin with, she will have beautiful hands. She had absurdly pretty 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 real name is Euphrasie. Wait! This morning I was looking at the dust on the mantelpiece, and suddenly I had a feeling, just like that, that I would see Cosette again soon. My God! how wrong it is not to see your

children for years! One ought to remember that life does not last forever. Oh, how kind M. le Maire is to go! It is very cold. He was wearing his cloak, at least, wasn't he? He will be here tomorrow, won't he? Tomorrow will be a festival day. Tomorrow morning, sister, you must remind me to put on my little lace cap. What a place Montfermeil is! I once made that journey on foot. It was very long for me, but the stagecoaches travel very fast! He will be here tomorrow with Cosette. How far is it from here to Montfermeil?"

The sister, who had no sense of distance, replied, "Oh, I think he will be here tomorrow."

"Tomorrow! tomorrow!" said Fantine. "I shall see Cosette tomorrow! You see, good sister of the good God, I am not ill anymore. I am beside myself. I could dance if anyone asked me to."

Anyone who had seen her a quarter of an hour earlier would not have understood the change. She was flushed now. She spoke in a lively, natural voice. Her whole face was smiling. From time to time she talked and laughed softly. A mother's joy is almost childlike."

"Well," the nun went on, "now that you're happy, listen to me, and don't talk anymore."

Fantine laid her head on the pillow and said softly, "Yes, lie down again; be good, because you're going to have your child; Sister Simplice is right; everyone here is right."

Then, without stirring, without even turning her head, she began looking all around her with wide, shining eyes and a joyful expression, and she said nothing more.

The sister drew the curtains closed again, hoping she would drift off to sleep. Between seven and eight o'clock, the doctor came. Hearing no sound, he thought Fantine was asleep, so he came in quietly and walked to the bed on tiptoe. He parted the curtains slightly, and by the candlelight he saw Fantine's large eyes fixed on him.

She said to him, "She'll be allowed to sleep beside me in a little bed, won't she, sir?"

The doctor thought she was delirious. She added:

"Look! There's just enough room."

The doctor took Sister Simplice aside, and she explained everything to him: that M. Madeleine would be away for a day or two, and that, since they were uncertain, they had thought it best not to undeceive the sick woman, who believed the mayor had gone to Montfermeil; after all, it was possible that her guess was right. The doctor agreed.

He went back to Fantine's bed, and she continued:

"You see, when she wakes up in the morning, I'll be able to say good morning to her, poor little kitten, and when I can't sleep at night, I'll be able to hear her sleeping; her soft little breathing will do me good."

"Give me your hand," said the doctor.

She held out her arm and cried with a laugh:

“Ah, wait! You really didn’t know; I’m cured; Cosette will be here tomorrow.”

The doctor was astonished. She was better. The pressure on her chest had lessened; her pulse had grown stronger; a kind of life had suddenly returned and revived this poor, exhausted creature.

“Doctor,” she went on, “did the sister tell you that M. le Maire has gone to fetch that tiny child?”

The doctor ordered complete quiet and said she must be spared any painful emotion. He prescribed an infusion of pure cinchona and, if the fever rose again during the night, a soothing potion. As he was leaving, he said to the sister:

“She is better. If, by some good fortune, the mayor really arrives tomorrow with the child—who knows? Some turning points are astonishing. Great joy has been known to stop an illness in its tracks. I know this is an organic disease, and far advanced, but these things are full of mystery. We may still be able to save her.”

CHAPTER VII—THE TRAVELER, ON ARRIVING, MAKES PLANS TO LEAVE

It was nearly eight in the evening when the cart we left on the road rolled into the carriage entrance of the Hotel de la Poste in Arras. The man we have been following until now got out. Distracted, he barely responded to the inn servants' attentions. He sent back the extra horse and led the little white horse to the stable himself. Then he opened the door of a billiard room on the ground floor, sat down, and leaned his elbows on a table. The trip had taken fourteen hours instead of the six he had expected. To be fair to himself, it was not his fault. But deep down, he was not sorry.

The landlady came in.

"Does Monsieur want a room? Does Monsieur wish for supper?"

He shook his head no.

"The stableman says Monsieur's horse is completely worn out."

At that, he finally spoke.

"Won't the horse be fit to leave again tomorrow morning?"

"Oh, Monsieur! He needs at least two days of rest."

He asked:

"Is the posting station here?"

“Yes, sir.”

The landlady took him to the office. He showed his passport and asked whether there was any way to return that very night to M. sur M. by mail coach. By chance, the seat beside the post-boy was empty. He took it and paid for it. “Monsieur,” said the clerk, “be sure to be here and ready to leave at exactly one o’clock in the morning.”

After that, he left the hotel and started wandering through the town.

He did not know Arras. The streets were dark, and he walked aimlessly, but he seemed determined not to ask anyone for directions. He crossed the little river Crinchon and ended up in a maze of narrow lanes, where he lost his way. A townsman carrying a lantern passed by. After hesitating, he decided to ask the man, but only after first looking behind him and ahead of him, as though he were afraid someone might overhear the question he was about to ask.

“Sir,” he said, “could you tell me where the courthouse is?”

“You are not from this town, sir?” replied the burgher, an elderly man. “Well, come with me. I happen to be going that way—to the prefecture, that is, because the courthouse is being repaired at the moment, and the courts are temporarily meeting in the prefecture.”

“Is that where the Assizes are being held?” he asked.

“Certainly, sir. You see, today’s prefecture used to be the bishop’s palace before the Revolution. M. de Conzié, who was

bishop in ’82, built a great hall there. That is where the court is sitting.”

As they walked, the burgher said to him:

“If you want to watch a case, sir, it is rather late. The sessions usually end at six o’clock.”

But when they reached the main square, the man pointed out four long, brightly lit windows on the front of a vast, gloomy building.

“Well, sir, you are in luck; you have arrived in time. Do you see those four windows? That is the Court of Assizes. There are lights there, so they have not finished yet. The case must have gone on a very long time, and they are holding an evening session. Are you interested in this matter? Is it a criminal case? Are you a witness?”

He replied:

“I have not come on business; I only want to speak to one of the lawyers.”

“That is different,” said the burgher. “There, sir—that is the door with the sentry. You only need to go up the main staircase.”

He followed the bourgeois’s directions, and a few minutes later he found himself in a hall crowded with people. Small groups stood here and there, whispering among themselves, mixed in with lawyers in their robes.

There is always something heartbreaking about seeing these gatherings of men dressed in black, murmuring in low voices at

the entrance to the halls of justice. Charity and pity rarely come out of such conversations. More often, they lead to judgments made in advance. To a thoughtful passerby, all these groups look like so many dark hives, where buzzing minds work together to build all kinds of gloomy structures.

This large hall, lit by a single lamp, had once been the hall of the episcopal palace, and now served as the main hall of the palace of justice. A closed double door separated it from the large chamber where the court was in session.

It was dark enough that he did not hesitate to approach the first lawyer he saw.

“How far have they gotten, sir?” he asked.

“It’s over,” said the lawyer.

“Over!”

He repeated the word in such a tone that the lawyer turned around.

“Excuse me, sir; are you perhaps a relative?”

“No; I know no one here. Has the judgment been given?”

“Of course. There was no other possible outcome.”

“Penal servitude?”

“For life.”

He went on in a voice so faint it could barely be heard:

“Then his identity was established?”

“What identity?” the lawyer replied. “There was no identity to establish. The case was very simple. The woman had killed her child; the infanticide was proved; the jury dismissed the question of premeditation, and she was sentenced to penal servitude for life.”

“So it was a woman?” he said.

“Why, certainly. The Limosin woman. What are you talking about?”

“Nothing. But if it is all over, why is the hall still lit?”

“For another case, which began about two hours ago.”

“What other case?”

“Oh! This is clearly another open-and-shut case. It’s about some kind of scoundrel—a man arrested for a second offense, a convict guilty of theft. I don’t know his name exactly. Just look at that bandit’s face! I’d send him to the galleys on his looks alone.”

“Is there any way to get into the courtroom, sir?” he asked.

“I really don’t think so. It’s extremely crowded. Still, the hearing has been suspended for the moment. Some people have gone out, and when it starts again, you might try.”

“Where is the entrance?”

“Through that large door over there.”

The lawyer left him. In the space of a few moments, he had felt almost every possible emotion, all at once and all tangled

together. The words of that indifferent onlooker had pierced his heart by turns like needles of ice and blades of fire. When he realized that nothing had yet been decided, he breathed freely again. But he could not have said whether what he felt was pain or relief.

He moved from group to group, listening to what people were saying. The court's schedule was very full; the presiding judge had set two short, simple cases for the same day. They had started with the infanticide case, and now they were on to the convict, the old offender, the "return horse." The man had stolen apples, though that did not seem to have been fully proved. What had been proved was that he had already served time in the galleys at Toulon. That was what made his case look so bad. Still, the questioning of the man and the witnesses' testimony were over, but the defense lawyer's argument and the public prosecutor's speech were still to come. The trial could not be finished before midnight. The man would probably be convicted. The attorney-general was very clever and never missed his culprits; he was a brilliant man who wrote verse.

An usher was standing at the door that led to the Assize Court hall. He asked him:

"Will the door be opened soon, sir?"

"It won't be opened at all," the usher replied.

"What! It won't be opened when the hearing resumes? Hasn't the hearing been suspended?"

“The hearing has just started again,” the usher replied, “but the door will not be opened again.”

“Why?”

“Because the hall is full.”

“What! Isn’t there room for even one more?”

“Not one more. The door is shut. No one can come in now.”

After a pause, the usher added, “To tell the truth, there are two or three extra seats behind Monsieur le Président, but Monsieur le Président allows only public officials to use them.”

With that, the usher turned away.

He withdrew with his head bowed, crossed the antechamber, and slowly went down the stairs, as if he hesitated at every step. He was probably arguing with himself. The fierce struggle that had been raging inside him since the night before was still not over, and at every moment it seemed to take on some new form. When he reached the landing, he leaned against the balusters and folded his arms. Suddenly he opened his coat, took out his pocketbook, pulled a pencil from it, tore out a sheet, and quickly wrote on it by the light of the street lamp: _M. Madeleine, Mayor of M. sur M._ Then he ran back up the stairs, pushed through the crowd, went straight to the usher, handed him the paper, and said firmly:

“Take this to Monsieur le Président.”

The usher took the paper, glanced at it, and did as he was told.

CHAPTER VIII—AN ENTRANCE BY SPECIAL PERMISSION

Though he did not realize it, the mayor of M. sur M. had become something of a public figure. For seven years, his reputation for virtue had spread throughout all of Bas Boulonnais. In time, it went beyond that small district and reached two or three neighboring departments. Beyond reviving the black jet industry and restoring prosperity to the chief town, he had helped nearly every one of the hundred and forty communes in the arrondissement of M. sur M. in some way. When necessary, he had even found ways to support and expand industries in other arrondissements. Thus, whenever the opportunity arose, he used his credit and his own money to support the linen factory at Boulogne, the flax-spinning industry at Frévent, and the water-powered cloth manufacture at Boubers-sur-Canche. Everywhere, people spoke the name of M. Madeleine with reverence. Arras and Douai envied the fortunate little town of M. sur M. for having him as mayor.

The councillor of the Royal Court of Douai who was presiding over this session of the Assizes at Arras knew the name, as everyone did, and knew how deeply and widely it was honored. When the usher quietly opened the door between the council chamber and the courtroom, leaned over the back of the President’s chair, and handed him the note bearing the line we have just read, adding, “The gentleman wishes to attend the trial,” the President quickly and respectfully took up a pen, wrote a few words at the bottom of the paper, and gave it back

to the usher, saying, “Show him in.”

The unhappy man whose story we are telling had remained near the door of the hall, in the same spot and in the same posture in which the usher had left him. Lost in thought, he heard someone say, “Will Monsieur do me the honor of following me?” It was the same usher who, only a moment earlier, had turned his back on him and who was now bowing low before him. At the same time, the usher handed him the paper. He unfolded it, and because he happened to be standing near the light, he was able to read it.

“The President of the Court of Assizes presents his respects to M. Madeleine.”

He crushed the paper in his hand, as if those words left a strange and bitter taste in his mouth.

He followed the usher.

A few minutes later, he found himself alone in a stern-looking paneled room, lit by two wax candles set on a table covered with green cloth. The last words of the usher who had just left him still echoed in his ears: “Monsieur, you are now in the council chamber; you have only to turn the copper handle of that door, and you will find yourself in the courtroom, behind the President’s chair.” Those words mixed in his mind with a hazy memory of the narrow corridors and dark staircases he had just passed through.

The usher had left him alone. The decisive moment had come. He tried to gather his thoughts, but could not. It is often just

when we most need to fix our minds on the painful facts of life that the threads of thought break in the brain. He was in the very place where the judges deliberated and passed sentence. With a dull calm, he looked around this quiet and terrible room, where so many lives had been shattered, which would soon resound with his name, and through which his fate was passing at that very moment. He looked at the wall, then at himself, astonished that it was this room and that it was he.

He had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours. He was exhausted from the jolting of the cart, but he was not aware of it. It seemed to him that he felt nothing.

He went over to a black frame hanging on the wall. Under the glass was an old handwritten letter from Jean Nicolas Pache, mayor of Paris and minister, dated—no doubt by mistake—the 9th of June, year II, in which Pache sent the commune the list of ministers and deputies being held under arrest by them. Anyone who happened to see him then, and watched him closely, would probably have thought the letter deeply interested him, for he kept his eyes on it and read it two or three times. He read it without really noticing it, and without being aware of doing so. He was thinking of Fantine and Cosette.

As he sat there dreaming, he turned around, and his eyes landed on the brass doorknob of the door that separated him from the Court of Assizes. He had almost forgotten that door. At first his gaze was calm. Then it lingered on the brass handle, stayed fixed there, and slowly filled with terror. Sweat beaded in his hair and ran down his temples.

At one point he made that impossible-to-describe gesture that mixes authority with defiance, the kind that clearly says, “Pardieu! who is forcing me to do this?” Then he spun around, saw the door he had come through in front of him, went to it, opened it, and stepped out. He was no longer in the chamber. He was in a corridor—a long, narrow passage broken by steps and grates, twisting at every angle, lit here and there by lanterns like the night candles used by the sick. It was the same corridor he had come through. He took a breath and listened. Not a sound ahead of him, not a sound behind him, and he ran as if someone were chasing him.

Even after he had turned many corners in the corridor, he kept listening. The same silence ruled there, and the same darkness surrounded him. He was out of breath. He staggered and leaned against the wall. The stone was cold. The sweat on his forehead felt icy. Shivering, he straightened up.

Then, alone there in the dark, trembling from the cold and perhaps from something else as well, he stopped to think.

He had been thinking all night and all day, and inside himself he heard only one voice saying, “Alas!”

A quarter of an hour passed like that. At last he lowered his head, let out a sigh of anguish, dropped his arms, and turned back the way he had come. He walked slowly, as if crushed by a weight. It seemed as though someone had caught up with him in his flight and was now leading him back.

He went back into the council chamber. The first thing he saw was the doorknob. Round and polished brass, it shone for him

like a dreadful star. He stared at it the way a lamb might stare into a tiger’s eyes.

He could not pull his eyes away from it. From time to time he took a step forward and moved closer to the door.

If he had listened, he would have heard the next hall as a kind of confused murmur. But he did not listen, and he heard nothing.

Suddenly, without knowing how, he found himself by the door. He seized the knob convulsively, and the door opened.

He was in the courtroom.

CHAPTER IX—A PLACE WHERE VERDICTS TAKE SHAPE

He took a step forward, mechanically closed the door behind him, and stood still, taking in what he saw.

It was a large, poorly lit room, at one moment noisy and the next completely still, where all the machinery of a criminal trial, with its small yet mournful solemnity amid the crowd, was unfolding.

At one end of the hall, the end where he stood, were the judges, distracted-looking in worn robes, biting their nails or letting their eyelids droop. At the other end was a ragged crowd: lawyers in every sort of pose; soldiers with stern but honest faces; old, stained woodwork; a dirty ceiling; tables covered with serge that looked more yellow than green; doors blackened by countless hands; tavern lamps hanging from nails in the paneling, giving off more smoke than light; and candles in brass candlesticks on the tables. There was darkness, ugliness, and sadness. Yet out of all this came an austere and majestic impression, because here one felt that great human thing called the law, and that great divine thing called justice.

No one in that crowd paid him any attention. Every eye was fixed on a single spot: a wooden bench set against a small door in the section of wall to the President’s left. On that bench, lit by several candles, sat a man between two gendarmes.

This man was the man.

He did not look for him; he saw him at once. His eyes went there naturally, as if they had already known where that figure would be.

He thought he was looking at himself grown old. The face was not exactly the same, of course, but the posture and whole appearance were strikingly alike: the bristling hair, the wild, restless eye, the blouse, exactly as he had worn it on the day he entered D——, full of hatred and hiding his soul beneath that hideous heap of terrible thoughts he had spent nineteen years gathering on the prison floor.

He said to himself with a shudder, “Good God! Am I going to become like that again?”

The man seemed to be at least sixty. There was something indescribably coarse, dull, and frightened about him.

At the sound of the door opening, people stepped aside to let him pass. The President turned his head and, realizing that the man who had just entered was the mayor of M. sur M., bowed to him. The attorney-general, who had seen M. Madeleine at M. sur M. when his duties had taken him there more than once, recognized him and greeted him as well. He barely noticed any of it. He was in the grip of a kind of hallucination. He was watching.

Judges, clerks, gendarmes, a crowd of cruelly curious faces—he had seen all this once before, long ago, twenty-seven years earlier. He was facing those dreadful things again. There they were. They moved. They existed. They were no longer just an effort of memory, no longer a mirage of the

mind. They were real gendarmes, real judges, a real crowd, real men of flesh and blood. It was all there again. He saw the monstrous shapes of his past reappear and come to life around him, with all the terror that reality gives them.

All of it opened before him like an abyss.

He was horrified. He closed his eyes and cried out in the deepest part of his soul, “Never!”

And by a tragic twist of fate that shook all his thoughts and nearly drove him mad, it was another version of himself standing there. Everyone was calling the man on trial Jean Valjean.

Before his very eyes, in an unimaginable vision, he saw a kind of reenactment of the most terrible moment of his life, performed by his own ghost.

Everything was there: the same setting, the same hour of the night, the same faces of judges, soldiers, and spectators. Everything was unchanged, except for one thing. Above the President’s head hung a crucifix, something the court had not had when he himself was condemned: God had been absent when he was judged.

There was a chair behind him, and he sank into it, terrified that someone might see him. Once seated, he used a stack of cardboard boxes on the judge’s desk to hide his face from the whole room. Now he could see without being seen. He had fully come back to the reality of what was happening. Little by little, he regained control of himself. At last he reached that state of

calm in which it is possible to listen.

M. Bamatabois was one of the jurors.

He looked for Javert but did not see him. The witnesses' bench was hidden from view by the clerk's table, and besides, as we have just said, the hall was dimly lit.

At the moment he entered, the defendant's lawyer had just finished his argument.

Everyone's attention was stretched to the limit. The proceedings had gone on for three hours. For three hours, the crowd had watched a strange man—a wretched figure, either deeply stupid or deeply cunning—slowly buckle under the weight of a terrible resemblance. As the reader already knows, this man was a vagrant found in a field carrying a branch heavy with ripe apples, broken off in a neighboring orchard known as the Pierron orchard. Who was he? An investigation had been made. Witnesses had been heard, and they all agreed. The whole debate had been flooded with evidence. The prosecution declared: "We have in our hands not merely a trespasser, a thief of fruit. We have here a bandit, a repeat offender who has violated the terms of his release, an ex-convict, a man of the most dangerous kind, a criminal named Jean Valjean, whom the authorities have long been seeking. Eight years ago, after leaving the galleys at Toulon, he committed a violent highway robbery against a child, a Savoyard called Little Gervais—a crime covered by article 383 of the Penal Code. We reserve the right to try him for that offense later, once his identity has been legally established. He has just committed a new theft. This is a

second offense. Convict him for the new crime now; later he will be tried for the old one." Faced with this accusation, and with the unanimous testimony of the witnesses, the accused seemed more bewildered than anything else. He made signs and gestures that appeared to mean no, or else he simply stared at the ceiling. He spoke with difficulty and answered awkwardly, but his whole body, from head to foot, seemed to deny the charge. He looked like a fool surrounded by all these minds drawn up against him, like a stranger trapped in a society that was closing in on him. And yet the future threatening him was dreadful. The resemblance grew more striking with every moment, and the whole crowd watched, with more anxiety than he himself seemed to feel, the disastrous sentence hanging ever lower over his head. There was even a terrifying possibility beyond the galleys: the death penalty, if his identity were proved and the matter of Little Gervais later ended in conviction. Who was this man? What did his apathy mean? Was it stupidity or cunning? Did he understand too much, or nothing at all? These questions divided the crowd and seemed to divide the jury as well. There was something both terrible and baffling in the case. The drama was not only sad; it was also obscure.

The lawyer for the defense had spoken fairly well, in that provincial legal style that for so long passed for courtroom eloquence. It was once used by advocates everywhere, in Paris no less than in Romorantin or Montbrison. Today, having become almost classical, it survives mainly in the speeches of judicial officials, to whom it suits its grave resonance and stately rhythm. It is a language in which a husband becomes _a consort_, and a woman _a spouse_; Paris is _the center of art and

civilization_; the king is _the_ monarch_; Monseigneur the Bishop is _a_ sainted pontiff_; the district-attorney is _the_ eloquent interpreter of public prosecution_; arguments are _the_ accents to which we have just listened_; the age of Louis XIV. is _the_ grand age_; a theatre is _the_ temple of Melpomene_; the reigning family is _the_ august blood of our kings_; a concert is _a_ musical solemnity_; the General Commandant of the province is _the_ illustrious warrior, who, etc._; the pupils in the seminary are _these_ tender levities_; and the faults attributed to newspapers are _the_ imposture which distills its venom through the columns of those organs_; and so on. So the lawyer began by explaining the theft of the apples—an awkward subject dressed up in elegant language. But even Bénigne Bossuet had once been forced to mention a chicken in the middle of a funeral oration, and he had managed it with dignity. The lawyer argued that the theft of the apples had not been specifically proved. His client, whom he continued in his role as counsel to call Champmathieu, had not been seen by anyone climbing the wall or breaking the branch. He had been found carrying that branch—though the lawyer preferred to call it a _bough_—but he said he had found it already broken on the ground and had simply picked it up. What proof was there to the contrary? No doubt the branch had been broken off after someone climbed the wall, hidden, and then thrown away by the frightened thief. No doubt there had been a thief. But what proof was there that the thief was Champmathieu? Only one thing: his status as an ex-convict. The lawyer did not deny that this status seemed, unfortunately, to be well established. The accused had lived at Faverolles. He had worked there as a tree-pruner. The name Champmathieu could

very well have come from Jean Mathieu. All that was true. In short, four witnesses identified Champmathieu positively and without hesitation as the convict Jean Valjean. Against these signs and this testimony, the defense could offer nothing but the accused man's own denial—the denial of an interested party. But even if he were the convict Jean Valjean, did that prove he had stolen the apples? At most, it was a presumption, not proof. It was true, and the lawyer was obliged to admit it "in good faith," that the prisoner and his counsel had adopted "a bad system of defense." He stubbornly denied everything: the theft and his identity as a convict. If he had admitted that last point, it certainly would have been better and might have earned him some leniency from the judges. His lawyer had advised him to do so. But the accused had stubbornly refused, no doubt thinking that by admitting nothing he could save everything. It was a mistake. But should not his lack of intelligence be taken into account? The man was plainly dull. Long years of suffering in the galleys, followed by long misery outside them, had brutalized him, and so on. He defended himself badly; was that a reason to condemn him? As for the matter of Little Gervais, the lawyer said there was no need to discuss it; it was not part of the case. He ended by begging the jury and the court that, if Jean Valjean's identity seemed clear to them, they should apply only the police penalties prescribed for a criminal who has broken his ban, and not the dreadful punishment inflicted on a convict guilty of a second offense.

The district attorney replied to the defense counsel. He was forceful and flowery, as district attorneys usually are.

He congratulated the lawyer for the defense on his “loyalty,” then cleverly used that loyalty to his own advantage. Through every concession the defense had made, he closed in on the accused. The lawyer had seemed to admit that the prisoner was Jean Valjean. He seized on that point. So this man was Jean Valjean. The prosecution now treated that as settled, beyond dispute. At this point, using one of those clever rhetorical turns that trace crime back to its supposed origins and causes, the district attorney launched into a denunciation of the immorality of the romantic school, then just beginning to appear under the name of the _Satanic school_, a label given to it by the critics of the _Quotidienne_ and the _Oriflamme_. He argued, not without some plausibility, that this corrupt literature had influenced the crime of Champmathieu—or rather, to speak more accurately, of Jean Valjean. Having finished with these reflections, he turned to Jean Valjean himself. Who was this Jean Valjean? Then came a description of Jean Valjean: a monster vomited forth, and so on. The model for this kind of description can be found in the story of Théramène. It is not much use in tragedy, but it is of great service every day in courtroom eloquence. The audience and the jury “shuddered.” When he had finished the description, the district attorney continued with one of those grand rhetorical flourishes designed to fill the prefecture’s newspaper with admiration the next day: And it is such a man, etc., etc., etc.—a vagabond, a beggar, without means of existence, etc., etc., hardened by his former life to criminal acts, and scarcely improved by his time in the galleys, as the crime against Little Gervais has proved, etc., etc.—it is such a man, caught on the highway in the very act of theft, only a few steps from a wall

that had been climbed, still holding in his hand the stolen object, who denies the crime, the theft, the climbing of the wall; denies everything; even denies his own identity! And against a hundred other proofs, which we need not review again, four witnesses identify him—Javert, the honorable inspector of police; Javert, and three of his former companions in infamy, the convicts Brevet, Chenildieu, and Cochepaille. What does he set against this overwhelming agreement? His denial. What stubbornness! You will do justice, gentlemen of the jury, etc., etc. While the district attorney spoke, the accused listened with his mouth open, wearing an expression of amazement in which there was certainly some admiration. He was plainly astonished that a man could speak like that. From time to time, during those "powerful" moments in the prosecutor's speech, when eloquence that cannot contain itself spills over in a torrent of crushing epithets and sweeps around the accused like a storm, he slowly moved his head from right to left and from left to right, in the same silent, sorrowful protest he had kept up since the argument began. Two or three times, the spectators nearest him heard him say softly, "That is what comes of not having asked M. Baloup." The district attorney called the jury's attention to this stupid-looking attitude, clearly intentional, which showed not stupidity but cunning, skill, and a practiced habit of deceiving justice, and which revealed in full the "deep perversity" of this man. He ended by reserving his position on the matter of Little Gervais and demanding a severe sentence.

At that time, as the reader will remember, the sentence was penal servitude for life.

Counsel for the defense stood up. He began by praising Monsieur l'Avocat-General for his "admirable speech," then answered as well as he could. But he faltered; it was clear the ground was slipping from under his feet.

CHAPTER X—THE SYSTEM OF DENIALS

The time had come to close the debate. The President had the accused stand and asked the usual question: “Have you anything to add to your defence?”

The man did not seem to understand. He stood there, twisting a dreadful cap in his hands.

The President repeated the question.

This time the man heard it. He seemed to understand. He moved like someone just waking up, glanced around him, and stared at the audience, the gendarmes, his counsel, the jury, and the court. He set his huge fist on the wooden rail in front of the bench, looked around once more, and then suddenly fixed his eyes on the district-attorney and began to speak. It came out like an eruption. From the way the words burst from his mouth—incoherent, impetuous, jumbled together, tumbling over one another—it seemed as if they were all struggling to get out at once. He said:—

“This is what I have to say. I was a wheelwright in Paris, working for Monsieur Baloup. It is hard work. A wheelwright is always working outdoors, in yards, or under sheds if the masters are decent, but never in enclosed workshops, because the job needs space, you see. In winter you get so cold that you have to beat your arms against yourself to warm up, but the masters do not like that; they say it wastes time. Working iron when there is ice between the paving stones is brutal. It wears a man out fast.

In that trade, a man is old while he is still young. By forty, he is finished. I was fifty-three. I was in bad shape. And then the workmen are so cruel. When a man is no longer young, they call him nothing but an old bird, an old beast. I was earning no more than thirty sous a day. They paid me as little as they could. The masters took advantage of my age. And then I had my daughter, who worked as a laundress by the river. She earned a little too. It was enough for the two of us. She had a hard life as well. All day she stood up to her waist in a tub, in rain or snow. When the wind cuts your face, when it is freezing, it makes no difference; you still have to wash. Some people do not have much linen and wait until the last moment, and if you do not wash for them, you lose their business. The planks are badly fitted, and water drips on you from every side. Your petticoats are soaked, above and below. It gets into you. She also worked at the laundry of the Enfants-Rouges, where the water comes through taps. You are not standing in the tub there; you wash at the tap in front of you and rinse in a basin behind you. Since it is enclosed, you are not as cold, but there is that hot steam, which is terrible and ruins your eyes. She came home at seven in the evening and went straight to bed, she was so tired. Her husband beat her. She is dead. We have not been very happy. She was a good girl. She did not go to dances, and she was very quiet. I remember one Shrove Tuesday when she went to bed at eight o'clock. There, I am telling the truth; you need only ask. Ah, yes, how stupid I am! Paris is a gulf. Who knows Father Champmathieu there? But M. Baloup does, I tell you. Go and ask at M. Baloup's; and besides, I do not know what is wanted of me."

The man stopped speaking but stayed on his feet. He had spoken in a loud, rapid, hoarse voice, with a kind of irritated, almost savage frankness. At one point he paused to greet someone in the crowd. The declarations he seemed to toss out at random came in bursts, like hiccups, and each one was accompanied by a chopping motion, like a woodcutter splitting logs. When he finished, the audience burst out laughing. He looked at the crowd, and when he saw that they were laughing, without understanding why, he began to laugh too.

It did not bode well.

The President, a careful and kindly man, raised his voice.

He reminded "the gentlemen of the jury" that "the sieur Baloup, formerly a master wheelwright, with whom the accused claims to have worked, had been summoned without success. He had gone bankrupt and could not be found." Then, turning to the accused, he instructed him to listen carefully to what he was about to say, and added: "You are in a position where serious thought is necessary. The strongest presumptions weigh against you, and they may lead to consequences of the utmost importance. Prisoner, for your own sake, I call on you for the last time to explain yourself clearly on two points. First, did you or did you not climb the wall of the Pierron orchard, break the branch, and steal the apples—that is, commit the crimes of breaking in and theft? Second, are you the discharged convict Jean Valjean—yes or no?"

The prisoner shook his head with a confident air, like a man who had understood perfectly and knew exactly what he was going

to say. He opened his mouth, turned toward the President, and said:

“First of all—”

Then he stared at his cap, looked up at the ceiling, and said nothing.

“Prisoner,” said the district attorney in a severe voice, “pay attention. You are not answering any of the questions put to you. Your confusion condemns you. It is clear that your name is not Champmathieu; that you are the convict Jean Valjean, first hidden under the name Jean Mathieu, which was his mother’s name; that you went to Auvergne; that you were born at Faverolles, where you worked as a tree-pruner. It is clear that you are guilty of unlawful entry and of stealing ripe apples from the Pierron orchard. The gentlemen of the jury will draw their own conclusions.”

[Illustration: Father Champmathieu on Trial]

The prisoner had finally sat down again, but when the district attorney finished, he suddenly sprang to his feet and cried:

“You are very wicked, you are! That is what I wanted to say. At first I could not find the words. I have stolen nothing. I am a man who does not get something to eat every day. I was coming from Ailly. I was walking through the countryside after a rainstorm that had turned everything yellow. Even the ponds had overflowed, and nothing was growing out of the sand anymore except the little blades of grass by the roadside. I found a broken branch with apples on it lying on the ground. I

picked up the branch, never thinking it would get me into trouble. I have been in prison, and for the last three months they have been dragging me from place to place. I cannot say anything more than that. People speak against me. They tell me, 'Answer!' The gendarme, who is a good fellow, nudges my elbow and whispers, 'Come, answer!' I do not know how to explain myself. I have no education. I am a poor man. That is how they wrong me, because they do not see that. I did not steal. I picked up things from the ground that were lying there. You say, Jean Valjean, Jean Mathieu! I do not know those people; they are villagers. I worked for Monsieur Baloup on the Boulevard de l'Hôpital. My name is Champmathieu. You are very clever to tell me where I was born; I do not know myself. Not everyone has a house to be born in; that would be too convenient. I think my father and mother were people who wandered the roads. I know nothing else. When I was a child, they called me young fellow; now they call me old fellow. Those are my baptismal names, if you like. I have been in Auvergne. I have been at Faverolles. Well then! Can a man not have been in Auvergne or at Faverolles without having been in the galleys? I tell you I have not stolen, and that I am Father Champmathieu. I have worked for Monsieur Baloup. I have had a fixed residence. You are tormenting me with all this nonsense! Why is everyone chasing after me so furiously?"

The district attorney had remained standing. He addressed the President:

"Monsieur le Président, given the prisoner's confused yet highly skillful denials—he would like to make himself out to be a fool,

but he will not succeed in that, and we shall see to it—we ask that it please you, and that it please the court, to summon once more before this court the convicts Brevet, Cochepaille, and Chenildieu, along with Police Inspector Javert, and question them one last time about whether the prisoner is in fact the convict Jean Valjean."

"I would remind the district attorney," said the President, "that Police Inspector Javert, called back by his duties to the chief town of a neighboring arrondissement, left the courtroom and the town as soon as he had given his testimony. We granted him permission to do so, with the agreement of both the district attorney and the prisoner's counsel."

"That is true, Mr. President," replied the district attorney. "Since sieur Javert is absent, I think it is my duty to remind the gentlemen of the jury what he said here a few hours ago. Javert is a worthy man who brings honor, through his severe and inflexible honesty, to duties that may be humble but are important. These were the words of his testimony: 'I do not even need detailed evidence or moral presumptions to refute the prisoner's denial. I know him perfectly well. This man's name is not Champmathieu; he is a former convict named Jean Valjean, and he is extremely vicious and greatly to be feared. It was only with the deepest regret that he was released when his sentence ended. He served nineteen years of penal labor 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 highly specific statement seemed to make a strong impression on both the public and the jury. The district attorney ended by insisting that, since Javert was unavailable, the three witnesses—Brevet, Chenildieu, and Cochepaille—should be heard again and formally questioned.

The President passed the order to an usher, and a moment later the door to the witnesses' room opened. The usher came in with a gendarme beside him, ready to back him up by force if needed, and brought in the convict Brevet. The whole audience waited in tense suspense; every chest seemed to rise and fall as if they all shared a single soul.

The ex-convict Brevet wore the black-and-gray waistcoat of the central prisons. He was about sixty years old, with a face that looked almost like a businessman's, but with the air of a scoundrel. The two sometimes go together. In prison, where new crimes had brought him back, he had become something like a turnkey. His superiors said of him, "He tries to make himself useful." The chaplains spoke well of his religious habits. It should not be forgotten that all this took place under the Restoration.

"Brevet," said the President, "you have served a dishonorable sentence, and you cannot be sworn in."

Brevet lowered his eyes.

“Even so,” the President went on, “a man whom the law has degraded may still keep, if divine mercy allows it, some sense of honor and fairness. It is to that feeling that I appeal at this decisive moment. If it still exists in you—and I hope it does—think carefully before you answer me. Consider, on one side, this man, whom a word from you may destroy; on the other, justice, which a word from you may help bring to light. This is a solemn moment. There is still time to take back what you have said if you believe you were mistaken. Stand up, prisoner. Brevet, look closely at the accused, search your memory, and tell us, on your soul and conscience, whether you still identify this man as your former companion in the galleys, Jean Valjean.”

Brevet looked at the prisoner, then turned to the court.

“Yes, Mr. President, I was the first to recognize him, and I stand by it. That man is Jean Valjean. He arrived at Toulon in 1796 and left in 1815. I got out a year later. He looks brutal now, but that must be because age has made him so; in the galleys he was sly. I am absolutely certain I recognize him.”

“Sit down,” said the President. “Prisoner, remain standing.”

Chenildieu was brought in, a convict serving a life sentence, as his red smock and green cap showed. He was serving his term in the Toulon galleys and had been brought from there for this case. He was a small man of about fifty—quick, wrinkled, frail, yellow-skinned, hard-faced, and feverish. His whole body had a kind of unhealthy weakness, yet his eyes held tremendous force. His fellow convicts in the galleys had nicknamed him

I-deny-God– (Je-nie Dieu_, Chenildieu).

The President spoke to him in almost the same words he had used with Brevet. When he reminded him that his disgrace deprived him of the right to swear an oath, Chenildieu lifted his head and looked straight at the crowd. The President urged him to think carefully and asked, as he had asked Brevet, whether he still insisted that he recognized the prisoner.

Chenildieu burst into laughter.

“Of course I recognize him! We were chained together for five years. So, old fellow, are you in a sulk?”

“Go back to your seat,” said the President.

The usher brought in Cochepaille. He was another convict serving a life sentence, brought from the galleys and dressed in red like Chenildieu. He was a peasant from Lourdes, half like a bear of the Pyrenees. He had once watched flocks in the mountains, and from shepherd he had drifted into brigandage. Cochepaille was no less savage and seemed even duller than the prisoner. He was one of those miserable men whom nature seems to have roughly shaped for a wild beast, and whom society completes by turning into a galley convict.

The President tried to move him with a few grave and solemn words, then asked him, as he had asked the other two, whether he still recognized without hesitation or uncertainty the man standing before him.

“He is Jean Valjean,” said Cochepaille. “They even called him Jean-the-Screw because he was so strong.”

Each of these statements from the three men, who were plainly sincere and speaking in good faith, stirred a troubled murmur in the courtroom—a murmur that grew louder and lasted longer each time another declaration was added to the case."

The prisoner had listened to them with that bewildered expression which, according to the prosecution, was his main way of defending himself. At the first statement, the gendarmes beside him heard him mutter through his teeth, "Ah, well, he's a fine one!" After the second, he said a little louder, with something like satisfaction, "Good!" After the third, he shouted, "Excellent!"

The President addressed him:

"Did you hear, prisoner? What do you have to say?"

He replied:

"I say, 'Excellent!'"

An uproar burst out among the spectators and spread to the jury; it was clear that the man was doomed.

"Ushers," said the President, "restore order! I am about to sum up the case."

At that moment, there was a stir beside the President; a voice cried out:

"Brevet! Chenildieu! Cochepaille! Look here!"

Everyone who heard that voice shuddered; it was so full of misery and terror. All eyes turned toward the place it had come from. A man seated among the privileged spectators behind the

bench had just stood up, pushed open the half-door that separated the court from the audience, and was now standing in the middle of the hall. The President, the district attorney, M. Bamatabois, and twenty others recognized him and cried out together:

“M. Madeleine!”

CHAPTER XI—CHAMPMATHIEU GROWS MORE AND MORE ASTONISHED

It was indeed he. The clerk's lamp lit up his face. He held his hat in his hand. His clothes were in perfect order; his coat was carefully buttoned. He was very pale, and he trembled slightly. His hair, which had still been gray when he arrived in Arras, was now completely white: it had turned white during the hour he had been sitting there.

Every head lifted. The shock was beyond description. For a moment the audience hesitated, so heartbreaking had the voice been; and the man standing there looked so calm that at first they could not make sense of it. They asked themselves whether he had really uttered that cry. They could not believe that this composed man was the one who had let out that terrible shout.

This hesitation lasted only a few seconds. Before the President or the district attorney could say a word, before the ushers or the gendarmes could move, the man everyone still called M. Madeleine stepped forward toward the witnesses Cochepaille, Brevet, and Chenildieu.

"Don't you recognize me?" he said.

All three stood speechless and shook their heads to show that they did not know him. Cochepaille, intimidated, gave a military salute. M. Madeleine turned to the jury and the court and said in

a gentle voice:

“Gentlemen of the jury, order the prisoner to be set free! Mr. President, have me arrested. He is not the man you are looking for; I am. I am Jean Valjean.”

Not a sound came from anyone. The first shock of astonishment gave way to a silence like the grave. Everyone in the courtroom felt that kind of sacred terror that seizes a crowd when something great has been done.

Meanwhile, the President’s face showed sympathy and sadness. He exchanged a quick signal with the district attorney and spoke a few quiet words to the assistant judges. Then he addressed the crowd and asked in a tone everyone could understand:

“Is there a doctor present?”

The district attorney spoke:

“Gentlemen of the jury, this very strange and unexpected incident, which has disturbed everyone here, fills us, as it does you, with a feeling that we do not need to put into words. You all know, at least by reputation, the honorable M. Madeleine, mayor of M. sur M. If there is a doctor in the audience, we join the President in asking him to attend to M. Madeleine and escort him home.”

M. Madeleine did not let the district attorney finish. He interrupted him in a voice full of gentleness and authority. These are the words he spoke. They are given here exactly as one witness to the scene wrote them down immediately after the

trial, and as they still echoed in the ears of those who heard them nearly forty years later:

“Thank you, Mr. District Attorney, but I am not mad. You will see. You were about to make a terrible mistake. Release this man. I am carrying out a duty. I am that miserable criminal. I am the only person here who sees this clearly, and I am telling you the truth. God above is watching what I am doing at this moment, and that is enough for me. You can arrest me, because here I am. But I did all I could. I hid myself under another name. I became rich. I became a mayor. I tried to return to the company of honest men. It seems that cannot be done. In short, there are many things I cannot tell you. I will not tell you the story of my life now; you will hear it one day. I did rob Monseigneur the Bishop, it is true. It is also true that I robbed Little Gervais. They were right to tell you that Jean Valjean was a very wicked wretch. Perhaps it was not entirely his fault. Listen, honorable judges: a man who has been brought as low as I have has no complaints to make against Providence and no advice to offer society. But the disgrace I have tried to escape is a terrible thing. The galleys make the convict into what he becomes. Think about that, if you please. Before I went to the galleys, I was a poor peasant with very little intelligence, almost an idiot. The galleys changed me. I was dull; I became vicious. I was a block of wood; I became a torch. Later, mercy and kindness saved me, just as harshness had ruined me. But forgive me, you cannot understand what I am saying. At my house, among the ashes in the fireplace, you will find the forty-sou piece that I stole seven years ago from Little Gervais. I have nothing more to say. Take me. Good God, the district attorney is shaking his

head. You are saying, ‘M. Madeleine has gone mad!’ You do not believe me. That is painful. At least do not condemn this man. What? These men do not recognize me! I wish Javert were here; he would recognize me.”

Nothing could capture the dark, gentle sadness in the tone of those words.

He turned to the three convicts and said:

“Well, I recognize you. Do you remember, Brevet?”

He paused, hesitated for a moment, and said:

“Do you remember the knitted suspenders with a checked pattern that you wore in the galleys?”

Brevet started in surprise and looked him up and down with a frightened expression. He went on:

“Chenildieu, you gave yourself the name ‘Jenie-Dieu.’ Your whole right shoulder bears a deep burn, because one day you pressed it against a brazier full of coals to erase the three letters T. F. P., which are still visible anyway. Answer me: is that true?”

“It is true,” said Chenildieu.

He turned to Cochepaille:

“Cochepaille, near the bend of your left arm, you have a date marked in blue letters with burned powder. It is the date of the Emperor’s landing at Cannes, March 1, 1815. Roll up your sleeve!”

Cochepaille rolled up his sleeve. Every eye fixed on him and on his bare arm.

A gendarme held a light close to it. The date was there.

The unhappy man turned to the spectators and the judges with a smile that still breaks the hearts of all who saw it whenever they remember it. It was a smile of triumph, and also a smile of despair.

“You can see clearly,” he said, “that I am Jean Valjean.”

In that room, there were no longer any judges, accusers, or gendarmes. There were only staring eyes and sympathetic hearts. No one remembered the role he was supposed to play. The district attorney forgot that he was there to prosecute, the President forgot that he was there to preside, and the defense counsel forgot that he was there to defend. Strikingly, no one asked a question, and no authority stepped in. That is what is remarkable about moments of the sublime: they seize every soul and turn witnesses into spectators. Probably no one could have explained what he felt. Probably no one said to himself that he was watching the glorious burst of a great light. But inwardly, everyone felt dazzled.

It was obvious that Jean Valjean stood before them. That much was clear. The sight of this man alone lit up what had been dark and confusing only a moment earlier, without any further explanation. The whole crowd, as if struck by a flash of revelation, instantly understood in a single glance the simple and magnificent truth: a man was surrendering himself so that another man would not be condemned in his place. The details,

the doubts, the small possible objections all disappeared in the face of that great, radiant fact.

The feeling passed quickly, but at that moment it was overwhelming.

“I do not wish to delay the court any longer,” Jean Valjean continued. “I will leave, since you are not arresting me. I have many things to do. The district attorney knows who I am; he knows where I am going; he can have me arrested whenever he chooses.”

He walked toward the door. No one spoke, and no one raised a hand to stop him. Everyone moved aside. At that moment, there was something almost divine about him, something that makes crowds step back and clear a path for a man. He passed slowly through the crowd. No one ever knew who opened the door, but it is certain that it stood open when he reached it. When he got there, he turned and said:

“I am at your disposal, Mr. District Attorney.”

Then he turned to the people in the room:

“All of you here—surely you think me worthy of pity? Good God! When I think of what I was on the verge of doing, I feel that I am almost to be envied. And yet I would rather this had not happened.”

He went out, and the door closed behind him just as it had opened, for those who do certain supreme things can always count on someone in the crowd to serve them.

Less than an hour later, the jury returned a verdict that cleared Champmathieu of all charges. Champmathieu was released at once and went away in a daze, thinking that all men were fools and understanding nothing of what he had just seen.

CHAPTER I—THE MIRROR IN WHICH M. MADELEINE LOOKS AT HIS HAIR

Day was just beginning to break. Fantine had spent a sleepless, feverish night full of happy dreams, and at dawn she finally fell asleep. Sister Simplice, who had stayed beside her, used that moment of rest to go prepare a fresh dose of cinchona. The good sister had only been in the infirmary laboratory for a few moments, leaning over her medicines and bottles and peering closely because the weak light of early morning made everything hard to see. Suddenly she looked up and gave a small cry. M. Madeleine was standing before her; he had just come in without a sound.

“Is that you, Mr. Mayor?” she cried.

He answered softly:

“How is that poor woman?”

“She is not as bad at the moment, but we have been very worried.”

She told him what had happened: Fantine had been very ill the day before, and she was better now because she believed the mayor had gone to Montfermeil to bring back her child. The sister did not dare question the mayor, but it was clear from his expression that he had not come from there.

“That is all for the best,” he said. “You were right not to take away her hope.”

“Yes,” said the sister, “but now, Mr. Mayor, she will see you and she will not see her child. What are we to tell her?”

He thought for a moment.

“God will guide us,” he said.

“But we cannot tell a lie,” the sister murmured, half under her breath.

By then the room was fully lit by day. The light fell directly across M. Madeleine’s face. The sister happened to look up at him.

“Good God, sir!” she cried. “What has happened to you? Your hair is completely white!”

“White?” he said.

Sister Simplice had no mirror. She searched through a drawer and took out the small glass the infirmary doctor used to check whether a patient was dead and no longer breathing. M. Madeleine took the mirror, looked at his hair, and said:

“Well!”

He said it with indifference, as if his thoughts were elsewhere.

The sister shivered at the strange thing she sensed in all this.

He asked:

“Can I see her?”

“Is Monsieur le Maire not going to have her child brought back to her?” the sister asked, barely daring to say it.

“Of course. But it will take at least two or three days.”

“If she does not see Monsieur le Maire before then,” the sister went on timidly, “she will not know that he has returned, and it would be easy to help her be patient. When the child arrives, she would naturally think Monsieur le Maire had just come with her. Then we would not have to tell a lie.”

M. Madeleine seemed to think for a moment. Then he said with calm seriousness:

“No, sister, I must see her. I may perhaps be in a hurry.”

The nun did not seem to notice the word “perhaps,” which gave the mayor’s words a strange, shadowy meaning. She replied, lowering her eyes and speaking respectfully:

“In that case, she is asleep; but Monsieur le Maire may go in.”

He commented on a door that did not close properly and might wake the sick woman with its noise. Then he went into Fantine’s room, walked to the bed, and drew back the curtains. She was asleep. Her breathing rose from her chest with that tragic sound so common in such illnesses, the sound that breaks a mother’s heart when she sits through the night beside a sleeping child who is doomed to die. Yet that painful breathing barely disturbed the deep, unearthly peace spread across her face, a peace that transformed her in sleep. Her pallor had turned to whiteness; her cheeks were flushed red. Her long golden eyelashes—the only beauty left from her youth and innocence—trembled, though her eyes stayed closed and lowered. Her whole body seemed to quiver with some invisible unfolding of wings, ready to open and carry her away; you could almost sense their rustling, though you could not see them. Seeing her like this, no one would have guessed she was a dying woman whose life was nearly beyond hope. She looked less like someone about to die than like someone about to rise

and fly away.

A branch trembles when a hand reaches toward it to pick a flower. It seems to draw back and offer itself at the same time. The human body has something of that same tremor at the moment when the mysterious fingers of Death are about to pluck away the soul.

M. Madeleine stood motionless beside the bed for some time, looking first at the sick woman and then at the crucifix, just as he had two months earlier, on the day he first came to see her in that infirmary. Both were still there in the same posture—she sleeping, he praying. Only now, after two months had passed, her hair was gray and his was white.

The sister had not come in with him. He stood by the bed with a finger to his lips, as if there were someone in the room he needed to command to be silent.

She opened her eyes, saw him, and said quietly, with a smile:

“And Cosette?”

CHAPTER II—FANTINE HAPPY

She showed no surprise and no burst of joy; she was joy itself. That simple question—"And Cosette?"—was asked with such deep faith, such certainty, and such complete freedom from fear or doubt that he could not find a single word to answer. She went on:

"I knew you were there. I was asleep, but I saw you. I have been seeing you for a long, long time. All night I followed you with my eyes. You were surrounded by glory, and all around you were heavenly forms of every kind."

He lifted his eyes to the crucifix.

"But," she went on, "tell me where Cosette is. Why didn't you put her on my bed so she would be there when I woke?"

He gave some automatic reply that he was never able to remember afterward.

Fortunately, the doctor had been warned and now arrived. He came to M. Madeleine's rescue.

"Be calm, my child," said the doctor. "Your child is here."

Fantine's eyes shone and lit up her whole face. She clasped her hands with an expression that held everything prayer can contain—both fierce intensity and tenderness.

"Oh!" she cried. "Bring her to me!"

A mother's touching illusion: to her, Cosette was still the little child someone carries in their arms.

“Not yet,” said the doctor. “Not right now. You still have a fever. Seeing your child would upset you and make you worse. You must get well first.”

She broke in eagerly:

“But I am well! Oh, I tell you, I am well! What a fool that doctor is! Imagine that! I want to see my child!”

“You see,” said the doctor, “how agitated you become. As long as you are in this state, I will not allow your child to come to you. It is not enough just to see her; you must live for her. When you are calm and reasonable, I will bring her to you myself.”

The poor mother lowered her head.

“Forgive me, doctor, truly forgive me. Before all these misfortunes came upon me, I would never have spoken the way I just did. So much has happened to me that sometimes I do not know what I am saying. I understand. You are afraid the emotion will be too much for me. I will wait as long as you wish, but I swear to you, seeing my daughter would not harm me. I have been seeing her already; I have not taken my eyes off her since yesterday evening. Do you know, if they brought her to me now, I would speak to her very softly. That is all. Is it not only natural that I should want to see my daughter, who has been brought here for me all the way from Montfermeil? I am not angry. I know I am about to be happy. All night I have seen white things and people smiling at me. Whenever Monsieur le Docteur wishes, he may bring me Cosette. I no longer have a fever; I am well. I know perfectly well that there is nothing wrong with me now. But I will behave as if I were ill, and I will not move, just to

please these ladies here. When they see how calm I am, they will say, 'She must have her child.'"

M. Madeleine was sitting in a chair beside the bed. She turned toward him. She was making a clear effort to stay calm and be "very good," as she put it, with that weakness of illness that resembles childhood, so that, seeing how peaceful she was, they would not hesitate to bring Cosette to her. But even while she kept herself under control, she could not help questioning M. Madeleine.

"Did you have a good trip, Monsieur le Maire? Oh, how kind you were to go and bring her back for me! Just tell me how she is. Did she bear the journey well? Alas, she won't recognize me. She must have forgotten me by now, poor darling! Children don't remember. They're like birds. A child sees one thing today and another tomorrow, and then thinks no more about it. 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, asking myself such questions through all my misery. But now it is over. I am happy. Oh, how I long to see her! Do you think her pretty, Monsieur le Maire? Isn't my daughter beautiful? You must have been very cold in that diligence! Could she not be brought in for just one little moment? She could be taken away again at once. Tell me—you are the master; it could be done if you wished!"

He took her hand. “Cosette is beautiful,” he said. “Cosette is well. You shall see her soon. But calm yourself; you are speaking too excitedly, and you keep throwing your arms out from under the covers, and that makes you cough.”

In fact, Fantine was interrupted by coughing fits almost every time she spoke.

Fantine said nothing in complaint. She was afraid that, with her desperate outpouring, she had damaged the trust she wanted to inspire, so she began talking about ordinary things.

“Montfermeil is quite pretty, isn’t it? People go there for outings in the summer. Are the Thénardiers doing well? There are not many travelers in that area. Their inn is really more like a roadside eating-house.”

M. Madeleine was still holding her hand and looking at her anxiously. It was clear that he had come to tell her certain things, but now he hesitated. The doctor, having finished his visit, withdrew. Sister Simplice remained alone with them.

But in the middle of this pause, Fantine cried out:

“I hear her! Mon Dieu, I hear her!”

She stretched out her arm to ask for silence around her, held her breath, and began listening in rapture.

A child was playing in the yard—the portress’s child, or perhaps the child of one of the workwomen. It was one of those chance details that always seem to appear, as if they belong to the strange backdrop of sorrowful scenes. The child, a little girl, kept coming and going, running about to warm herself,

laughing, and singing at the top of her lungs. Sadly, what part of children's games is not mixed with pain? It was this little girl that Fantine heard singing.

"Oh!" she said again. "It's my Cosette! I know her voice."

The child went away as she had come, and the voice faded. Fantine kept listening a little longer. Then her face darkened, and M. Madeleine heard her say in a low voice, "How cruel that doctor is, not letting me see my daughter! That man has an evil face, he truly does."

But then the bright undercurrent of her thoughts rose again. She went on talking to herself, her head resting on the pillow. "How happy we are going to be! The very first thing, we'll have a little garden; M. Madeleine has promised me that. My daughter will play in the garden. She must know her letters by now. I'll teach her to spell. She'll run through the grass chasing butterflies. I'll watch her. Then she'll make her first communion. Ah! when will she make her first communion?"

She started counting on her fingers.

"One, two, three, four—she is seven years old. In five years she'll have a white veil and openwork stockings; she'll look like a little woman. Oh, my good sister, you don't know how silly I become when I think about my daughter's first communion!"

She began to laugh.

He had let go of Fantine's hand. He listened to her words the way one listens to the wind sighing, his eyes lowered, his thoughts sunk in a reflection that seemed bottomless. Suddenly

she stopped speaking, and that made him lift his head almost automatically. Fantine had become terrifying.

She was no longer speaking; she was no longer even breathing. She had pushed herself up into a sitting position. Her thin shoulder showed above her chemise. Her face, radiant only a moment before, was now ghastly, and her eyes, wide with terror, seemed fixed on something dreadful at the far end of the room.

“Good God!” he cried. “What is the matter, Fantine?”

She said nothing. Her eyes stayed fixed on whatever she seemed to be seeing. She took one hand from his arm and, with the other, motioned for him to look behind him.

He turned and saw Javert.

CHAPTER III—JAVERT SATISFIED

This is what had happened.

Half-past midnight had just struck when M. Madeleine left the Hall of Assizes in Arras. He got back to his inn just in time to leave again in the mail-wagon, where he had reserved a seat. A little before six in the morning, he arrived at M. sur M., and his first act was to mail a letter to M. Laffitte, then go to the infirmary and see Fantine.

But he had barely left the courtroom when the district attorney, recovering from his first shock, rose to speak. He lamented the mad act of the honorable mayor of M. sur M., declared that this strange incident had not changed his convictions in the slightest and would be explained later, and meanwhile demanded the conviction of Champmathieu, who was obviously the real Jean Valjean. The district attorney's stubbornness clearly went against the feelings of everyone else—the public, the court, and the jury. Counsel for the defense had some difficulty answering this speech and showing that, because of M. Madeleine's revelations—that is, the revelations of the real Jean Valjean—the whole case had completely changed, and that the jury now had before it only an innocent man. From this, the lawyer drew a few rather stale remarks, unfortunately, about judicial errors, and so on. In his summing up, the President sided with the defense, and within a few minutes the jury dismissed the case against Champmathieu.

Even so, the district attorney was determined to have a Jean Valjean; and since he no longer had Champmathieu, he turned to Madeleine.

As soon as Champmathieu was released, the district attorney shut himself in with the president. They discussed “the necessity of arresting the person of M. le Maire of M. sur M.” That phrase, overloaded with _ofs_, was the district attorney’s own wording, written in his own hand in the official report to the attorney general. Once his first shock had passed, the president raised few objections. Justice, after all, had to follow its course. And in the end, although he was a kind and fairly intelligent man, he was also a loyal, almost passionate royalist. He had been offended to hear the Mayor of M. sur M. say _the Emperor_ instead of _Bonaparte_ when speaking of the landing at Cannes.

The order for his arrest was sent at once. The district attorney dispatched it to M. sur M. by special messenger, traveling as fast as possible, and put Police Inspector Javert in charge of carrying it out.

The reader already knows that Javert had returned to M. sur M. immediately after giving his testimony.

Javert was just getting out of bed when the messenger handed him the arrest order and the command to bring in the prisoner.

The messenger was himself a sharp and capable police officer, and in a few words he told Javert what had happened at Arras. The arrest order, signed by the district attorney, was written as follows: “Inspector Javert will arrest the person of Sieur Madeleine, mayor of M. sur M., who, during today’s session of

the court, was identified as the released convict Jean Valjean."

Anyone who did not know Javert, and happened to see him as he entered the infirmary antechamber, would have guessed nothing of what had happened. He would have seemed perfectly ordinary. He was cool, calm, and serious. His gray hair lay perfectly smooth against his temples, and he had just come up the stairs with his usual measured pace. But anyone who knew him well, and looked closely at him in that moment, would have shuddered. The buckle of his leather stock was under his left ear instead of at the back of his neck. That one detail revealed an unusual agitation.

Javert was a man of complete order. There was never the slightest lapse in his sense of duty or in the neatness of his uniform. He was methodical with criminals and strict even about the buttons on his coat.

For the buckle of his stock to be crooked, he had to be shaken by one of those emotions that can only be called an inner earthquake.

He had arrived quietly, requested a corporal and four soldiers from the neighboring post, left the soldiers in the courtyard, and had Fantine's room pointed out to him by the porteress. She suspected nothing, being used to armed men coming to ask for the mayor.

When he reached Fantine's room, Javert turned the handle, pushed the door open with the gentleness of a nurse tending the sick—or a police spy—and went in.

Strictly speaking, he did not go in. He stood upright in the half-open doorway, his hat still on his head and his left hand thrust inside his coat, which was buttoned to the chin. In the crook of his arm, behind him, you could see the leaden head of his enormous cane.

He stayed like that for nearly a minute, unnoticed. Then Fantine suddenly lifted her eyes, saw him, and made M. Madeleine turn around.

The moment Madeleine's eyes met Javert's, Javert became terrifying—without stirring, without leaving his place, without coming any closer. No human feeling can be as terrible as joy.

He looked like a demon who had just found the soul damned to him.

The satisfaction of finally laying hands on Jean Valjean brought everything in his soul to the surface of his face. What lay in the depths rose up. The humiliation of having, for a little while, lost the trail and mistaken Champmathieu was wiped away by his pride in having judged correctly from the beginning and trusted that true instinct for so long. Javert's satisfaction shone in his commanding posture. The ugliness of triumph spread across that narrow forehead. Every kind of horror that can appear on a satisfied face was there.

At that moment, Javert was in heaven. He did not put it clearly into words even in his own mind, but he had a confused sense that his presence was necessary and that he would succeed. He, Javert, embodied justice, light, and truth in their heavenly work of stamping out evil. Behind him and around him,

stretching into the infinite distance, stood authority, reason, the settled judgment of the case, the conscience of the law, the public prosecutor, all the stars. He was defending order. He was making the law speak with thunder. He was avenging society. He was giving his support to the absolute. He stood upright in the middle of a kind of glory. Even in his victory, there was still something of challenge and battle. Upright, proud, and dazzling, he displayed in broad daylight the superhuman brutality of a savage archangel. The terrible shadow of what he was doing made the dim flash of society's sword visible in his clenched fist. Happy and furious, he kept his heel on crime, vice, rebellion, ruin, hell. He shone, he destroyed, he smiled, and there was an undeniable grandeur in this monstrous Saint Michael.

Javert, terrifying as he was, had nothing base or mean about him.

Integrity, sincerity, openness, conviction, and a sense of duty can become hideous when they are turned in the wrong direction. But even then, they remain great. Their majesty—the majesty that belongs to the human conscience—stays with them even in horror. They are virtues with a single flaw: error. The honest, merciless joy of a fanatic at the height of his atrocity still keeps a dark and solemn kind of radiance. Without knowing it, Javert, in his terrible happiness, was someone to be pitied, like every ignorant man who triumphs. Nothing could be more painful or more dreadful than this face, which showed everything that can be called the evil of the good.

CHAPTER IV—AUTHORITY REASSERTS ITS RIGHTS

Fantine had not seen Javert since the day the mayor had torn her away from the man. Her fevered mind understood nothing, but of one thing she was certain: he had come to take her. She could not bear that terrible face. She felt her life slipping away. She covered her face with both hands and cried out in anguish:

“Monsieur Madeleine, save me!”

Jean Valjean—we will call him nothing else from this point on—had stood up. He said to Fantine in the gentlest, calmest voice:

“Don’t be afraid; he has not come for you.”

Then he turned to Javert and said:

“I know what you want.”

Javert replied:

“Be quick about it!”

There was something wildly fierce, almost mad, in the tone with which he said those words. Javert did not really say, “Be quick about it!”; he blurted it out in a mangled rush of sound.

No spelling could capture the way he said it: it was no longer a human word, but a roar.

He did not act as he usually did. He did not go through the formalities or produce a warrant. In his eyes, Jean Valjean was a

strange and dangerous opponent, a fighter in the dark whom he had been trying to bring down for five years without success. This arrest was not a beginning, but an ending. So he said only, “Be quick about it!”

As he said this, he did not move forward a single step. He flung a look at Jean Valjean like a grappling hook, the kind of look he used to drag miserable people violently under his power.

It was that same look that Fantine had felt piercing her to the marrow two months earlier.

At Javert’s shout, Fantine opened her eyes again. But the mayor was there; what did she have to fear?

Javert stepped into the middle of the room and cried:

“Well? Are you coming?”

The unhappy woman looked around her. No one was there except the nun and the mayor. Who else could that degrading form of address have been meant for? Only her. She trembled.

Then she saw something utterly unheard of, something so unimaginable that not even her darkest fever dreams had shown her anything like it.

She saw 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 ending.

Javert had in fact seized Jean Valjean by the collar.

“Monsieur le Maire!” Fantine screamed.

Javert burst out laughing, with that dreadful laugh that showed all his gums.

“There is no Monsieur le Maire here anymore!”

Jean Valjean did not try to free himself from the hand gripping the collar of his coat. He said:

“Javert—”

Javert cut him off. “Call me Inspector.”

“Sir,” said Jean Valjean, “I would like to speak to you privately.”

“Out loud! Say it out loud!” Javert replied. “People usually speak to me out loud.”

Jean Valjean continued in a lower voice:

“I have a request to make—”

“I told you to speak up.”

“But only you should hear it—”

“What do I care? I will not listen.”

Jean Valjean turned to him and said very quickly, in a very low voice:

“Give me three days’ grace—three days to go and bring back this unhappy woman’s child. I will pay whatever is needed. You may come with me if you wish.”

“You’re making fun of me!” Javert cried. “Really, I didn’t think you were such a fool! You ask me to give you three days so you can run away! And you say it’s to fetch that woman’s child! Ah!

Ah! That's good! That's truly excellent!"

Fantine began to tremble violently.

"My child!" she cried. "Go and fetch my child! Then she isn't here? Answer me, sister—where is Cosette? I want my child! Monsieur Madeleine! Monsieur le Maire!"

Javert stamped his foot.

"And now the other one starts! Will you be quiet, you wretch? This is a fine kind of place, where convicts are magistrates and women of the streets are treated like countesses! Ah, but we are going to change all that. It is high time!"

He fixed his eyes on Fantine and added, once again grabbing Jean Valjean by the cravat, shirt, and collar:

"I'm telling you, there is no Monsieur Madeleine, and there is no Monsieur le Maire. There is only a thief, a brigand, a convict named Jean Valjean. And I have him in my hands. That's the truth!"

Fantine sprang up in bed, bracing herself on her rigid arms and both hands. She stared at Jean Valjean, then at Javert, then at the nun. She opened her mouth as if to speak, but only a rattling sound came from deep in her throat, and her teeth chattered. In her agony, she stretched out her arms, her hands opening and closing convulsively as she groped around her like a drowning person. Then she suddenly fell back onto her pillow.

Her head struck the bed's headboard and then dropped forward onto her chest, her mouth hanging open and her eyes wide, blank, and sightless.

She was dead.

Jean Valjean placed his hand on the hand with which Javert was holding him and pried it open as easily as if he were opening a baby's hand. Then he said to Javert:

"You have killed that woman."

"Enough of this!" Javert shouted furiously. "I'm not here to listen to speeches. Let's skip all that. The guard is downstairs. Move at once, or you'll get the thumb-screws!"

In the corner of the room stood an old iron bedstead in obvious disrepair, which the sisters used as a camp bed when they sat up with the sick. Jean Valjean went to it and, in an instant, tore off the headpiece, already half broken and easy for a man of his strength to wrench loose. He seized the main iron bar like a club and looked at Javert. Javert backed toward the door. Armed with the iron bar, Jean Valjean slowly walked to Fantine's bed. When he reached it, he turned and said to Javert in a voice barely above a whisper:

"I advise you not to disturb me right now."

One thing was certain: Javert was trembling.

He did think of calling the guard, but Jean Valjean might use that moment to escape. So he stayed where he was, gripping his cane by the thin end and leaning against the doorpost, never taking his eyes off Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean rested his elbow on the bedpost and his forehead in his hand, and began to look at Fantine's still body lying there. He stayed like that, silent and absorbed, as if he had no thought left for anything in this world. His face and posture showed nothing but a sorrow too deep for words. After a few moments of reflection, he leaned over Fantine and spoke to her softly.

What did he say to her? What could this man, under reproach, say to that woman, now dead? What were those words? No one on earth heard them. Did the dead woman hear them? There are tender illusions that may, perhaps, be sublime truths. One thing, however, is certain: Sister Simplice, the only witness to the scene, often said that at the moment Jean Valjean whispered in Fantine's ear, she clearly saw an unearthly smile appear on those pale lips and in those dim eyes, still filled with the astonishment of the grave.

Jean Valjean took Fantine's head in both hands and settled it on the pillow the way a mother might for her child. Then he tied the string of her chemise and smoothed her hair back under her cap. When that was done, he closed her eyes.

At that moment, Fantine's face seemed strangely lit.

Death means entering the great light.

Fantine’s hand hung over the side of the bed. Jean Valjean knelt before it, lifted it gently, and kissed it.

Then he stood up and turned to Javert.

“Now,” he said, “I am in your hands.”

CHAPTER V—A SUITABLE TOMB

Javert took Jean Valjean to the city prison.

The arrest of M. Madeleine caused a sensation—or rather, an extraordinary uproar—in M. sur M. We are sorry to say that the moment people heard the words, “He was a convict,” almost everyone abandoned him. In less than two hours, all the good he had done was forgotten, and he became nothing more than a “convict from the galleys.” In fairness, it should be added that the details of what had happened at Arras were not yet known. All day long, conversations like the following could be heard throughout the town:

“You haven’t heard? He was a released convict!” “Who?” “The mayor.” “Nonsense! M. Madeleine?” “Yes.” “Really?” “His name wasn’t Madeleine at all; he had a dreadful name—Béjean, Bojean, Boujean.” “Ah! Good God!” “He’s been arrested.” “Arrested!” “He’s in prison, in the city jail, waiting to be transferred.” “Waiting to be transferred!” “So he is being transferred!” “Where are they taking him?” “He’s going to be tried at the Assizes for a highway robbery he committed long ago.” “Well! I thought as much. That man was too good, too perfect, too affected. He refused the cross; he handed out sous to every little rascal he met. I always thought there was some dark story behind all that.”

The drawing rooms, in particular, were full of remarks like these.

One old lady, who subscribed to the _Drapeau Blanc_, made the following comment, whose depth is impossible to measure:

“I’m not sorry. It will be a lesson to the Bonapartists!”

That was how the figure known as M. Madeleine disappeared from M. sur M. In the whole town, only three or four people stayed loyal to his memory. The old portress who had served him was one of them.

That evening, the worthy old woman sat in her lodge, still badly shaken and lost in sad thoughts. The factory had been shut all day, the carriage gate was bolted, and the street was empty. No one was in the house except the two nuns, Sister Perpétue and Sister Simplice, who were keeping watch beside Fantine’s body.

Around the time when M. Madeleine usually came home, the good portress got up automatically. She took from a drawer the key to M. Madeleine’s room and the flat candlestick he used every evening to go upstairs to his quarters. Then she hung the key on the nail where he usually took it and set the candlestick to one side, as if she were expecting him. After that, she sat down in her chair again and sank back into thought. The poor, kind old woman had done all this without realizing it.

Only two hours later did she come out of her reverie and cry, “Why, good Lord Jesus! I hung his key on the nail!”

At that moment, the small window in the lodge opened. A hand came through, grabbed the key and the candlestick, and lit the taper from the candle burning inside.

The portress looked up and stood there, mouth open, with a scream caught in her throat.

She recognized that hand, that arm, and the sleeve of that coat.

It was M. Madeleine.

Several seconds passed before she could speak. As she later told the story, she had a “seizure.”

“Good God, Monsieur le Maire,” she finally cried, “I thought you were—”

She broke off. The end of the sentence would have been disrespectful to the beginning. To her, Jean Valjean was still Monsieur le Maire.

He finished the thought for her.

“In prison,” he said. “I was there. I broke one of the window bars, dropped down from the top of a roof, and here I am. I’m going up to my room. Go and find Sister Simplice for me. She is with that poor woman, no doubt.”

The old woman hurried to obey.

He gave her no further instructions. He was quite sure she would protect his secret better than he could himself.

No one ever discovered how he had managed to get into the courtyard without opening the large gates. He had, and always carried, a passkey that opened a small side door; but he must have been searched, and that key must have been taken from him. The matter was never explained.

He went up the stairs to his room. When he reached the top, he set his candle on the highest step, opened his door as quietly as possible, went in and shut the window and the shutters by touch, then came back for his candle and re-entered the room.

It was a sensible precaution; as you may remember, his window could be seen from the street.

He looked around at his table, his chair, and his bed, which had not been touched for three days. No sign remained of the disorder from the night before last. The portress had put his room back in order; only she had taken the two iron ends of the cudgel and the forty-sou piece, blackened by the fire, from the ashes and arranged them neatly on the table.

He took a sheet of paper and 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.” He arranged the note, the iron pieces, and the coin so they would be the first things anyone saw on entering the room. Then he took one of his old shirts from a cupboard and tore it into strips. In those strips of linen, he wrapped the two silver candlesticks. He showed no hurry and no distress. As he wrapped the Bishop’s candlesticks, he nibbled a piece of black bread. It was probably the prison bread he had carried with him as he fled.

This was confirmed by the crumbs found on the floor when the authorities examined the room later.

There were two knocks at the door.

“Come in,” he said.

It was Sister Simplice.

She was pale, her eyes were red, and the candle in her hand trembled. The cruel thing about blows dealt by fate is that, no matter how composed or self-controlled we may be, they wrench our human feelings out of the depths and force them into view. The emotions of that day had made the nun a woman again. She had been crying, and she was shaking.

Jean Valjean had just finished writing a few lines on a sheet of paper. He handed it to the nun and said, “Sister, please give this to Monsieur le Curé.”

The paper was not folded. She glanced at it.

“You may read it,” he said.

She read:

“I ask Monsieur le Curé to watch over everything I leave behind. He will be kind enough to pay, from it, the costs of my trial and the funeral of the woman who died yesterday. The rest is for the poor.”

The sister tried to speak, but could only stammer a few broken sounds. Still, she managed to say:

“Does not Monsieur le Maire wish to take one last look at that poor, unhappy woman?”

“No,” he said. “I am being pursued. It would only end with them arresting me in that room, and that would disturb her.”

He had barely finished when a loud noise sounded on the staircase. They heard a rush of footsteps coming up, and the

old portress crying out in her loudest, sharpest voice:

“My good sir, I swear to you before God that no one has entered this house all day or all evening, and that I have not even left the door.”

A man answered:

“And yet there is a light in that room.”

They recognized Javert’s voice.

The room was arranged so that when the door opened, it hid the corner of the wall on the right. Jean Valjean blew out the light and stood in that corner. Sister Simplice dropped to her knees beside the table.

The door opened.

Javert came in.

In the corridor, they could hear the murmuring of several men and the portress still protesting.

The nun did not lift her eyes. She was praying.

The candle stood on the mantelpiece and gave off very little light.

Javert saw the nun and stopped in astonishment.

As will be remembered, the central fact of Javert’s character—his natural element, the very air he breathed—was reverence for all authority. Nothing could shake it; it allowed no objection and no limit. In his eyes, ecclesiastical authority was naturally the highest of all. He was religious in this matter,

though in a shallow and rigidly proper way, as in everything else. To him, a priest was a mind that never made a mistake; a nun was a being who never sinned. They were souls shut away from the world, with a single door that opened only to let truth pass through.

When he saw the sister, his first impulse was to withdraw.

But another duty also held him and drove him just as strongly the other way. His second impulse was to stay and risk at least one question.

This was Sister Simplice, who had never told a lie in her life. Javert knew that, and for that reason he held her in special reverence.

“Sister,” he said, “are you alone in this room?”

A terrible moment followed, during which the poor portress felt as if she were about to faint.

The sister looked up and replied:

“Yes.”

“Then,” Javert went on, “you must forgive me for insisting. It is my duty. You have not seen a certain person—a man—this evening? He has escaped, and we are looking for him, that Jean Valjean. You have not seen him?”

The sister answered:

“No.”

She lied. She had now lied twice in a row, one after the other, without hesitation and without delay, as people do when they are sacrificing themselves.

“Pardon me,” said Javert, and he withdrew with a deep bow.

O holy maiden, 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 in your favor in paradise!

The sister’s answer seemed so conclusive to Javert that he did not even notice the odd detail of the candle that had just been put out and was still smoking on the table.

An hour later, a man was moving quickly through trees and mist, leaving M. sur M. behind on the road to Paris. That man was Jean Valjean. The testimony of two or three carters who passed him established that he was carrying a bundle and wearing a blouse. Where had he gotten that blouse? No one ever discovered. But an old workman had died in the factory infirmary a few days earlier, leaving behind nothing but his blouse. Perhaps it was that one.

One last word about Fantine.

We all have one mother—the earth. Fantine was returned to that mother.

The curé believed he was doing the right thing—and perhaps he was—by keeping as much money as possible from what Jean Valjean had left for the poor. After all, who was involved? A convict and a fallen woman. So he gave Fantine a very simple funeral and reduced it to the bare minimum known as a pauper’s

burial.

So Fantine was buried in the free corner of the cemetery, the part that belongs to anyone and everyone, where the poor disappear. Fortunately, God knows where to find the soul again. Fantine was laid in the shade among the first bones at hand. She was given over to the mingling of ashes. She was thrown into the common grave. Her grave was like her bed.

[End of Volume I: “Fantine”]

[Illustration: Frontispiece, Volume Two]

[Illustration: Title Page, Volume Two]

CHAPTER I—WHAT YOU FIND ON THE ROAD FROM NIVELLES

Last year, in 1861, on a beautiful morning in May, a traveler—the man telling this story—was coming from Nivelles and heading toward La Hulpe. He was on foot, following a broad paved road that rose and fell over a succession of hills between two rows of trees, making the road seem like a series of enormous waves.

He had passed Lillois and Bois-Seigneur-Isaac. To the west he could see the slate-roofed tower of Braine-l'Alleud, shaped like an upside-down vase. He had just left a wood on a height behind him, and at the corner of a crossroads, beside a sort of weathered gibbet bearing the words _Ancient Barrier No. 4_, stood an inn with this sign on the front: _At the Four Winds_ (Aux Quatre Vents). _Échabeau, Private Café_.

About a quarter of a league farther on, he reached the bottom of a small valley, where water passed under an arch cut through the road embankment. A cluster of thinly scattered but vividly green trees filled the valley on one side of the road, then spread across the meadows on the other and faded away, graceful and almost orderly, in the direction of Braine-l'Alleud.

On the right, close to the road, stood an inn. At its door were a four-wheeled cart, a large bundle of hop-poles, a plough, and a heap of dry brushwood beside a thriving hedge. Lime smoked in a square pit, and a ladder hung along an old lean-to with straw partitions. A young girl was weeding in a field where a huge yellow poster—probably advertising some traveling

entertainment, perhaps a parish fair—fluttered in the wind. At one corner of the inn, beside a pond where a little fleet of ducks was swimming, a badly paved path disappeared into the bushes. The traveler took that path.

After walking about a hundred paces and passing along a fifteenth-century wall topped with a pointed gable and patterned brickwork, he came to a large arched stone doorway with a straight lintel, built in the dark, severe style of Louis XIV and flanked by two flat medallions. A stern façade rose above the door. A wall set at right angles to it almost touched the entrance, hemming it in sharply. In the meadow before the door lay three harrows, with May flowers growing wild through them. The door was shut. Its two worn, decaying panels were fitted with an old rusty knocker.

The sun was lovely. The branches trembled with that gentle May quiver that seems to come more from the nests than from the wind. In a large tree, a bold little bird—probably in love—was singing with wild excitement.

The traveler bent down and examined a fairly large round hollow in the stone to the left, at the base of the doorpost. It looked like part of a sphere had been pressed into it.

At that moment, the two panels of the door opened, and a peasant woman came out.

She saw the traveler and noticed what he was examining.

“A French cannonball did that,” she said to him. Then she added:

“And what you see higher up in the door, near that nail, is the mark of a large iron bullet, as big as an egg. The bullet did not go through the wood.”

“What is this place called?” the traveler asked.

“Hougomont,” said the peasant woman.

The traveler straightened up. He walked on a few steps and moved off to look over the tops of the hedges. Through the trees on the horizon, he saw a slight rise in the ground, and on that rise something that, from that distance, looked like a lion.

He was on the battlefield of Waterloo.

CHAPTER II—HOUGOMONT

Hougomont—this was a place of death, the beginning of the barrier, the first resistance that the great woodcutter of Europe, called Napoleon, met at Waterloo, the first knot struck by his axe.

It was once a château; now it is nothing more than a farm. To antiquarians, Hougomont is known as Hugomons–. This manor was built by Hugo, Sire of Somerel, the same man who endowed the sixth chaplaincy of the Abbey of Villiers.

The traveler pushed open the door, shoved an old calash under the porch with his elbow, and stepped into the courtyard.

The first thing that struck him in this enclosure was a sixteenth-century doorway that now stands in place of an arcade, while everything around it has collapsed. Ruin often gives rise to grandeur. In a wall near the arcade, another arched door opens, dating from the time of Henry IV., and through it one catches a glimpse of the orchard trees. Beside that door are a manure pit, pickaxes, shovels, carts, and an old well with its flagstone and iron reel; a chicken hops about, a turkey spreads its tail, and a chapel rises with a small bell tower above it. Against the chapel wall, a pear tree blooms, trained flat in espalier. This is the courtyard whose capture was one of Napoleon’s dreams. If he could have taken this patch of ground, it might perhaps have given him the world as well. Chickens scatter its dust with their beaks. A growl can be heard: it is a huge dog, baring its teeth and taking the place of the English.

The English fought there with remarkable courage. Cooke's four companies of guards held out there for seven hours against the assault of an army.

Seen on a map as a geometric layout of buildings and enclosures, Hougomont forms a kind of irregular rectangle with one corner cut away. In that corner is the southern gate, protected by the wall that overlooks it from only a gunshot away. Hougomont has two gates: the southern gate, which belongs to the château, and the northern gate, which belongs to the farm. Napoleon sent his brother Jérôme against Hougomont. The divisions of Foy, Guilleminot, and Bachelu threw themselves at it. Nearly all of Reille's corps was committed there, and failed. Kellermann's cannon fire was spent against this heroic stretch of wall. Bauduin's brigade was not strong enough to force Hougomont from the north, and Soye's brigade could do no more on the south than begin to make a breach, without taking it.

The farm buildings line the south side of the courtyard. Part of the north door, shattered by the French, still hangs on the wall. It is made of four planks nailed to two crosspieces, and the marks of the attack can still be seen on it.

The north door, which the French smashed in, now has a patch added to replace the panel hanging on the wall. It stands half-open at the bottom of the paddock. It is set squarely into the north wall that encloses the courtyard, built of stone below and brick above. It is a plain cart gate, like those found on any farm, with two large leaves made of rough planks. Beyond it lie the meadows. The fighting over this entrance was savage. For a

long time, all kinds of bloody handprints could still be seen on the doorposts. It was there that Bauduin was killed.

The violence of the battle still seems to hang over this courtyard. Its horror is still visible. The chaos of the fight seems frozen in place. It feels both alive and dying there, as if it happened only yesterday. The walls seem to be in their death throes. Stones are falling. The breaches seem to cry out. The holes look like wounds. The drooping, trembling trees seem to be trying to escape.

In 1815, this courtyard had more buildings around it than it does today. Structures that have since been demolished then formed salients and corners.

The English barricaded themselves there. The French forced their way in, but they could not hold their position. Beside the chapel, one wing of the château—the only ruin now left of the manor of Hougomont—still stands in a crumbling state, almost as if it had been ripped open. The château served as a dungeon, and the chapel as a blockhouse. Men slaughtered one another there. The French were fired on from every side—from behind the walls, from the tops of the garrets, from the depths of the cellars, through every window, through every air hole, through every crack in the stone. They brought bundles of sticks and set fire to both walls and men. They answered grapeshot with flames.

In the ruined wing, you can see the stripped-out rooms of the main brick building through windows fitted with iron bars. English guards once lay in ambush in those rooms. The spiral

staircase, cracked from the ground floor all the way to the roof, looks like the inside of a broken shell. The staircase rises two stories. When the English were trapped there and crowded onto the upper steps, they cut away the lower ones. Those steps were made of large slabs of blue stone, now lying in a heap among the nettles. Five or six steps still cling to the wall; a trident is carved into the first. These unreachable steps remain solid in their sockets. Everything else looks like a jaw with its teeth torn out. Two old trees stand there: one is dead; the other is wounded at the base and covered with green leaves in April. Since 1815, it has begun growing through the staircase.

A massacre took place in the chapel. Its interior, now peaceful again, is striking. Mass has not been celebrated there since the slaughter. Even so, the altar remains: a plain wooden altar set against a backdrop of rough-cut stone. Four whitewashed walls, a door facing the altar, two small arched windows, a large wooden crucifix above the door, and beneath the crucifix a square air hole plugged with a bundle of hay; on the floor, in one corner, an old window frame with all its glass shattered—this is the chapel. Near the altar, a fifteenth-century wooden statue of Saint Anne is nailed to the wall; the head of the infant Jesus has been knocked off by a large ball. The French held the chapel for a moment, then were driven out, and they set it on fire. The flames filled the building. It became a furnace. The door burned, the floor burned, but the wooden Christ did not. The fire consumed his feet, and only blackened stumps can now be seen; then it stopped—a miracle, according to the people of the area. The infant Jesus, beheaded, was less fortunate than the Christ.

The walls are covered with inscriptions. Near the feet of Christ, this name can be read: _Henquinez_. Then these others: _Conde de Rio Maior Marques y Marquesa de Almagro (Habana)_. There are French names marked with exclamation points—a sign of anger. The wall was freshly whitewashed in 1849. The nations traded insults there.

At the door of this chapel, they found a body with an axe still in its hand. The body was that of Sub-Lieutenant Legros.

When you come out of the chapel, you can see a well on the left. There are two wells in this courtyard. You might ask why this one has no bucket or pulley. It is because no one draws water from it anymore. And why not? Because it is full of skeletons.

The last person to draw water from this well was named Guillaume van Kylsom. He was a peasant who lived at Hougomont and worked there as a gardener. On June 18, 1815, his family fled and hid in the woods.

For many days and nights, the forest around the Abbey of Villiers gave shelter to these unfortunate people, scattered and homeless. Even today, certain traces can still be recognized, such as the old trunks of burned trees that mark the places where these poor people camped, trembling deep in the thickets.

Guillaume van Kylsom stayed at Hougomont "to guard the château" and hid in the cellar. The English found him there. They dragged him out of his hiding place, and the soldiers forced the terrified man to serve them by striking him with the flat sides of their swords. They were thirsty, and Guillaume brought them water. He drew it from this well. Many men drank their last drink there. This well, from which so many of the dead had drunk, was itself destined to die.

After the battle, they were in a hurry to bury the bodies. Death has a way of troubling victory, and pestilence follows glory. Typhus comes with triumph. The well was deep, and they turned it into a tomb. Three hundred bodies were thrown into it.

Perhaps they acted too quickly. Were they all really dead? Legend says they were not. It is said that on the night after the burial, faint voices could be heard calling up from the well.

This well stands alone in the middle of the courtyard. It is enclosed on three sides by walls of stone and brick, arranged like the folded panels of a screen so that they resemble a small square tower. The fourth side is open. That is where the water was drawn. In the back wall there is a rough, misshapen opening, perhaps a hole made by a shell. This little tower once had a platform, but only the beams remain. On the right, the iron supports of the well form a cross. If you lean over the edge, your gaze disappears into a deep brick shaft packed with layered shadow. Around the well, the bottoms of the walls are hidden by a growth of nettles.

Unlike most wells in Belgium, this one does not have the large blue stone slab that serves as a kind of table. Here, that slab has been replaced by a crossbeam, against which five or six shapeless pieces of knotted, hardened wood are leaning; they look like enormous bones. The pail, chain, and pulley are gone now, but the stone basin that caught the overflow is still there. Rainwater gathers in it, and from time to time a bird from the nearby woods comes there to drink before flying off again. One building in these ruins, the farmhouse, is still inhabited. Its door opens onto the courtyard. On that door, beside a handsome Gothic lock-plate, is an iron handle set with slanting trefoils. At the moment when the Hanoverian lieutenant Wilda seized that handle to take refuge in the farm, a French sapper cut off his hand with an axe.

The family living in the house are descendants of Guillaume van Kylsom, the old gardener, long dead. A gray-haired woman said to us: “I was there. I was three years old. My older sister was frightened and cried. They carried us off into the woods. I went in my mother’s arms. We pressed our ears to the ground to listen. I imitated the cannon and went _boum_! boum!_”

We were told that a door on the left side of the courtyard opened into the orchard. The orchard is dreadful.

It has three parts—almost three acts. First comes a garden, then an orchard, and finally a wood. All three lie within the same enclosure: at the entrance stand the château and farm buildings; on the left runs a hedge; on the right, a wall; and at the far end, another wall. The wall on the right is brick, and the one at the back is stone. You enter the garden first. It slopes downward, is planted with gooseberry bushes, overrun with wild growth, and ends in a monumental cut-stone terrace with a balustrade that curves in two sweeps.

It was once a seignorial garden in the early French style that came before Le Nôtre; today it is a ruin tangled with briars. The pilasters are topped with globes that look like stone cannonballs. You can still count forty-three balusters standing on their bases; the rest lie fallen in the grass. Nearly all are marked by bullet scars. One broken baluster has been set on the pediment like a shattered leg.

It was in this garden, lower down than the orchard, that six light infantrymen of the 1st forced their way in and, unable to escape, were tracked down and cornered like bears in their dens. They

accepted battle against two Hanoverian companies, one of them armed with carbines. The Hanoverians lined the balustrade and fired from above. The infantrymen answered from below—six against two hundred—fearless and with no cover but the currant bushes. It took them a quarter of an hour to die.

You go up a few steps and pass from the garden into the orchard itself. There, within those few square fathoms, fifteen hundred men fell in less than an hour. The wall seems as if it could start the battle again. The thirty-eight loopholes the English cut into it at uneven heights are still there. In front of the sixth stand two English granite tombs. The loopholes appear only in the south wall, because the main attack came from that side. On the outside, a tall hedge hides the wall. The French advanced thinking they faced only a hedge, crossed it, and suddenly found the wall—both a barrier and an ambush—with the English guards behind it. At once all thirty-eight loopholes poured out grape-shot and bullets, and Soye's brigade shattered against it. That was how Waterloo began.

Even so, the orchard was captured. With no ladders, the French climbed the walls with their bare hands. They fought at close quarters among the trees. The grass here has been drenched in blood. A Nassau battalion, seven hundred men strong, was crushed there. The outer face of the wall, at which Kellermann's two batteries were aimed, is chewed up by grapeshot.

In May, this orchard feels alive, like any other. It has buttercups and daisies. The grass grows high. Cart-horses graze there. Lines hung with drying linen stretch between the trees and

make passersby duck their heads. As you cross this untilled ground, your foot sinks into molehills. In the middle of the grass lies an uprooted tree trunk, still green. Major Blackmann leaned against it as he died. Beneath a large nearby tree fell the German general Duplat, descended from a French family that fled after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. An old, failing apple tree leans sharply to one side, its wound patched with straw and clay. Nearly all the apple trees are collapsing with age. Not one of them has escaped a bullet or a biscayan.6 Dead tree skeletons are everywhere in this orchard. Crows pass through their branches, and at the far end lies a wood full of violets.

Bauduin dead, Foy wounded, fire, massacre, slaughter, a stream made of English blood, French blood, German blood mixed together in fury, a well packed with corpses, the regiments of Nassau and Brunswick destroyed, Duplat dead, Blackmann dead, the English Guards mutilated, twenty French battalions—besides the forty from Reille's corps—cut to pieces, three thousand men in that hovel of Hougomont alone struck down, hacked apart, shot, burned, their throats cut—and all of it so that today a peasant can say to a traveler: Monsieur, give me three francs, and if you like, I will explain the affair of Waterloo!_

CHAPTER III—JUNE EIGHTEENTH, 1815

Let us go back—that is one of the storyteller's rights—and place ourselves once more in the year 1815, and even a little before the time when the events told in the first part of this book began.

If it had not rained during the night of June 17–18, 1815, Europe's fate would have been different. A few more or fewer drops of water decided Napoleon's fall. All Providence needed to make Waterloo the end of Austerlitz was a little extra rain, and a single untimely cloud crossing the sky was enough to bring a world crashing down.

The battle of Waterloo could not begin until half past eleven, and that gave Blücher time to arrive. Why? Because the ground was wet. The artillery had to wait until the soil grew a little firmer before it could move.

Napoleon was an artillery officer, and he felt the force of this delay. At the core of this extraordinary commander was the man who wrote in his report to the Directory on Aboukir, _One of our cannonballs killed six men_. He planned all his battles around artillery fire. The secret of his victories was to concentrate his guns on a single point. He treated the enemy general's strategy like a fortress and blasted an opening in it. He buried the weak spot under grapeshot. He used cannon to bring battles together and to break them apart. There was something of the marksman in his genius. Breaking infantry squares, crushing regiments,

shattering lines, smashing and scattering masses of men—for him, everything depended on striking, striking, striking without pause—and he gave that work to the cannonball. It was a formidable method, and when joined to genius, it made this dark champion of war's brutal boxing invincible for fifteen years.

On June 18, 1815, he depended even more heavily on his artillery because he had superior numbers. Wellington had only one hundred and fifty-nine guns; Napoleon had two hundred and forty.

If the ground had been dry, and the artillery able to move, the fighting would have begun at six in the morning. The battle would have been won and finished by two o'clock, three hours before fortune turned in the Prussians' favor. How much blame for losing this battle belongs to Napoleon? Was the shipwreck the pilot's fault?

Was it Napoleon's obvious physical decline that made this period so difficult by weakening him from within? Had twenty years of war worn down not just the body but the spirit as well, dulling the blade as much as the scabbard? Did the old soldier fatally interfere with the commander? In short, was this genius, as many major historians have believed, passing through an eclipse? Did he throw himself into a kind of frenzy to hide his failing strength from himself? Did he begin to hesitate, misled by the illusion of adventure? Had he become—something serious in a general—unaware of danger? Is there an age at which these great practical men, these giants of action, become short-sighted in their genius? Old age has no power over geniuses of the ideal; for Dantes and Michael Angelos, to grow

old is to grow greater. But for Hannibals and Bonapartes, does it mean becoming less? Had Napoleon lost his sure instinct for victory? Had he reached the point where he could no longer see the hidden rock, sense the trap, or recognize the crumbling edge of the abyss? Had he lost his gift for detecting disaster? He who had once known every road to triumph, and from the height of his lightning chariot had pointed them out with sovereign certainty—had he now entered that dark state of bewilderment in which he could drive his roaring legions straight toward the precipice? At forty-six, had he been seized by a final madness? Was that titanic driver of destiny now nothing more than a colossal gambler?

We do not believe so.

His battle plan was, by everyone's admission, a masterpiece. He meant to strike straight at the center of the Allied line, break through the enemy, and split them in two. He would drive the British half back toward Hal and the Prussian half toward Tongres. He would reduce Wellington and Blücher to two shattered fragments, take Mont-Saint-Jean, seize Brussels, throw the Germans back to the Rhine, and drive the English into the sea. According to Napoleon, all of that was contained in this battle. The rest would be seen afterward.

We are not trying to give a history of the Battle of Waterloo. One of the scenes at the foundation of the story we are telling is connected to that battle, but the battle itself is not our subject. Besides, that history has already been written, and written brilliantly: from one point of view by Napoleon, and from another by a whole constellation of historians.

For our part, we leave the historians to their disputes. We are only a distant witness, a passerby on the field, a searcher bending over soil made entirely of human flesh, perhaps mistaking appearances for reality. We have no right to challenge, in the name of science, a body of facts that no doubt contains illusions. We have neither military experience nor strategic skill enough to build a system. In our view, a chain of accidents ruled both leaders at Waterloo. And when the matter is destiny—that mysterious culprit—we judge as the people do, like that shrewd judge, the crowd.

CHAPTER IV—A

Anyone who wants a clear picture of the Battle of Waterloo need only imagine a capital A laid out on the ground. The left stroke of the A is the road to Nivelles; the right stroke is the road to Genappe; the crossbar is the sunken road to Ohain from Braine-l'Alleud. The top of the A is Mont-Saint-Jean, where Wellington stands; the lower left point is Hougomont, where Reille is posted with Jérôme Bonaparte; the right point is Belle-Alliance, where Napoleon was. At the center of that crossbar lies the exact spot where the battle's final word was spoken. It is there that the lion has been placed, an unintended symbol of the supreme heroism of the Imperial Guard.

The triangle at the top of the A, enclosed by the two strokes and the crossbar, is the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean. The struggle for this plateau was the whole battle. The wings of the two armies stretched right and left along the roads to Genappe and Nivelles: d'Erlon facing Picton, Reille facing Hill.

Beyond the top of the A, behind the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean, lies the forest of Soignes.

As for the plain itself, the reader should imagine a vast expanse of rolling ground. Each rise overlooks the next, and all the slopes climb toward Mont-Saint-Jean, where they end at the forest.

Two enemy armies on a battlefield are like two wrestlers. The struggle is to get hold of the other around the waist. Each tries to throw the other off balance. They grab onto anything they

can use: a bush becomes support; the corner of a wall gives a shoulder something to brace against; if there is no hut behind which they can form up, a regiment gives way; a rise or dip in the ground, an unexpected turn in the landscape, a crossroads reached at the right moment, a grove, a ravine—all can stop the heel of that giant called an army and keep it from retreating. Whoever leaves the field is defeated. That is why the commander in charge must inspect even the smallest clump of trees and study closely the slightest contour of the ground.

The two generals had carefully studied the plain of Mont-Saint-Jean, now called the plain of Waterloo. The year before, Wellington, with remarkable foresight, had examined it as a possible site for a great battle. On that ground, and for that duel, on June 18, Wellington held the stronger position and Napoleon the weaker one. The English army stood on higher ground; the French army was below.

It is hardly necessary to describe Napoleon on horseback, spyglass in hand, on the heights of Rossomme at daybreak on June 18, 1815. Everyone has already seen him before we can present him. That calm profile beneath the little three-cornered hat from the school of Brienne; that green uniform; the white facings hiding the star of the Legion of Honor; the greatcoat covering his epaulets; the bit of red ribbon showing beneath his vest; the leather breeches; the white horse with its purple velvet saddlecloth, marked at the corners with crowned N's and eagles; the Hessian boots over silk stockings; the silver spurs; the sword of Marengo—that whole image of the last of the Caesars lives in every imagination, greeted with cheers by

some and watched sternly by others.

For a long time, that figure stood fully in the light only because of the legendary haze that gathers around most heroes and hides the truth for a shorter or longer time. But now history has arrived, and daylight with it.

The light of history is merciless. It has this strange, almost divine power: though it is pure light, and because it is nothing but light, it often throws shadows where people once saw only brilliance. From the same man, it creates two different figures, and one turns on the other and judges it. The shadow of the despot struggles against the radiance of the leader. From this comes a truer standard in the final judgment of nations. Babylon violated diminishes Alexander; Rome in chains diminishes Caesar; Jerusalem murdered diminishes Titus. Tyranny trails behind the tyrant. It is a misfortune for a man to leave behind him a darkness shaped like himself.

CHAPTER V—THE OBSCURE ELEMENT IN BATTLES

Everyone knows the first phase of this battle: a beginning that was confused, uncertain, hesitant, and threatening to both armies, but even more threatening to the English than to the French.

It had rained all night. The downpour had torn up the ground, and water had collected here and there in the hollows of the plain as though in barrels. In some places, the artillery wagons sank to the axles. The horses' straps were soaked with runny mud. If the wheat and rye crushed under this mass of transport on the march had not filled the ruts and spread a layer beneath the wheels, all movement—especially in the low ground toward Papelotte—would have been impossible.

The engagement began late. As we have already explained, Napoleon liked to keep tight control of his artillery, using it like a pistol and aiming it first at one point in the battle, then at another. He wanted to wait until the horse batteries could move and gallop freely. For that, the sun needed to come out and dry the ground. But the sun did not appear. This was no Austerlitz rendezvous. 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 fighting opened fiercely—perhaps with more violence than the Emperor would have wanted—on the French left wing at Hougomont. At the same time, Napoleon attacked the center by

throwing Quiot's brigade against La Haie-Sainte, while Ney drove the French right wing forward against the English left, which rested on Papelotte.

The attack on Hougomont was partly a diversion. The idea was to draw Wellington there and make him shift to the left. The plan would have worked if four companies of the English Guards and the brave Belgians in Perponcher's division had not held the position so firmly. Because they did, Wellington did not need to concentrate his forces there. He only had to send four more companies of Guards and one battalion from Brunswick as reinforcements.

The French attack on the right at Papelotte was meant to crush the English left, cut off the road to Brussels, block the way for any Prussians who might arrive, force Mont-Saint-Jean, and drive Wellington back toward Hougomont, then to Braine-l'Alleud, and then to Hal. Nothing could have seemed easier. Aside from a few setbacks, the attack succeeded. Papelotte was taken, and La Haie-Sainte was captured.

One detail should be noted. The English infantry, especially Kempt's brigade, included many raw recruits. These young soldiers showed real courage against our formidable infantry. Their inexperience actually helped them face the danger with boldness. They were especially effective as skirmishers, since a skirmisher, left somewhat on his own, becomes, in a sense, his own general. These recruits showed something of the French gift for quick thinking and fierce energy. This inexperienced infantry had dash. Wellington did not like that.

After La Haie-Sainte was taken, the battle hung in the balance.

There is an obscure stretch in this day, from noon until four o'clock. The middle part of the battle is almost impossible to make out, and it shares the darkness of close hand-to-hand fighting. A kind of twilight hangs over it. In that haze we glimpse huge surges of movement, a dizzying mirage, and the equipment of war, much of it almost unknown today: hanging colbacks, swinging sabre-taches, cross-belts, grenade cartridge-boxes, hussar dolmans, red boots creased a thousand times, heavy shakos wrapped with cords, the nearly black infantry of Brunswick mixed with the scarlet infantry of England, English soldiers with large white circular shoulder-pads for epaulets, Hanoverian light cavalry with their oblong leather helmets, brass ornaments, and red horse-tails, the Scotch with bare knees and plaids, and the tall white gaiters of our grenadiers. These are pictures, not strategic lines—what Salvator Rosa would need, not what suits the purposes of Gribeauval.

Every battle always contains a measure of storm and confusion. _Quid obscurum, quid divinum_. Each historian picks out, to some degree, the feature that strikes him most in the middle of that chaos. Whatever the generals may have planned, the collision of armed masses rises and falls in ways no one can calculate. As the fighting goes on, the plans of both commanders overlap and distort each other. One part of the battlefield consumes more men than another, just as some soils, being more or less porous, absorb water more or less quickly. More soldiers have to be thrown in than anyone intended; these are the unforeseen

expenditures of war. The battle line sways and ripples like a thread. Streams of blood break out without logic. The fronts of the armies tremble. Regiments jut out and sink back like capes and gulfs as they advance and withdraw. All these reefs are constantly shifting in front of one another. Where infantry stood, artillery now arrives. Cavalry charges where the artillery had been. Battalions are like smoke. Something was there; look for it. It is gone. The open spaces move. The dark folds advance and fall back. A kind of wind from the grave drives these tragic multitudes forward, throws them back, stretches them out, and scatters them. What is a clash of arms? An oscillation. The stillness of a mathematical plan can capture a minute, not a whole day. To paint a battle, you need one of those great artists who carry chaos in their brush. Rembrandt is better than Vandermeulen; Vandermeulen, accurate at noon, is false by three o'clock. Geometry deceives; only the hurricane tells the truth. That is what gives Folard the right to contradict Polybius. Let us add that there comes a moment when the battle breaks down into separate combats, narrows, and scatters into countless individual acts of bravery which, to borrow Napoleon's own phrase, "belong rather to the biography of the regiments than to the history of the army." In such a case, the historian plainly has the right to summarize the whole. He can do no more than grasp the main outlines of the struggle, and no narrator, however conscientious, can fix with absolute certainty the shape of that dreadful cloud called a battle.

What is true of all great battles is especially true of Waterloo.

Nevertheless, at a certain moment in the afternoon, the battle reached a decisive point.

CHAPTER VI—FOUR O'CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON

Toward four o'clock, the English army was in serious trouble. The Prince of Orange commanded the center, Hill the right wing, and Picton the left. Desperate and fearless, the Prince of Orange shouted to the Hollando-Belgians, "Nassau! Brunswick! Never retreat!" Hill, after being weakened, had moved up to support Wellington. Picton was dead. At the very moment the English captured the flag of the French 105th of the line, the French killed the English general Picton with a bullet through the head. For Wellington, the battle rested on two key strongpoints: Hougomont and La Haie-Sainte. Hougomont was still holding out, but it was on fire. La Haie-Sainte had fallen. Of the German battalion that defended it, only forty-two men survived. All the officers except five were dead or captured. Three thousand fighters had been slaughtered in that barn. An English Guards sergeant, the best boxer in England and said by his comrades to be invulnerable, had been killed there by a small French drummer boy. Baring had been driven out, Alten cut down. 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 cut to pieces. That brave cavalry had broken under the lancers of Bro and the cuirassiers of Travers. Of twelve hundred horses, only six hundred remained. Of three lieutenant-colonels, two lay on the ground: Hamilton wounded, Mater dead. Ponsonby had fallen, pierced

by seven lance thrusts. Gordon was dead. Marsh was dead. Two divisions, the fifth and the sixth, had been destroyed.

With Hougomont damaged and La Haie-Sainte taken, only one rallying point remained: the center. That point still stood firm. Wellington reinforced it. He called in Hill from Merle-Braine. He called in Chassé from Braine-l'Alleud.

The center of the English army was slightly hollowed inward, tightly packed, and firmly positioned. It held the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean, with the village behind it and the slope in front, which was fairly steep at that time. It was anchored on that solid stone house which then belonged to the estate of Nivelles and marked the crossing of the roads—a sixteenth-century building so strong that cannonballs struck it and bounced off without damaging it. All around the plateau, the English had cut gaps in the hedges, opened firing slits in the hawthorn trees, pushed the mouth of a cannon between two branches, and turned the shrubs into defenses. Artillery lay hidden there in the brushwood. This Carthaginian kind of labor, clearly allowed by war, which permits traps, was carried out so skillfully that Haxo, whom the Emperor had sent at nine in the morning to scout the enemy batteries, saw none of it. He returned and reported to Napoleon that there were no obstacles except the two barricades blocking the roads to Nivelles and Genappe. It was the season when the grain stood high; at the edge of the plateau, a battalion of Kempt's brigade, the 95th, armed with carbines, was hidden in the tall wheat.

With these supports and protections in place, the center of the Anglo-Dutch army was strongly positioned. The danger in this position lay in the forest of Soignes, which then bordered the battlefield and was cut through by the ponds of Groenendael and Boitsfort. An army could not retreat into it without falling apart; the regiments would have broken up at once. The artillery would have been lost in the marshes. According to many men skilled in the art of war—though others dispute it—the retreat would have turned into a chaotic rout.

To strengthen the center, Wellington brought in one of Chassé's brigades from the right wing, one of Wincke's brigades from the left, and Clinton's division. As reinforcements for his English troops—for Halkett's regiments, Mitchell's brigades, and Maitland's guards—he added the infantry of Brunswick, Nassau's contingent, Kielmansegg's Hanoverians, and Ompteda's Germans. That gave him twenty-six battalions under his direct command. As Charras says, "The right wing was drawn back toward the centre." A huge battery stood hidden behind earth-filled sacks on the spot where what is now called the "Museum of Waterloo" stands. In addition, Wellington had Somerset's Dragoon Guards, fourteen hundred strong, stationed behind a rise in the ground. They were the remaining half of the famous English cavalry. Ponsonby had been destroyed; Somerset remained.

The battery, which would almost have become a redoubt if it had been finished, stood behind a very low garden wall reinforced with sandbags and a broad slope of earth. The work was incomplete; there had not been time to add a palisade.

Wellington, anxious but outwardly unmoved, stayed on horseback all day in the same position, a little in front of the old mill of Mont-Saint-Jean, which still exists, under an elm tree that an Englishman—an enthusiastic vandal—later bought for two hundred francs, cut down, and carried away. Wellington's heroism was cold and controlled. Bullets poured down around him. His aide-de-camp, Gordon, fell beside him. Lord Hill, pointing to a shell that had burst, asked him, "My lord, what are your orders if you are killed?" "Do as I do," Wellington replied. To Clinton he said briefly, "Hold this spot to the last man." The day was clearly going badly. Wellington shouted to his old comrades of Talavera, Vittoria, and Salamanca: "Boys, can we think of retreat? Think of old England!"

Toward four o'clock, the English line fell back. Suddenly, nothing could be seen on the crest of the plateau except the artillery and the sharpshooters; everything else had vanished. The regiments, driven off by shells and French gunfire, withdrew into the hollow now crossed by the back road from the farm of Mont-Saint-Jean. A backward movement began. The English front disappeared from view. Wellington pulled back. "The beginning of a retreat!" cried Napoleon.

CHAPTER VII—NAPOLEON IN A GOOD MOOD

The Emperor, though sick and uncomfortable on horseback because of a local ailment, had never been in better spirits than he was that day. His usually unreadable face had been smiling since morning. On June 18, that deep soul hidden behind a marble mask shone with a blind confidence. The man who had been somber at Austerlitz was cheerful at Waterloo. Even those most favored by destiny make mistakes. Our joys are made partly of shadow. The highest smile belongs to God alone.

Ridet Cæsar, Pompeius flebit_, said the soldiers of the Fulminatrix Legion. Pompey was not fated to weep on that occasion, but Cæsar certainly laughed. At one o'clock the night before, while riding out through storm and rain with Bertrand to reconnoiter the communes near Rossomme, Napoleon had been pleased by the sight of the long line of English campfires lighting the whole horizon from Frischemont to Braine-l'Alleud. It seemed to him that fate, to which he had given an appointment on the field of Waterloo, had arrived exactly on time. He stopped his horse and remained still for a while, watching the lightning and listening to the thunder. Then this fatalist was heard to throw into the darkness this mysterious remark: "We are in accord." Napoleon was wrong. They were no longer in accord.

He did not sleep for a moment; every instant of that night brought him pleasure. He rode along the line of the main outposts, stopping here and there to speak with the sentries. At

half past two, near the wood of Hougomont, he heard the sound of a column on the march. He immediately thought Wellington was retreating. “It is the English rear guard moving off in preparation for decamping,” he said. “I will capture the six thousand English who have just arrived at Ostend.” He spoke freely and at length. He recovered the lively energy he had shown when he landed on the first of March, when he pointed out to the Grand Marshal the enthusiastic peasant at the Gulf Juan and cried, “Well, Bertrand, here is a reinforcement already!” On the night of June 17 to 18, he mocked Wellington. “That little Englishman needs a lesson,” said Napoleon. The rain grew heavier, and the thunder rolled as the Emperor spoke.

At half past three in the morning, he lost one of his illusions. Officers sent out to scout returned and told him that the enemy was making no move. Nothing was stirring. Not a single bivouac fire had gone out. The English army was asleep. The silence on the ground was complete; the only sound came from the sky. At four o’clock, the scouts brought him a peasant. The man had served as a guide to a brigade of English cavalry, probably Vivian’s brigade, which was on its way to take up position in the village of Ohain, on the extreme left. At five o’clock, two Belgian deserters told him that they had just left their regiment and that the English army was ready for battle. “So much the better!” Napoleon exclaimed. “I would rather crush them than merely drive them back.”

That morning he got off his horse in the mud on the slope that meets the Plancenoit road at an angle. He had a kitchen table and a peasant’s chair brought from the farm of Rossomme, sat

down with a bundle of straw under him like a carpet, and spread the map of the battlefield across the table. As he did, he said to Soult, “A fine checkerboard.”

Because of the rain during the night, the supply wagons had sunk into the muddy roads and could not arrive by morning. The soldiers had not slept. They were soaked and had nothing to eat. Even so, Napoleon cheerfully said to Ney, “We have ninety chances out of a hundred.” At eight o’clock, the Emperor’s breakfast was brought to him, and he invited several generals to join him. During the meal, someone mentioned that Wellington had attended a ball in Brussels two nights earlier, at the Duchess of Richmond’s. Soult, a hard soldier with the face of an archbishop, said, “The ball takes place to-day.” The Emperor joked with Ney, who said, “Wellington will not be so simple as to wait for Your Majesty.” Yet that was exactly his habit. “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 flashes of humor in such a giant of a man are worth noting. He was the one who called his grenadiers “his grumblers.” He pinched their ears. He tugged their moustaches. “The Emperor did nothing but play pranks on us,” one of them said. During the mysterious voyage from the island of Elba to France, on the 27th of February, out on the open sea, the French war brig _Le Zéphyr_ came across the brig _L’Inconstant_, on which Napoleon was hidden, and asked _L’Inconstant_ for news of Napoleon. The Emperor, still wearing in his hat the white and amaranth cockade sprinkled with bees that he had adopted on the isle of Elba, laughingly grabbed the

speaking-trumpet and answered for himself, “The Emperor is well.” A man who can laugh like that is on familiar terms with events. Napoleon gave way to several bursts of this laughter during the breakfast at Waterloo. After breakfast, he reflected for a quarter of an hour. Then two generals sat down on a bundle of straw, with pens in hand and paper on their knees, and the Emperor dictated the order of battle to them.

At nine o’clock, just as the French army—drawn up in echelons and moving forward in five columns—had fully deployed, the divisions in two lines, the artillery placed between the brigades, the bands at their head, and as the march sounded out with rolling drums and blaring trumpets, while a vast, joyful sea of helmets, sabres, and bayonets filled the horizon, the Emperor was moved and cried out twice, “Magnificent! Magnificent!”

Between nine o’clock and half-past ten, the entire army—remarkable as it may seem—had moved into position and drawn up in six lines, forming, as the Emperor put it, “the figure of six V’s.” A few moments after the army was arranged for battle, in the deep silence that comes before a storm and before fighting begins, the Emperor looked at the three batteries of twelve-pounders. By his order, they had been detached from the corps of Erlon, Reille, and Lobau, and were meant to open the action by taking Mont-Saint-Jean, which stood at the meeting point of the Nivelles and Genappe roads. He tapped Haxo on the shoulder and said, “There are four and twenty handsome maids, General.”

Confident of the outcome, he smiled encouragingly at the company of sappers from the first corps as they passed before him. He had assigned them to barricade Mont-Saint-Jean as soon as the village was taken. In all this calm assurance, only one remark carried a note of proud pity. Seeing on his left, at the place where a large tomb now stands, those splendid Scotch Grays gathering with their magnificent horses, he said, “It is a pity.”

Then he got on his horse, rode past Rossomme, and chose as his observation post a narrow rise of ground on the right side of the road from Genappe to Brussels. This was his second position during the battle. His third position—the one he took at seven o’clock in the evening, between La Belle-Alliance and La Haie-Sainte—was a dangerous one. It was a somewhat raised knoll, still there today, behind which the Guard was drawn up on the slope of the plain. Around this knoll, cannonballs struck the paving stones of the road and bounced back, reaching even Napoleon himself. As at Brienne, he had above him the whistling of bullets and heavy artillery fire. At the very spot where his horse had stood, people found moldy cannonballs, old sword blades, and misshapen projectiles eaten away by rust. Scabra rubigine_. A few years ago, a sixty-pound shell was dug up there, still loaded, with its fuse broken off flush with the bomb. It was at this last position that the Emperor said to his guide, Lacoste—a frightened, hostile peasant tied to a hussar’s saddle, who turned around at every burst of grapeshot and kept trying to hide behind Napoleon—“Fool, this is disgraceful! You’ll get yourself killed by a shot in the back.” The man writing these lines has himself found, in the crumbly soil of this knoll, by

turning over the sand, the remains of the neck of a bomb, broken down by forty-six years of oxidation, and old pieces of iron that snapped between the fingers like elder twigs.

Everyone knows that the rolling contours of the plain where Napoleon and Wellington fought are no longer what they were on June 18, 1815. In taking material from this sorrowful battlefield to build a monument to it, people destroyed its true shape. History, thrown off, can no longer recognize the ground. It was disfigured in order to glorify it. When Wellington saw Waterloo again two years later, he cried, “They have altered my field of battle!” Where the great mound of earth topped by the lion stands today, there used to be a rise that sloped gently toward the Nivelles road, but dropped almost like a steep bank on the side of the highway to Genappe. The height of that bank can still be judged by the two mounds of the two great tombs that border the road from Genappe to Brussels: the English tomb on the left, and the German tomb on the right. There is no French tomb. That whole plain is France’s tomb. Because thousands upon thousands of cartloads of earth were used to build the mound, one hundred and fifty feet high and half a mile around, the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean can now be reached by an easy incline. On the day of the battle, especially on the side of La Haie-Sainte, it was steep and hard to approach. The slope there was so sharp that the English cannon could not see the farm below in the valley, which was the center of the fighting. On June 18, 1815, the rain had made the climb even worse. The mud made the ascent harder still, and the men not only slipped backward but became stuck in the mire. Along the crest of the plateau ran a kind of trench that no distant observer could

possibly detect.

What was this trench? Here is the explanation. Braine-l'Alleud is a Belgian village, and Ohain is another. Hidden by the curves of the land, the two villages are linked by a road about a league and a half long. It crosses the plain along its rolling surface, then at times dips into the hills and disappears in them like a furrow, so that in some places the road becomes a ravine. In 1815, as now, this road crossed the crest of the Mont-Saint-Jean plateau between the two highways from Genappe and Nivelles. The difference is that today it lies level with the plain; then it was a sunken road. The two slopes have since been taken for the monumental mound. This road was, and still is, a trench through most of its length: a hollow cut, sometimes a dozen feet deep, with banks so steep that they sometimes gave way, especially in winter under heavy rain. Accidents happened there. At the Braine-l'Alleud entrance, the road was so narrow that a passerby was crushed by a cart, as a stone cross near the cemetery records. It gives the name of the dead man, _Monsieur Bernard Debrye, Merchant of Brussels_, and the date of the accident, _February, 1637_.8 On the Mont-Saint-Jean plateau, the road was so deep that in 1783 a peasant, Mathieu Nicaise, was crushed there by a collapse of the slope, as another stone cross states. The top of that cross has disappeared during the clearing of the ground, but its overturned base can still be seen 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 the battle, this sunken road along the crest of Mont-Saint-Jean gave no sign of its existence. It was a trench

at the top of the slope, a rut hidden in the earth. It could not be seen—and that made it terrible.

CHAPTER VIII—THE EMPEROR ASKS THE GUIDE LACOSTE A QUESTION

So, on the morning of Waterloo, Napoleon was satisfied.

And he was right: the battle plan he had formed was, as we have seen, truly admirable.

Once the battle had begun, all its rapid shifts and reversals passed before Napoleon: the stubborn defense of Hougomont; the tenacious stand at La Haie-Sainte; Bauduin killed; Foy disabled; the unexpected wall that shattered Soye's brigade; Guilleminot's fatal carelessness when he had neither petard nor powder bags; the batteries bogged down in the mud; the fifteen unsupported guns overwhelmed in a sunken road by Uxbridge; the shells that fell among the English ranks but did little damage, sinking into the rain-soaked ground and doing no more than throwing up eruptions of mud, so that even the canister only splashed; Piré's useless feint at Braine-l'Alleud; all that cavalry, fifteen squadrons, nearly wiped out; the English right badly shaken, the left badly mauled; Ney's strange error in massing the four divisions of the first corps instead of arranging them in echelon; men exposed to grapeshot, packed in ranks twenty-seven deep across a front of two hundred; the terrible gaps cannon fire tore through those masses; the attacking columns thrown into disorder; the side battery suddenly revealed on their flank; Bourgeois, Donzelot, and Durutte put in danger; Quiot driven back; Lieutenant Vieux, that Hercules

trained at the Polytechnic School, wounded just as he was smashing in the door of La Haie-Sainte with an axe under the direct fire of the English barricade that blocked the angle of the road from Genappe to Brussels; Marcognet's division trapped between infantry and cavalry, cut down almost at the mouths of the guns in the grain by Best and Pack, then sabred by Ponsonby; his battery of seven guns spiked; the Prince of Saxe-Weimar still holding and defending both Frischemont and Smohain in spite of the Comte d'Erlon; the flag of the 105th taken, the flag of the 45th captured; that black Prussian hussar stopped by scouts from the flying column of three hundred light cavalry between Wavre and Plancenoit; the alarming reports brought by prisoners; Grouchy's delay; fifteen hundred men killed in the orchard of Hougomont in less than an hour; eighteen hundred men struck down in even less time around La Haie-Sainte. Yet all these violent episodes, drifting past like battle clouds, scarcely disturbed Napoleon's gaze and did not darken that face of imperial certainty. Napoleon was used to looking war straight in the face. He did not count up its heartbreaking details one by one. Individual losses meant little to him, so long as they added up to the one total that mattered: victory. He was not troubled if the opening moves went wrong, because he believed himself master and owner of the end. He knew how to wait, placing himself, as he thought, beyond risk, and he dealt with destiny as if it were his equal. He seemed to say to fate: you would not dare.

Made up of equal parts light and shadow, Napoleon believed he was protected when he did good and excused when he did wrong. He felt—or imagined—that events themselves were in

league with him, almost his accomplices, giving him something like the invulnerability of the heroes of antiquity.

And yet, after Bérésina, Leipzig, and Fontainebleau, it would seem that Waterloo should have inspired distrust. A mysterious darkening could be felt in the depths of the sky.

The moment Wellington fell back, Napoleon trembled. All at once he saw the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean cleared and the front of the English army vanish. It was regrouping, but out of sight. The Emperor rose halfway in his stirrups. The flash of victory blazed in his eyes.

If Wellington were driven into the corner of the forest of Soignes and destroyed, France would have conquered England once and for all. It would avenge Crécy, Poitiers, Malplaquet, and Ramillies. The victor of Marengo would erase Agincourt.

So, as the Emperor considered this terrible turn in fortune, he swept his spyglass one last time across every part of the battlefield. Behind him, his guard stood with grounded arms and watched him with a kind of reverence. He thought in silence. He studied the slopes, marked the descents, examined the clumps of trees, the square of rye, and the path; he seemed to count every bush. He looked closely at the English barricades on the two highways—two great abatis of trees: one on the road to Genappe above La Haie-Sainte, defended by two cannon, the only guns in the whole English artillery that commanded the edge of the battlefield; and the other on the road to Nivelles, where the Dutch bayonets of Chassé's brigade gleamed. Near this barricade he noticed the old white-painted chapel of Saint

Nicholas, standing at the corner of the crossroads near Braine-l'Alleud. He bent down and spoke softly to the guide Lacoste. The guide shook his head no, a gesture that was probably treacherous.

The Emperor straightened up and sank into thought.

Wellington had fallen back.

All that remained was to finish the retreat by crushing him.

Napoleon turned sharply and sent a courier racing to Paris with the news that the battle had been won.

Napoleon was one of those rare geniuses who strike like lightning.

He had just found the thunderbolt he needed.

He ordered Milhaud's cuirassiers to take the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean.

CHAPTER IX—THE UNEXPECTED

There were three thousand five hundred of them. Their line stretched for a quarter of a league. They were huge men on massive horses. They were formed in twenty-six squadrons, and behind them, ready to support them, stood Lefebvre-Desnouettes's division: the one hundred and six picked gendarmes, the light cavalry of the Guard, numbering eleven hundred and ninety-seven men, and the lancers of the Guard with eight hundred and eighty lances. They wore helmets without horsehair crests and cuirasses of hammered iron, with horse-pistols in their holsters and long sabres at their sides. That morning, at nine o'clock, the whole army had admired them as they advanced in a solid column, trumpets blaring and the bands playing "Let us watch o'er the Safety of the Empire." One battery rode on their flank, another at their centre. Then they deployed in two ranks between the roads to Genappe and Frischemont and took up their place for battle in that powerful second line so skillfully arranged by Napoleon. With Kellermann's cuirassiers on the far left and Milhaud's cuirassiers on the far right, it had, so to speak, two wings of iron.

Aide-de-camp Bernard brought them the Emperor's orders. Ney drew his sword and took his place at their head. The massive squadrons began to move.

Then an awe-inspiring sight appeared.

All the cavalry, swords raised, with standards and trumpets streaming in the wind, formed into divisional columns and moved down the hill of La Belle Alliance in one simultaneous motion, as if they were a single man. They advanced with the force and precision of a bronze battering ram breaking through a wall. They plunged into the terrible hollow where so many men had already fallen and vanished into the smoke. Then they emerged from that darkness and appeared again on the far side of the valley, still solid and tightly packed, climbing at a full trot up the dreadful muddy slope of the Mont-Saint-Jean plateau through a storm of grapeshot bursting over them. They went up steadily, threatening and unshaken. Between the bursts of musket and cannon fire, the massive pounding of their horses could be heard. There were two divisions, and so there were two columns: Wathier's division on the right, Delort's on the left. It looked as though two enormous steel serpents were crawling toward the crest of the plateau. It passed through the battle like a marvel.

Nothing like it had been seen since the heavy cavalry took the great redoubt of the Moskowa. Murat was not there, but Ney was once again. It was as if that mass had become a single creature with only one soul. Each column rose and swayed like the coils of a polyp. They could be seen through a vast cloud of smoke that tore open here and there. There was a chaos of helmets, shouts, and sabres; the violent tossing of horses' hindquarters among the cannons; the blare of trumpets; a terrible but disciplined uproar. Above it all were the cuirasses, like the scales of a hydra.

These accounts seemed to come from another age. No doubt something like this vision appeared in the ancient Orphic epics that told of the centaurs, the old hippanthropes, those Titans with human heads and horses' bodies who galloped up Olympus—horrible, invulnerable, sublime, both gods and beasts.

A strange numerical coincidence: twenty-six battalions rode out to face twenty-six battalions. Behind the crest of the plateau, in the shadow of the hidden battery, the English infantry waited in thirteen squares, with two battalions to each square. They stood in two lines, seven in the first and six in the second, their gunstocks against their shoulders, aiming at what was about to appear. They were calm, silent, and perfectly still. They could not see the cuirassiers, and the cuirassiers could not see them. They listened to this human flood rising toward them. They heard the growing thunder of three thousand horses, the steady, measured beat of hooves at full trot, the rattle of cuirasses, the clash of sabres, and a kind of vast, savage breathing. Then came a terrible silence. Suddenly, above the crest appeared a long line of raised arms waving sabres, along with helmets, trumpets, standards, and three thousand gray-mustached heads shouting, "Vive l'Empereur!" All that cavalry poured onto the plateau, and it looked like an earthquake breaking into view.

Then, all at once, came a tragic turn. On the English left, on our right, the front of the cuirassier column suddenly reared up with a dreadful roar. As they reached the top of the crest, impossible to control and completely carried away by fury and by their

charge to destroy the squares and cannon, the cuirassiers suddenly saw a trench between themselves and the English. It was the sunken road of Ohain.

It was a terrible moment. The ravine was there without warning, gaping open directly beneath the horses' feet, two fathoms deep between its two slopes. The second rank drove the first into it, and the third pushed the second on. Horses reared and fell backward, dropped onto their haunches, and slid down with all four legs in the air, crushing and burying their riders. There was no way to pull back, because the whole column had become nothing but a projectile. The force gathered to crush the English instead crushed the French. The pit would yield only when it was filled. Horses and riders tumbled into it in a heap, grinding against one another and becoming a single mass of flesh in that gulf. Once the trench was packed with living men, the rest rode over them and passed on. Nearly a third of Dubois's brigade fell into that abyss.

This was the beginning of the battle's loss.

A local tradition, clearly exaggerated, claims that two thousand horses and fifteen hundred men were buried in the sunken road at Ohain. That number probably includes all the other bodies thrown into this ravine the day after the battle.

It is worth noting, in passing, that it was Dubois's hard-pressed brigade that, an hour earlier, had charged off to one side and captured the flag of the Lunenburg battalion.

Before ordering this charge by Milhaud's cuirassiers, Napoleon had studied the ground, but he had not been able to make out

that sunken road, which did not show even the slightest crease on the surface of the plateau. Still, the little white chapel marking the point where it joined the Nivelles road had warned him and put him on guard, so he had probably asked the guide, Lacoste, whether there might be an obstacle there. The guide answered no. One might almost say that Napoleon's disaster began with that peasant's nod.

More disasters were still to come.

Could Napoleon have won that battle? We answer no. Why? Because of Wellington? Because of Blücher? No. Because of God.

Bonaparte victorious at Waterloo did not fit the law of the nineteenth century. Another chain of events was already taking shape, and in it there was no longer any place for Napoleon. The hostility of events had declared itself long before.

The time had come for this great man to fall.

The sheer weight of this man in human destiny had thrown the balance off. This one individual counted for more than whole multitudes. So much of humanity's living force concentrated in a single mind, the whole world rising into one man's brain—if that had lasted, it would have been fatal to civilization. The moment had come for incorruptible and supreme justice to change its course. Perhaps the very principles and elements on which the steady movements of the moral world, like those of the physical world, depend had cried out. Blood still steaming, cemeteries overflowing, mothers weeping—these are powerful advocates. When the earth suffers under too heavy a burden, mysterious

voices rise from the shadows, and the abyss listens.

Napoleon had been denounced before the infinite, and his fall had been decided.

He stood in God’s way.

Waterloo was not just a battle; it was the moment when the Universe changed direction.

CHAPTER X—THE PLATEAU OF MONT-SAINT-JEAN

At the same moment, the battery was revealed, along with the ravine.

Sixty cannons and the thirteen squares fired point-blank at the cuirassiers like flashes of lightning. The fearless General Delort gave the English battery a military salute.

All the English flying artillery had galloped back inside the squares. The cuirassiers had not even had time to pause. The disaster at the sunken road had cut down their numbers, but it had not shaken their resolve. They were the sort of men whose courage grows stronger as their ranks grow thinner.

Only Wathier's column had suffered in the disaster. Delort's column, which Ney had turned to the left, as if he sensed an ambush, had arrived intact.

The cuirassiers threw themselves against the English squares.

They charged at full speed, reins loose, swords clenched in their teeth, pistols in hand—that was the attack.

There are moments in battle when the soul hardens a man until the soldier becomes like a statue, and living flesh seems to turn to granite. The English battalions, though attacked with desperate fury, did not move.

Then the scene became terrible.

All sides of the English squares were attacked at once. A wild storm of violence closed around them. But that steady infantry did not waver. The first rank knelt and met the cuirassiers with their bayonets. The second rank fired and cut them down. Behind the second rank, the gunners reloaded their cannon. The front of the square opened, let out a burst of grapeshot, then closed again. The cuirassiers answered by smashing into them. Their huge horses reared up, pushed across the ranks, leaped over the bayonets, and crashed down, enormous, into the middle of those four living walls. Cannon fire tore furrows through the cuirassiers; the cuirassiers tore gaps in the squares. Whole lines of men vanished, crushed under the horses. Bayonets drove into the bellies of those centaurs, creating a horror of wounds such as was probably never seen anywhere else. Though this mad cavalry battered them down, the squares closed their ranks again without hesitation. With an endless supply of grapeshot, they blasted explosions into the middle of their attackers. The shape of this battle was monstrous. These squares were no longer battalions; they were craters. Those cuirassiers were no longer cavalry; they were a storm. Each square was a volcano under attack by a cloud; lava struggled against lightning.

The square on the far right, the most exposed of all because it stood isolated, was nearly destroyed at the first impact. It was made up of the 75th regiment of Highlanders. In the center, the bagpiper lowered his melancholy eyes, full of the reflections of forests and lakes, with deep detachment, while men were being slaughtered around him. Sitting on a drum, with his pibroch under his arm, he played Highland airs. These Scots died

thinking of Ben Lothian, just as the Greeks died remembering Argos. A cuirassier's sword cut down the bagpipes and the arm that held them, and the song ended with the death of the singer.

The cuirassiers were relatively few, and the disaster at the ravine had reduced their numbers even more. Yet they faced almost the entire English army and fought with such force that each man seemed equal to ten. Even so, some Hanoverian battalions gave way. Wellington saw it and turned his thoughts to his cavalry. If Napoleon, at that same moment, had thought of his infantry, he would have won the battle. That lapse was his great and fatal mistake.

All at once, the cuirassiers, who had been attacking, found themselves under attack. The English cavalry was behind them. In front of them stood two squares, and behind them was Somerset; and Somerset meant fourteen hundred dragoons of the Guard. On the right, Somerset had Dornberg with the German light cavalry, and on the left, Trip with the Belgian carabineers. Attacked on the flank and from the front, before and behind, by infantry and cavalry, the cuirassiers had to fight in every direction. What did that matter to them? They were a whirlwind. Their bravery was beyond description.

On top of that, they had the battery behind them, still roaring. It had to be so, or they could never have been wounded in the back. One of their cuirasses, pierced in the shoulder by a ball from a biscayan, is in the collection of the Waterloo Museum.

Nothing less than such Englishmen was enough to face such Frenchmen. It was no longer a hand-to-hand fight; it was a

shadowy frenzy, a wild surge of souls and courage, a storm of flashing swords. In a moment, the fourteen hundred dragoon guards were reduced to only eight hundred. Their lieutenant-colonel, Fuller, fell dead. Ney came rushing up with the lancers and Lefebvre-Desnouettes's light cavalry. The plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean was taken, retaken, and taken again. The cuirassiers broke away from the cavalry to return to the infantry; or, more exactly, that whole terrible melee locked onto itself without ever letting go. The squares still stood firm.

There were a dozen assaults. Ney had four horses killed under him. Half the cuirassiers were left on the plateau. The struggle lasted two hours.

The English army was badly shaken. There is no doubt that if the cuirassiers had not been weakened in their first charge by the disaster at the hollow road, they would have crushed the center and decided the victory. This extraordinary cavalry stunned Clinton, who had seen Talavera and Badajoz. Wellington, already three-quarters beaten, looked on with heroic admiration. Under his breath, he said, "Sublime!"

The cuirassiers destroyed seven of the thirteen squares, took or spiked sixty guns, and captured six flags from the English regiments. Three cuirassiers and three chasseurs of the Guard carried them to the Emperor in front of the farm of La Belle Alliance.

Wellington's position had grown worse. This strange battle was like a duel between two furious, wounded men who keep fighting and resisting even as they bleed themselves dry.

Which of the two would fall first?

The fighting on the plateau went on.

What had happened to the cuirassiers? No one could say. One thing is certain: the day after the battle, a cuirassier and his horse were found dead in the timber framework of the vehicle weighing scales at Mont-Saint-Jean, exactly where the four roads from Nivelles, Genappe, La Hulpe, and Brussels meet. This horseman had broken through the English lines. One of the men who recovered the body still lives at Mont-Saint-Jean. His name is Dehaze. He was eighteen years old at the time.

Wellington felt himself giving way. The crisis had arrived.

The cuirassiers had failed, because the centre had not been broken. Since everyone occupied the plateau, no one truly controlled it, and in practice it remained largely in English hands. Wellington held the village and the high plain; Ney had only the ridge and the slope. On both sides, they seemed fixed to that fatal ground.

But the weakening of the English seemed beyond repair. That army was bleeding terribly. Kempt, on the left wing, asked for reinforcements. “There are none,” Wellington replied. “He must let himself be killed!” At almost that same moment, in a striking sign of how exhausted both armies were, Ney asked Napoleon for infantry, and Napoleon cried, “Infantry! Where does he expect me to get it? Does he think I can create it?”

Even so, the English army was in worse shape than the French. The savage charges of those massive squadrons, armored in

iron cuirasses and steel breastplates, had nearly wiped out the infantry. Here and there, a few men gathered around a flag marked where a regiment still held its ground. Some battalions were now led only by a captain or a lieutenant. Alten's division, already badly mauled at La Haie-Sainte, was almost annihilated. The brave Belgians of Van Kluze's brigade lay scattered through the rye fields along the Nivelles road. Almost nothing remained of those Dutch grenadiers who, mixed with Spaniards in our ranks in 1811, had fought against Wellington, and who in 1815, having rallied to the English standard, fought against Napoleon. The officer losses were severe. Lord Uxbridge, whose leg was buried the next day, had his knee shattered. On the French side, in that clash of the cuirassiers, Delort, l'Héritier, Colbert, Dnop, Travers, and Blancard were put out of action. On the English side, Alten was wounded, Barne was wounded, Delancey was killed, Van Meeren was killed, Ompteda was killed, and Wellington's whole staff was decimated. In that bloody reckoning, England suffered more heavily. The second regiment of foot guards lost five lieutenant-colonels, four captains, and three ensigns. The first battalion of the 30th infantry lost 24 officers and 1,200 soldiers. The 79th Highlanders lost 24 officers wounded, 18 officers killed, and 450 soldiers killed. The Hanoverian hussars of Cumberland, an entire regiment under Colonel Hacke, who was later to be tried and cashiered, turned and fled at the sight of the fighting. They rode off toward the forest of Soignes, spreading panic and defeat all the way to Brussels. The transport carts, ammunition wagons, baggage wagons, and wagons full of wounded men, seeing that the French were advancing and nearing the forest, rushed there in

confusion. The Dutch, cut down by the French cavalry, cried out, “Alarm!” From Vert-Coucou to Groenendael, nearly two leagues on the road to Brussels, the roads were choked with fugitives, according to eyewitnesses still living. The panic spread so far that it reached the Prince de Condé at Mechlin and Louis XVIII at Ghent. Apart from the weak reserve drawn up behind the ambulance station at the farm of Mont-Saint-Jean, and Vivian’s and Vandeleur’s brigades on the left flank, Wellington had no cavalry left. Several batteries had lost their horses. Siborne confirms these facts, and Pringle, pushing the disaster even further, claims that the Anglo-Dutch army had been reduced to thirty-four thousand men. The Iron Duke remained calm, but his lips turned pale. Vincent, the Austrian commissioner, and Alava, the Spanish commissioner, both present with the English staff during the battle, believed the Duke was lost. At five o’clock Wellington took out his watch and was heard to murmur these ominous words: “Blücher, or night!”

At about that moment, a distant line of bayonets flashed on the heights toward Frischemont.

Here the great drama takes a sudden turn.

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

Napoleon's painful shock is well known: he expected Grouchy, and Blücher arrived instead. Death came where he had hoped for life.

Fate has twists like this: he expected the throne of the world, and what appeared before him was Saint Helena.

If the young shepherd who guided Bülow, Blücher's lieutenant, had told him to come out of the forest above Frischemont instead of below Plancenoit, the shape of the nineteenth century might perhaps have been different. Napoleon would have won the battle of Waterloo. By any route other than the one below Plancenoit, the Prussian army would have emerged at a ravine that artillery could not cross, and Bülow would not have arrived.

Now the Prussian general Muffling states that if there had been a delay of one hour, Blücher would not have found Wellington still standing. "The battle was lost."

Bülow needed to arrive when he did, as will become clear. Besides, he had already been delayed a great deal. He had camped at Dion-le-Mont and set out at daybreak, but the roads were impassable, and his divisions became stuck in the mud. The ruts were as deep as the cannon hubs. He also had to cross the Dyle by the narrow bridge at Wavre. The French had set fire

to the street leading to the bridge, so the caissons and ammunition wagons could not pass between the two rows of burning houses and had to wait until the fire burned out. It was noon before Bülow's advance guard could reach Chapelle-Saint-Lambert.

If the action had begun two hours earlier, it would have been over by four o'clock, and Blücher would have come upon a battle already won by Napoleon. Such are those vast risks, measured against an infinity we cannot understand.

As early as midday, the Emperor was the first to spot something on the far horizon through his field glass, and it caught his attention. He said, "I see a cloud over there that looks to me like troops." Then he asked the Duc de Dalmatie, "Soult, what do you see in the direction of Chapelle-Saint-Lambert?" The marshal raised his glass and replied, "Four or five thousand men, Sire; clearly Grouchy." But the shape stayed motionless in the mist. Everyone on the staff studied the "cloud" the Emperor had pointed out through their glasses. Some said, "It is trees." In fact, the cloud did not move. The Emperor sent off Domon's division of light cavalry to reconnoitre in that direction.

In fact, Bülow had not advanced. His vanguard was too weak to do anything. He had to wait for the main body of the army corps, and he had been ordered to concentrate his forces before taking position in the line. But at five o'clock, seeing Wellington in danger, Blücher ordered Bülow to attack and spoke these remarkable words: "We must give air to the English army."

A little later, the divisions of Losthin, Hiller, Hacke, and Ryssel formed up in front of Lobau's corps. The cavalry of Prince William of Prussia emerged from the forest of Paris. Plancenoit was burning, and Prussian cannonballs began to fall even among the ranks of the Guard in reserve behind Napoleon.

CHAPTER XII—THE GUARD

Everyone knows the rest: the sudden arrival of a third army; the battle shattered; eighty-six guns firing at once; Pirch arriving first with Bülow; Zieten's cavalry led by Blücher himself; the French forced back; Marcognet swept from the plateau of Ohain; Durutte driven out of Papelotte; Donzelot and Quiot retreating; Lobau taken on the flank; a new battle crashing onto our broken regiments at nightfall; the whole English line going back on the offensive and pushing forward; the enormous gap torn in the French army; English grape-shot and Prussian grape-shot working together; the slaughter; disaster in front; disaster on the flank; and the Guard entering the line in the middle of this terrible collapse of everything.

Knowing they were about to die, they shouted, "Vive l'Empereur!" History records nothing more moving than that agony breaking out in cheers.

The sky had been covered with clouds all day. Then, suddenly, at that moment—it was eight in the evening—the clouds on the horizon opened, and the grand, ominous light of the setting sun shone through across the elms on the Nivelles road. They had seen it rise at Austerlitz.

Each battalion of the Guard was led by a general for this final disaster. Friant, Michel, Roguet, Harlet, Mallet, and Poret de Morvan were there. When the tall caps of the Guard grenadiers appeared, with their large eagle plaques, aligned, orderly, and calm in the middle of that battle, the enemy felt respect for France. It was as though they saw twenty victories entering the

field with wings spread wide. Those who had been the victors thought themselves beaten and fell back. But Wellington cried, “Up, Guards, and aim straight!” The red regiment of English guards, lying flat behind the hedges, leaped up. A storm of grape-shot tore through the tricolored flag and whistled around our eagles. Everyone surged forward, and the final slaughter began. In the darkness, the Imperial Guard felt the army around it giving way, and in the immense shock of the rout it heard the desperate cries of flight where “Vive l’Empereur!” had been before. With retreat behind it, it still kept advancing, more shattered each moment, losing more men with every step. No one hesitated; there were no cowards in its ranks. The common soldier in that troop was as much a hero as the general. Not a single man was absent from that act of self-destruction.

Ney, stunned, and made great by the full grandeur of accepted death, exposed himself to every blow in that storm. His fifth horse was killed under him there. Sweating, eyes blazing, foam at his mouth, his uniform unbuttoned, one epaulet half sliced away by a horseguard’s sword, the plate with the great eagle dented by a bullet, bleeding, covered in mud, magnificent, with a broken sword in his hand, he said, “Come and see how a Marshal of France dies on the field of battle!” But it was useless; he did not die. He was wild-eyed and furious. He flung this question at Drouet d’Erlon: “Are you not going to get yourself killed?” In the middle of all that artillery crushing a handful of men, he shouted, “So there is nothing for me! Oh, I wish all these English bullets would enter my bowels!” Unhappy man, you were being saved for French bullets!

CHAPTER XIII—THE CATASTROPHE

The collapse behind the Guard was grim.

The army suddenly gave way on every side at once—Hougomont, La Haie-Sainte, Papelotte, Plancenoit. The cry of “Treachery!” was followed by another: “Every man save himself!” An army falling apart is like ice breaking up in a thaw. Everything gives way, splits, cracks, drifts, rolls, collapses, collides, rushes, and is swept along. The collapse was like nothing ever seen before. Ney gets hold of a horse, jumps on, and, without hat, cravat, or sword, stations himself across the Brussels road, trying to stop both English and French. He struggles to hold the army back. He calls it to its duty, curses it, and throws himself against the rout. He is swallowed up by it. The soldiers flee past him, shouting, “Long live Marshal Ney!” Two of Durutte’s regiments rush back and forth in terror, as if tossed between the Uhlans’ sabers and the musket fire of the brigades of Kempt, Best, Pack, and Rylandt. The worst kind of hand-to-hand fighting is defeat itself. Men strike down their own comrades in their desperation to escape. Squadrons and battalions smash into each other and scatter, like the vast foam of battle. Lobau at one end and Reille at the other are both swept into the flood. In vain Napoleon tries to build barriers out of what remains of his Guard. In vain he throws his last usable squadrons into one final effort. Quiot falls back before Vivian, Kellermann before Vandeleur, Lobau before Bülow, Morand before Pirch, Domon and Subervic before Prince William of

Prussia. Guyot, who had led the Emperor's squadrons in the charge, is trampled under the feet of the English dragoons. Napoleon gallops along the line of fugitives, addressing them, urging them on, threatening them, begging them. All the mouths that had cried "Long live the Emperor!" that morning now hang open in shock. They barely recognize him. The newly arrived Prussian cavalry surges forward, racing on, cutting, slashing, killing, wiping everything out. Horses kick wildly, the cannons bolt away. The artillery-train soldiers unhitch the caissons and take the horses to escape. Overturned wagons, all four wheels in the air, block the road and cause slaughter. Men are crushed and trampled. Others climb over the dead and the living alike. Weapons are thrown away. A stunned mass of people fills the roads, the paths, the bridges, the plains, the hills, the valleys, and the woods, all choked by this flood of forty thousand men. Cries of despair. Knapsacks and muskets flung into the rye. Passages forced at sword point. No more comrades, no more officers, no more generals—nothing but unspeakable terror. Zieten cuts down France at his leisure. Lions turned into goats. Such was the flight.

At Genappe, they tried to turn and form a battle line. Lobau gathered three hundred men. They barricaded the entrance to the village, but at the first volley of Prussian canister, everyone fled again, and Lobau was captured. You can still see the marks of that grape-shot today on the old brick gable of a building on the right side of the road, a few minutes before you enter Genappe. The Prussians rushed into Genappe in a fury, no doubt angry that they were not even more completely the victors. The pursuit was tremendous. Blücher ordered

extermination. Roguet had already set the grim example by threatening death to any French grenadier who brought him a Prussian prisoner. Blücher went further. Duhesme, the general of the Young Guard, was trapped in the doorway of an inn at Genappe and surrendered his sword to a hussar of death, who took the sword and killed the prisoner. The victory was sealed by the murder of the defeated. Since we are writing history, let us pass judgment: old Blücher disgraced himself. This savagery completed the disaster. The desperate rout passed through Genappe, through Quatre-Bras, through Gosselies, through Frasnes, through Charleroi, through Thuin, and stopped only at the frontier. Alas! And who was fleeing like that? The Grand Army.

This dizziness, this terror, this collapse into ruin of the greatest bravery that ever astonished history—did it happen without cause? No. The shadow of an immense justice falls across Waterloo. It is the day of destiny. A power greater than man made that day. That is why those brows were lined with terror; that is why all those great souls gave up their swords. The men who had conquered Europe lay flat on the ground, with nothing left to say or do, feeling the shadow of a dreadful presence. Hoc erat in fatis_. On that day, the course of the human race changed. Waterloo is the hinge of the nineteenth century. The disappearance of the great man was necessary for the coming of the great century. Someone—one to whom no reply can be made—took that responsibility upon himself. The panic of heroes can be explained. In the battle of Waterloo there is more than a cloud; there is something of the meteor. God passed by.

At nightfall, in a meadow near Genappe, Bernard and Bertrand grabbed a man by the skirt of his coat and held him back. He looked haggard, brooding, sinister, and dark. Swept there by the tide of the rout, he had just dismounted, looped his horse’s bridle over his arm, and, with wild eyes, was heading back alone toward Waterloo. It was Napoleon, the great sleepwalker of this shattered dream, trying once more to move forward.

CHAPTER XIV—THE LAST SQUARE

Several squares of the Guard stood motionless in the flood of defeat, like rocks in running water, and held their ground until night. Night came, and death with it. They waited for that double darkness and, unconquered, let it close around them. Each regiment, cut off from the others and no longer connected to the army, now broken everywhere, died alone. Some had taken their place for this final stand on the heights of Rossomme, others on the plain of Mont-Saint-Jean. There, abandoned, defeated, and terrible, those grim squares went through their death agony with fearful grandeur. Ulm, Wagram, Jena, and Friedland died with them.

At twilight, around nine in the evening, one of them still remained at the foot of the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean. In that fatal valley, below the slope the cuirassiers had climbed, now flooded with masses of English troops, under the crossing fire of the victorious enemy cavalry, beneath a terrifying storm of shot, this square kept fighting. It was commanded by an obscure officer named Cambronne. With every volley, the square grew smaller and answered back. It met grape-shot with musket fire, its four sides steadily closing in. Far off, the fugitives stopped for a moment, breathless, and listened in the darkness to that grim thunder, always growing fainter.

When this legion had been cut down to a handful of men, when their flag was nothing but a rag, when their guns, out of bullets, were no more than clubs, when the pile of dead was bigger than

the band of survivors, a kind of sacred dread fell over the victors around those men who were dying with such grandeur, and the English artillery paused and fell silent. It gave them a brief respite. Around these fighters was something like a swarm of ghosts: the outlines of mounted men, the dark shapes of cannon, the white sky seen through wheels and gun carriages, the huge skull of death that the heroes kept seeing through the smoke in the depths of the battle, moving toward them and staring at them. In the deepening dusk they could hear the guns being loaded. The burning matches, like tigers' eyes at night, formed a ring around their heads. Every lintstock in the English batteries moved toward the cannons. Then, with a kind of solemn feeling, holding the final moment suspended over these men, an English general—Colville, according to some, Maitland, according to others—called out to them, "Surrender, brave Frenchmen!" Cambronne replied, "——."

{EDITOR'S COMMENTARY: Another edition of this book gives the word "Merde!" instead of the —— above.}

CHAPTER XV—CAMBRONNE

If any French reader would be offended, we would have to avoid repeating in his presence what may be the finest answer a Frenchman ever gave. That would mean leaving something sublime out of History.

At our own risk, let us break that rule.

Now, among those giants, there was one Titan: Cambronne.

What could be greater than giving that answer and then dying? To be willing to die is the same as dying; and it was not this man's fault that he lived after being shot.

The victor of the battle of Waterloo was not Napoleon, who was driven from the field; nor Wellington, who was yielding at four o'clock and in despair at five; nor Blücher, who took no part in the fighting. The victor of Waterloo was Cambronne.

To hurl out such an answer at the flash of lightning that kills you is to conquer!

So to answer catastrophe, so to speak back to fate; to set this pedestal beneath the lion of the future; to throw such a challenge at the midnight storm, at the treacherous wall of Hougomont, at the sunken road of Ohain, at Grouchy's delay, at Blücher's arrival; to become irony itself in the grave; to act in such a way that, though fallen, one still stands upright; to drown the European coalition in two syllables; to offer kings the chamber-pots the Cæsars once knew; to make the lowest word the loftiest by binding it to the glory of France; to end Waterloo,

with outrageous defiance, in Mardigras; to finish Leonidas with Rabellais; to place the crown on this victory with a word that cannot be spoken; to lose the battlefield and keep history; to have laughter on your side after such slaughter—this is immense!

It was an insult like one hurled by a thundercloud. It rises to the grandeur of Æschylus.

Cambronne's reply strikes like a sudden, violent rupture. It is like a heart breaking under the weight of contempt. It is agony overflowing at last. Who won? Wellington? No. Without Blücher, he was beaten. Was it Blücher? No. If Wellington had not begun the work, Blücher could not have finished it. This Cambronne, this man in his last hour, this unknown soldier, this tiny particle of war, sees that there is a lie here—a lie inside a catastrophe, and therefore all the more unbearable. And at the very moment when his fury is about to burst out because of it, they offer him this mockery: life! How could he hold back? There stand all the kings of Europe, the generals blazing with victory, the Jupiters hurling thunderbolts. They have a hundred thousand victorious soldiers, and behind those hundred thousand, a million more. Their cannon gape with open mouths; the match is lit. Beneath their heels they crush the Imperial Guard and the grand army. They have just overthrown Napoleon, and only Cambronne is left—only this worm of the earth remains to protest. So he protests. He searches for the right word as a man searches for a sword. Foam rises to his lips, and that foam becomes the word. Faced with this petty and enormous victory, faced with this victory in which no one is truly victorious, this desperate

soldier stands upright. He acknowledges its crushing vastness, but he also exposes its pettiness. And he does more than spit on it. Crushed by numbers, by superior force, by brute matter, he finds in his soul one expression: _“Excrément!”_ We say it again: to use that word, to act in that way, to create such an expression, is to be the conqueror.

In that fateful moment, the spirit of great days descended on that unknown man. Cambronne creates the word for Waterloo just as Rouget created the “Marseillaise,” as if inspired by a breath from above. Something from the divine whirlwind bursts out and sweeps over these men. They tremble; one sings the supreme song, and the other speaks the terrible cry.

With this colossal cry of scorn, Cambronne defies not only Europe in the name of the Empire—that would be too small a thing. He defies the past itself in the name of the Revolution. The cry is heard, and people recognize in Cambronne the ancient spirit of the Titans. It is as though Danton were speaking. It is as though Kléber were roaring.

At Cambronne’s word, the English voice answered, “Fire!” The batteries blazed. The hill shook. From all those bronze mouths came one last terrible blast of grapeshot. A huge mass of smoke, pale in the rising moonlight, rolled out. When it cleared, nothing was left. That formidable remnant had been destroyed; the Guard was dead. The four walls of that living redoubt lay flat, and here and there you could barely make out even a faint movement in the bodies. So the French legions—greater than the Roman legions—died on Mont-Saint-Jean, on ground soaked with rain and blood, among the dark grain, at the very

place where today Joseph, who drives the mail coach from Nivelles, passes by whistling and cheerfully urging on his horse at four o’clock in the morning.

CHAPTER XVI—QUOT LIBRAS IN DUCE?

The battle of Waterloo is a mystery. It is just as unclear to those who won it as to those who lost it. For Napoleon, it was a moment of panic. Blücher sees nothing in it but fire. Wellington understands nothing about it. Look at the reports: the bulletins are confused, and the commentaries tangled. Some stammer; others lisp. Jomini divides the battle of Waterloo into four phases. Muffling breaks it into three shifts. Charras alone—though we disagree with him on some points—grasped, with his proud gaze, the defining outlines of that catastrophe, where human genius collided with divine chance. All the other historians are hindered by being somewhat dazzled, and in that dazzled state they grope their way through it. It was a day of blinding brilliance; in truth, it was the collapse of the military monarchy which, to the great astonishment of kings, pulled all the kingdoms down with it—the fall of force, the defeat of war.

In this event, marked by a superhuman necessity, the part played by men was nothing.

If we take Waterloo away from Wellington and Blücher, do we really take anything from England or Germany? No. That great England and that noble Germany are not defined by Waterloo. Thank Heaven, nations are great for reasons beyond the grim exploits of war. England, Germany, and France do not fit inside a sword sheath. In that era, while Waterloo was only the clash of weapons, Germany had Schiller above Blücher, and England had Byron above Wellington. The defining mark of our century

is a vast dawn of ideas, and in that sunrise England and Germany shine brilliantly. They are great because they think. The higher place they hold in civilization belongs to them by their own nature; it comes from within, not from some accident. The greatness they gave to the nineteenth century did not come from Waterloo. Only barbarous peoples grow suddenly after a victory. That is the brief vanity of floodwaters swollen by a storm. Civilized peoples, especially in our age, are not raised up or cast down by the success or failure of a general. Their true weight in humanity comes from more than a battle. Their honor, thank God, their dignity, their intelligence, their genius, are not stakes that those gamblers—heroes and conquerors—can throw into the lottery of war. A battle is often lost while progress is won. There is less glory, but more liberty. The drum falls silent; reason begins to speak. It is a strange game in which the loser wins. So let us speak of Waterloo calmly, from both sides. Let us give chance what belongs to chance, and God what belongs to God. What is Waterloo? A victory? No. It is the winning number in a lottery.

The winning ticket, number 11, was claimed by Europe and paid for by France.

It was not worth putting a lion there.

Waterloo, moreover, is the strangest battle in history. Napoleon and Wellington were not simply enemies; they were opposites. God, who delights in contrasts, never created a sharper one, or a more extraordinary comparison. On one side stood precision, foresight, geometry, prudence, a secure line of retreat, reserves carefully preserved, stubborn coolness, unshakable method,

strategy that used the terrain to advantage, tactics that kept battalions in balance, slaughter carried out by rule, war conducted by regulation, watch in hand, with nothing willingly left to chance, old classical courage, and absolute order. On the other side stood intuition, divination, military eccentricity, superhuman instinct, a blazing glance, and some indescribable power that saw like an eagle and struck like lightning; a prodigious art expressed through scornful impetuosity; all the mysteries of a profound soul joined to destiny. The stream, the plain, the forest, the hill were summoned and, in a sense, compelled to obey; the despot went so far as to tyrannize the battlefield itself. Faith in a star was mixed with strategic science, lifting it up even as it unsettled it. Wellington was the Barême of war; Napoleon was its Michael Angelo. And here, genius was defeated by calculation. On both sides, someone was being awaited. The precise calculator was the one who succeeded. Napoleon was waiting for Grouchy; he did not come. Wellington was expecting Blücher; he came.

Wellington was the old style of war taking its revenge. Bonaparte, at the start of his rise, had met him in Italy and defeated him brilliantly. The old owl had fled before the young vulture. The old tactics had not only been struck down as if by lightning; they had been humiliated. Who was that Corsican of twenty-six? What was one to make of that magnificent ignoramus who, with everything against him and nothing in his favor—without provisions, without ammunition, without cannon, without shoes, almost without an army, with only a handful of men against great masses—threw himself against a united Europe and absurdly won impossible victories? Where had that

thundering convict come from, who, almost without pausing for breath, and with the same band of fighters in hand, crushed one after another the five armies of the emperor of Austria, overturning Beaulieu after Alvinzi, Wurmser after Beaulieu, Mélas after Wurmser, Mack after Mélas? Who was this beginner in war with the boldness of a master? The academic military school cast him out, and in doing so lost its footing. From that came the relentless hatred of the old Cæsarism for the new, of the regulated sword for the flaming sword, and of the treasury for genius. On the 18th of June, 1815, that hatred had the last word, and beneath Lodi, Montebello, Montenotte, Mantua, Arcola, it wrote: Waterloo. It was a triumph of the mediocre, and that is sweet to the majority. Destiny accepted the irony. In his decline, Napoleon found Wurmser the younger facing him once again.

In fact, to produce Wurmser, all that was needed was to turn Wellington's hair white.

Waterloo was a first-rate battle won by a second-rate commander.

What deserves admiration in the battle of Waterloo is England: English steadiness, English resolve, English blood. The great thing about England there, with no disrespect to her, was England herself. It was not her commander; it was her army.

Wellington, strangely ungrateful, says in a letter to Lord Bathurst that his army—the army that fought on the 18th of June, 1815—was a "detestable army." What must that dark mingling of bones buried beneath the fields of Waterloo think of that?

England has been too modest when it comes to Wellington. Making Wellington seem so great ends up diminishing England. Wellington was only a hero, like many others. What was truly great were those Scotch Greys, those Horse Guards, those regiments under Maitland and Mitchell, that infantry under Pack and Kempt, that cavalry under Ponsonby and Somerset, those Highlanders playing the pibroch through a storm of grape-shot, those battalions of Rylandt, those completely inexperienced recruits who barely knew how to handle a musket and yet stood firm against the veteran troops of Essling and Rivoli. Wellington was steadfast; that was his strength, and we do not mean to take that away from him. But the humblest foot soldier or cavalryman among his men would have been just as steady as he was. The iron soldier is worth as much as the Iron Duke. For our part, all our praise goes to the English soldier, the English army, and the English people. If there is a trophy to be awarded, it belongs to England. The monument of Waterloo would be more just if, instead of raising the figure of one man, it lifted up the statue of a people.

But this great England will be offended by what we are saying here. Even after its own 1688 and our 1789, it still clings to the feudal illusion. It still believes in heredity and hierarchy. This people, second to none in power and glory, thinks of itself as a nation rather than as a people. And as a people, it willingly submits and accepts a lord as its head. As a worker, it allows itself to be looked down on; as a soldier, it allows itself to be flogged.

People will remember that at the battle of Inkermann, a sergeant who had apparently saved the army could not be mentioned by Lord Paglan, because the English military hierarchy does not allow any hero below the rank of officer to be named in official reports.

What we admire most, in a clash like Waterloo, is the astonishing ingenuity of chance. A night of rain, the wall of Hougomont, the sunken road of Ohain, Grouchy deaf to the cannon, Napoleon misled by his guide, Bülow set right by his—the whole catastrophe unfolds with remarkable direction.

Taken as a whole, let us say it plainly: Waterloo was more a massacre than a battle.

Of all pitched battles, Waterloo was fought on the narrowest front for so many soldiers. Napoleon held three-quarters of a league; Wellington, half a league. There were seventy-two thousand men on each side. That concentration is what made the slaughter so great.

The following figures have been calculated, and this proportion established for losses in men: at Austerlitz, the French lost fourteen per cent, the Russians thirty per cent, and the Austrians forty-four per cent. At Wagram, the French lost thirteen per cent and the Austrians fourteen. At the Moskowa, the French lost thirty-seven per cent and the Russians forty-four. At Bautzen, the French lost thirteen per cent and the Russians and Prussians fourteen. At Waterloo, the French lost fifty-six per cent and the Allies thirty-one. The total at Waterloo was forty-one per cent: out of one hundred and forty-four

thousand combatants, sixty thousand were dead.

Today the field of Waterloo has the calm that belongs to the earth, that steady, impassive support of man, and it looks like any other plain.

At night, however, a kind of ghostly mist rises from it. If a traveler wanders there, if he listens, watches, and dreams like Virgil on the fatal plains of Philippi, the vision of the catastrophe takes hold of him. The dreadful 18th of June comes alive again. The false monumental mound disappears. The lion vanishes into the air. The battlefield becomes real once more. Lines of infantry ripple across the plain. Furious cavalry charges sweep along the horizon. The startled dreamer sees sabres flash, bayonets gleam, bombs flare, and hears the terrible exchange of thunder. He seems to hear, from the depths of a tomb, the death rattle and the dim clamor of the phantom battle. Those shadows are grenadiers; those lights are cuirassiers. That skeleton is Napoleon; that other skeleton is Wellington. None of this exists anymore, and yet it still collides and fights. The ravines turn red, the trees tremble, and even the clouds and shadows seem full of fury. All those terrible heights—Hougomont, Mont-Saint-Jean, Frischemont, Papelotte, Plancenoit—appear dimly crowned with whirlwinds of spectres destroying one another.

CHAPTER XVII—SHOULD WATERLOO BE CONSIDERED A GOOD THING?

There is a highly respectable liberal school that does not hate Waterloo. We are not part of it. To us, Waterloo is only the numbed, bewildered date of liberty. That such an eagle could come out of such an egg is certainly unexpected.

If you look at the issue from its highest vantage point, Waterloo was deliberately a counterrevolutionary victory. It was Europe against France: Petersburg, Berlin, and Vienna against Paris; the status quo against initiative; July 14, 1789, attacked through March 20, 1815. It was the monarchies joining forces against the indomitable uprising of France. Their dream was the final extinction of that great people, which had been in upheaval for twenty-six years. It was the solidarity of the Brunswicks, the Nassaus, the Romanoffs, the Hohenzollerns, the Hapsburgs, and the Bourbons. Waterloo carried divine right in its wake. It is true that, because the Empire had been despotic, the kingdom, by the natural reaction of events, was forced to be liberal, and a constitutional order emerged from Waterloo despite the conquerors' deep regret. That happened because revolution cannot truly be defeated. Since it is providential and inevitable, it always returns: before Waterloo, in Bonaparte overthrowing the old thrones; after Waterloo, in Louis XVIII granting and accepting the charter. Bonaparte puts a postilion on the throne of Naples and a sergeant on the throne of Sweden, using inequality itself to prove equality. Louis XVIII, at Saint-Ouen,

countersigns the declaration of the rights of man. If you want to understand what revolution is, call it Progress; and if you want to understand the nature of progress, call it Tomorrow. Tomorrow irresistibly carries out its work, and it is already carrying it out today. It reaches its goal in strange ways. It uses Wellington to turn Foy, who had been only a soldier, into an orator. Foy falls at Hougomont and rises again in the tribune. That is how progress moves forward. No tool is bad in the hands of that workman. It is never thrown off balance. It fits both the man who crossed the Alps and the good old tottering invalid of Father Élysée into its divine work. It makes use of the gouty man as well as the conqueror: the conqueror outside, the gouty man within. By cutting short the destruction of European thrones by the sword, Waterloo did nothing but force the revolutionary work to continue in another form. The men of violence were finished; it was the thinkers' turn. The century that Waterloo meant to stop kept moving forward. That dark victory was defeated by liberty.

In short, and beyond dispute, what triumphed at Waterloo—what smiled behind Wellington; what handed him all the marshals' staffs of Europe, including, it is said, the staff of a marshal of France; what cheerfully rolled wheelbarrows full of bones to build the lion's mound; what proudly carved the date "June 18, 1815" on that pedestal; what urged Blücher on as he cut down the fleeing army; what, from the heights of the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean, hung over France like a predator over its prey—was the counter-revolution. It was the counter-revolution that whispered that infamous word, "dismemberment." But when it arrived in Paris, it saw the crater up close. It felt the

ashes burning its feet, changed its mind, and fell back into the stammering language of a charter.

Let us see in Waterloo only what was truly there. There was no deliberate liberty in it. The counter-revolution became liberal without intending to, just as, by a matching paradox, Napoleon became revolutionary without intending to. On June 18, 1815, the mounted Robespierre was thrown from the saddle.

CHAPTER XVIII—A RETURN OF DIVINE RIGHT

The dictatorship was over. An entire European system collapsed.

The Empire sank into a darkness like that which fell over the Roman world as it died. Once again we see the abyss, as in the age of the barbarians; only the barbarism of 1815, which must be called by its familiar name, the counter-revolution, did not last long. It soon ran out of breath, gasped, and stopped short. The Empire was mourned—let us admit it—and mourned by heroic eyes. If glory means a sword turned into a sceptre, then the Empire was glory made flesh. It had spread across the earth all the light that tyranny can give—a dark light. We can say more: a dim light. Beside true daylight, it is night. And when night disappears, it can look like an eclipse.

Louis XVIII returned to Paris. The round dances of July 8 wiped away the excitement of March 20. The Corsican became the opposite of the Bearnese. The flag flying over the dome of the Tuileries was white. The exile was now king. Hartwell's pine table stood before the fleur-de-lys-covered throne of Louis XIV. People spoke of Bouvines and Fontenoy as if they had happened only the day before, while Austerlitz was already treated as ancient history. Altar and throne joined hands in majestic harmony. One of the most unquestioned signs of social order in the nineteenth century was established over France and across the continent. Europe adopted the white cockade. Trestaillon was praised. The motto _non pluribus impar_ appeared

again on the stone rays of a sun carved on the front of the barracks on the Quai d'Orsay. Where the Imperial Guard had once stood, there was now a red house. The Arc du Carrousel, burdened with victories that now sat awkwardly on it, looked out of place amid these changes. Perhaps a little embarrassed by Marengo and Arcola, it escaped the difficulty by displaying the statue of the Duc d'Angoulême. The cemetery of the Madeleine, a dreadful mass grave for the poor in 1793, was now covered in jasper and marble, because the bones of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette rested in that soil.

In the moat at Vincennes, a funerary monument rose from the ground, recalling that the Duc d'Enghien had died in the very month Napoleon was crowned. Pope Pius VII, who had carried out the coronation so close to that death, calmly gave his blessing to the fall just as he had blessed the rise. At Schoenbrunn there was a small shadow, four years old, whom it was considered seditious to call the King of Rome. All this happened. Kings climbed back onto their thrones. The master of Europe was shut in a cage. The old regime became the new regime. All the shadows and all the light of the earth changed places because, on the afternoon of a certain summer day, a shepherd said to a Prussian in the forest, "Go this way, not that way!"

That year, 1815, was like a grim April. Old, unhealthy, poisonous realities were covered over with fresh appearances. A lie married itself to 1789. Divine right hid behind a charter. Fictions passed themselves off as constitutional government. Prejudices, superstitions, and unspoken reservations, with

Article 14 at their core, were coated with a layer of liberalism. It was the serpent shedding its skin.

Napoleon had made humanity seem both greater and smaller. Under his rule of dazzling material power, the ideal was strangely dismissed as “ideology.” It is a serious mistake for a great man to mock the future. Yet the masses—those cannon-fodder troops who are so devoted to the man who commands the guns—kept searching for him. Where was he? What was he doing? “Napoleon is dead,” a passer-by said to a veteran of Marengo and Waterloo. “Dead?” the soldier cried. “You don’t know him.” Even after his fall, people’s imaginations refused to believe he was truly gone. After Waterloo, the depths of Europe were filled with darkness. Napoleon’s disappearance left behind a vast emptiness that remained unfilled for a long time.

The kings stepped into that empty space. Old Europe used it as its chance to begin its reforms. The Holy Alliance was formed; Belle-Alliance, Beautiful Alliance—the fatal field of Waterloo had already spoken the name in advance.

Facing that rebuilt old Europe, the outlines of a new France began to appear. The future, which the Emperor had once gathered around himself, now arrived on its own. On its brow shone the star of Liberty. The bright eyes of every young generation were fixed on it. A strange fact: people were in love at the same time with the future—Liberty—and with the past—Napoleon. Defeat had made the defeated man greater. Bonaparte fallen seemed taller than Napoleon standing. Those who had won were uneasy. England kept him under guard

through Hudson Lowe, and France kept watch on him through Montchenu. Even his folded arms troubled thrones. Alexander called him “my sleeplessness.” That fear came from the amount of revolution contained within him. That is what explains, and excuses, Bonapartist liberalism. This ghost made the old world tremble. The kings ruled, but not comfortably, with the rock of Saint Helena always on the horizon.

While Napoleon was going through his death agony at Longwood, the sixty thousand men who had fallen at Waterloo were quietly decaying where they lay, and something of their peace spread out over the world. In 1815, the Congress of Vienna drew up its treaties, and Europe gave this the name Restoration.

That was what Waterloo was.

But what did any of that matter to the Infinite? All that storm, all that cloud, that war, and then that peace? All that darkness did not disturb for even a moment the light of that immense Eye, before which a grub hopping from one blade of grass to another is equal to the eagle soaring from belfry to belfry on the towers of Notre-Dame.

CHAPTER XIX—THE BATTLEFIELD AT NIGHT

Let us return—for this book requires it—to that fatal battlefield.

On the 18th of June, the moon was full. Its light helped Blücher's savage pursuit. It revealed the tracks of the fugitives, exposed that disastrous mass to the eager Prussian cavalry, and assisted the slaughter. At times of catastrophe, the night does sometimes grant such tragic favors.

After the last cannon shot was fired, the plain of Mont-Saint-Jean lay deserted.

The English took over the French encampment; it is the usual sign of victory to sleep in the bed of the defeated. They set up their bivouac beyond Rossomme. The Prussians, unleashed on the fleeing rout, pressed on. Wellington went to the village of Waterloo to write his report to Lord Bathurst.

If the phrase _sic vos non vobis_ was ever applicable, it surely applies to the village of Waterloo. Waterloo played no part and lay half a league from the fighting. Mont-Saint-Jean was shelled, Hougomont was burned, La Haie-Sainte was taken by assault, Papelotte was burned, Plancenoit was burned, and La Belle-Alliance saw the embrace of the two conquerors. These names are scarcely known, while Waterloo, which did nothing in the battle, carries away all the glory.

We are not among those who flatter war; when the moment comes, we speak the truth about it. War has terrible beauties,

and we have not hidden them. But it also has hideous aspects, as we readily admit. One of the most shocking is how quickly the dead are stripped after a victory. The dawn after a battle always rises over naked corpses.

Who does this? Who stains a triumph in this way? What ugly, stealthy hand slips into the pocket of victory? Who are these pickpockets working in the shadow of glory? Some philosophers—Voltaire among them—claim that they are the very people who created that glory. They say it is the same men; there is no separate band coming in afterward. The men standing upright rob those lying on the ground. The hero of the day becomes the vampire of the night. After all, they argue, if you made the corpse, surely you have the right to strip it a little. For our part, we do not believe that. It seems impossible to us that the same hand could gather laurels and steal the shoes from a dead man.

One thing is certain: thieves generally follow conquerors. But let us leave the soldier—especially the modern soldier—out of it.

Every army has a rear guard, and that is where the blame belongs. There you find bat-like creatures, half brigand and half lackey—all the kinds of night-prowling vermin that the twilight world of war produces. They wear uniforms but do not fight: fake invalids, alarming limpers, hangers-on, sutlers rattling along in little carts, sometimes with their wives, stealing goods only to sell them again, beggars offering to guide officers, soldiers' servants, and marauders. In earlier times—we are not speaking of the present—armies on the march dragged this whole rabble behind them, and in military language they were

called “stragglers.” No army and no nation truly owned these creatures. They spoke Italian and followed the Germans, then spoke French and followed the English. One of these wretches, a Spanish straggler who spoke French, treacherously murdered and robbed the Marquis of Fervacques on the battlefield itself during the night after the victory of Cerisoles. He deceived the marquis with his Picard accent, which made him seem like one of our own men. This kind of scoundrel grew out of marauding. The hateful maxim, _Live on the enemy!_ produced this disease, and only strict discipline could cure it. Some reputations are misleading; one does not always know why certain generals, great in other ways, were so popular. Turenne was adored by his soldiers because he tolerated plunder; tolerated evil is often counted as part of goodness. Turenne was considered so good that he allowed the Palatinate to be given over to fire and blood. The number of marauders trailing an army rose or fell according to how strict its commander was. Hoche and Marceau had no stragglers. Wellington had few, and fairness requires us to say so.

Even so, on the night of June 18 to 19, the dead were robbed. Wellington was inflexible; he ordered that anyone caught doing it should be shot. But plunder is hard to stamp out. While some marauders were being shot in one part of the battlefield, others were stealing in another.

The moon cast a sinister light over the plain.

Toward midnight, a man was moving about there—or rather, climbing toward the sunken road of Ohain. He seemed to be one of the sort we have just described: neither English nor French,

neither peasant nor soldier, less a man than a ghoul drawn by the smell of corpses, with plunder as his only victory, come to loot Waterloo. He wore a smock that was almost like a greatcoat. He was both wary and bold. He moved forward while glancing behind him. Who was this man? The night probably knew more about him than the day did. He carried no sack, but he clearly had large pockets under his coat. From time to time he stopped, scanned the plain as if to make sure no one was watching, suddenly bent over, disturbed something silent and motionless on the ground, then straightened up and hurried away. The way he slipped along, his posture, and his quick, secretive movements made him look like those twilight larvae said to haunt ruins, which old Norman legends call the Alleurs.

Certain wading birds of the night cast just such shapes across the marshes.

A gaze sharp enough to cut through all that mist would have made out, some distance away, a kind of small sutler's cart with a ribbed wicker hood, hitched to a starving nag. The animal, standing still, was nibbling grass across its bit. The cart was hidden, as if tucked behind the hut beside the road to Nivelles, at the corner where the road from Mont-Saint-Jean meets the road to Braine l'Alleud. And in the cart sat a sort of woman, perched on chests and bundles. Perhaps that cart had something to do with the prowler.

The darkness was calm. There was not a cloud overhead. What did it matter if the earth was red? The moon stayed white; the sky is indifferent to such things. In the fields, tree branches shattered by grapeshot but not yet fallen, still held by their bark,

swayed gently in the night breeze. A faint breath, almost like breathing, stirred the bushes. Tremors like the passing of souls ran through the grass.

Far off, one could hear the patrols moving back and forth and the regular rounds of the English camp.

Hougomont and La Haie-Sainte kept burning—one in the west, the other in the east—like two great flames. Between them stretched the line of English bivouac fires, spread in a vast semicircle across the hills on the horizon, like a necklace of rubies with two carbuncles at its ends.

We have described the disaster on the road of Ohain. It is horrifying to imagine what that death must have been for so many brave men.

If anything is truly terrible, if any reality can surpass dreams, it is this: to be alive, to see the sun, to be full of strength, health, and joy; to laugh boldly; to rush toward the glory blazing before you; to feel lungs breathing in your chest, a heart beating, a mind at work; to speak, think, hope, love; to have a mother, a wife, children; to have the light—and then, all at once, in the space of a shout, in less than a minute, to drop into an abyss. To fall, roll, strike, and be crushed; to see wheat, flowers, leaves, branches, and be unable to grasp anything; to feel your sword is useless, men under you, horses on top of you; to struggle in vain because some blow in the darkness has broken your bones; to feel a heel that seems to force your eyes from their sockets; to bite horses' shoes in your fury; to suffocate, scream, writhe; to lie pinned underneath and say to yourself, "But just a moment

ago I was a living man!”

There, where that miserable disaster had breathed its last, everything was silent now. The sides of the hollow road were clogged with horses and riders, piled together in a hopeless mass. A dreadful tangle. There was no slope anymore, because the corpses had raised the road level with the plain and filled it to the brim, like a bushel packed full of barley. A heap of dead bodies above, a river of blood below—that was the road on the evening of June 18, 1815. The blood ran as far as the Nivelles highway and spread there into a large pool in front of the felled trees that blocked the way, at a place that is still pointed out.

You may remember that the cuirassiers were destroyed at the opposite end, toward the Genappe road. The thickness of the bodies matched the depth of the sunken road. Near the middle, where the ground leveled out and Delort’s division had passed, the layer of corpses was thinner.

The night prowler we have just shown the reader was heading that way. He was searching that vast tomb. He looked around him. He moved past the dead as if inspecting them in some horrible review. He walked with blood under his feet.

Suddenly he stopped.

A few steps ahead of him, in the hollow road, where the pile of dead came to an end, an open hand stuck out from beneath the heap of men, lit by the moon. On one finger was something shining: a gold ring.

The man bent down and stayed crouched for a moment. When he stood up, the hand no longer wore a ring.

He did not fully straighten. He stayed bent over in a frightened crouch, his back to the heap of dead, scanning the horizon from his knees. He supported the upper part of his body on his two forefingers pressed against the ground, while his head peered above the edge of the hollow road. A jackal’s four paws are well suited to certain acts.

Then, having made up his mind, he stood up.

At that moment he gave a violent start. He felt someone grab him from behind.

He spun around. It was the open hand, now closed, clutching the skirt of his coat.

An honest man would have been terrified; this one burst out laughing.

"Come," he said, "it’s only a dead body. I’d rather meet a ghost than a gendarme."

But the hand grew weak and let him go. In the grave, effort is quickly spent.

"Well then," said the prowler, "is that dead man alive? Let’s find out."

He bent down again and groped through the pile, shoving aside whatever blocked him. He caught a hand, gripped an arm, freed the head, and pulled out the body. A few moments later, he was dragging the lifeless—or at least unconscious—man through the

shadows of the sunken road. The man was a cuirassier, an officer, and clearly one of fairly high rank; a large gold epaulette showed beneath his cuirass. He had lost his helmet. A savage sword slash had torn across his face, which was nothing but blood.

Still, he did not seem to have any broken bones, and by some strange good luck—if that word can be used here—the dead had fallen over him in a way that kept him from being crushed. His eyes were still closed.

On his cuirass he wore the silver cross of the Legion of Honor.

The prowler ripped off the cross, and it vanished into one of the deep pockets beneath his greatcoat.

Then he felt for the officer's watch pocket, found a watch, and took it. After that he searched the man's waistcoat, found a purse, and slipped it into his own pocket.

By the time he had reached this stage in the help he was giving the dying man, the officer opened his eyes.

"Thank you," he said weakly.

The rough movements of the man handling him, the coolness of the night, and the air he could now breathe freely had stirred him out of his stupor.

The prowler did not answer. He lifted his head. Footsteps could be heard out on the plain; a patrol was probably coming closer.

The officer murmured, with the rattle of death still in his voice:

“Who won the battle?”

“The English,” the prowler answered.

The officer went on:

“Look in my pockets; you’ll find a watch and a purse. Take them.”

That had already been done.

The prowler went through the motions the officer asked for and said:

“There’s nothing there.”

“I’ve been robbed,” said the officer. “I’m sorry for that. You should have had them.”

The patrol’s footsteps grew clearer and clearer.

“Someone is coming,” said the prowler, moving as if he were about to leave.

The officer weakly lifted his arm and stopped him.

“You saved my life. Who are you?”

The prowler replied quickly, in a low voice:

“Like you, I served in the French army. I have to leave you. If they catch me, they’ll shoot me. I saved your life. Now you must get yourself out of this mess.”

“What rank are you?”

“Sergeant.”

“What is your name?”

“Thénardier.”

“I will not forget that name,” said the officer. “And remember mine as well. My name is Pontmercy.”

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

Jean Valjean had been captured again.

The reader will thank us if we move quickly past these sad details. We will limit ourselves to quoting two paragraphs published in the newspapers of that time, a few months after the surprising events that had taken place at M. sur M.

These articles are fairly brief. It should be remembered that, at that time, the _Gazette des Tribunaux_ did not yet exist.

We take the first from the _Drapeau Blanc_. It is dated July 25, 1823.

A district in Pas-de-Calais has just been the scene of a highly unusual event. A man unknown in the department, who went by the name of M. Madeleine, had revived an old local industry several years ago by introducing new methods in the manufacture of jet and black glass trinkets. He made a fortune from the business, and, it must be said, brought prosperity to the district as well. In recognition of his services, he was appointed mayor. The police later discovered that M. Madeleine was actually a former convict named Jean Valjean, sentenced in 1796 for theft and guilty of breaking the terms of his release. Jean Valjean has been sent back to prison. It seems that before his arrest he managed to withdraw more than half a million from M. Laffitte, where he had deposited it, and that he had earned this money through entirely legitimate business dealings. Since his return to prison at Toulon, no one has been able to discover

where Jean Valjean hid the money.

The second article, which gives a few more details, is an excerpt from the _Journal de Paris_ of the same date.

Jean Valjean, a former convict who had been released, has just appeared before the Assize Court of the Var under circumstances sure to draw public attention. This miserable man managed to slip past police surveillance, change his name, and even get himself appointed mayor of one of our small northern towns. There he built up a substantial business. He has finally been exposed and arrested, thanks to the tireless zeal of the public prosecutor. He was living with a woman of the town as his mistress, and she died from the shock at the moment of his arrest. This villain, gifted with enormous strength, somehow managed to escape. But three or four days after his flight, the police seized him again, in Paris itself, just as he was getting into one of those small carriages that run between the capital and the village of Montfermeil (Seine-et-Oise). It is said that during those three or four days of freedom, he withdrew a large sum that he had deposited with one of our leading bankers. The amount is estimated at six or seven hundred thousand francs. If the indictment is to be believed, he hid it in a place known only to himself, and it has not been possible to recover it. Be that as it may, the said Jean Valjean has just been brought before the Assizes of the Department of the Var, accused of a violent highway robbery committed about eight years ago against one of those honest children who, as the patriarch of Ferney said in immortal verse,

“. . . Come each year from Savoy, and with gentle hands clear out those long canals clogged with soot.”

This bandit refused to defend himself. The able and eloquent spokesman for the public prosecutor proved that the theft had been committed with accomplices, and that Jean Valjean belonged to a band of robbers in the south. Jean Valjean was found guilty and, as a result, sentenced to death. This criminal refused to appeal. In his inexhaustible clemency, the king has been pleased to commute the sentence to penal servitude for life. Jean Valjean was immediately taken to the prison at Toulon.

The reader will remember that Jean Valjean showed religious habits at M. sur M. Some newspapers, including the Constitutional–, presented this commutation as a victory for the priestly party.

Jean Valjean was given a new number in the galleys: 9,430.

But we should say at once, so that we do not have to return to it later, that the prosperity of M. sur M. disappeared with M. Madeleine. Everything he had foreseen during his night of fever and hesitation came true: without him, there truly was a missing soul. After his fall, M. sur M. underwent that selfish breaking apart that happens when great lives collapse, that fatal dismemberment of thriving things which takes place every day, quietly, in human society, and which history has recorded only once, because it happened after Alexander’s death. Lieutenants became crowned kings; overseers suddenly turned themselves into manufacturers. Jealous rivalries sprang up. M. Madeleine’s great workshops closed, his buildings fell into ruin, and his

workers scattered. Some left the region; others gave up the trade. From then on, everything was done on a small scale instead of a large one, for profit instead of the common good. There was no longer any center; everywhere there was competition and hostility. M. Madeleine had ruled over everything and guided everything. As soon as he fell, each person tried to pull things his own way. The spirit of conflict replaced the spirit of organization, bitterness replaced goodwill, and hatred of one another replaced the founder's kindness toward all. The threads M. Madeleine had put in place became tangled and snapped, the methods were corrupted, the products declined in quality, and confidence died. The market shrank for lack of orders. Wages were cut, the workshops stood idle, and bankruptcy came. Then nothing was left for the poor. Everything had vanished.

The state itself noticed that someone had been crushed somewhere. Less than four years after the Court of Assizes ruled, for the benefit of the galleys, that Jean Valjean and M. Madeleine were the same man, the cost of collecting taxes in the arrondissement of M. sur M. had doubled; and in February 1827, M. de Villèle pointed this out from the rostrum.

CHAPTER II—IN WHICH THE READER WILL READ TWO VERSES, POSSIBLY COMPOSED BY THE DEVIL

Before going any further, it is worth telling, in some detail, about a strange that took place around the same time in Montfermeil, and that oddly matches certain theories put forward by the prosecution.

In the Montfermeil area, there is a very old superstition. It is all the more curious—and all the more valuable—because a folk superstition so close to Paris is as rare as an aloe in Siberia. We are among those who respect anything that has the character of a rare plant. So here is the superstition of Montfermeil: People believe that, from time immemorial, the devil has chosen the forest as a hiding place for his treasures. Housewives say that at dusk, in lonely corners of the woods, it is not unusual to come across a black figure who looks like a carter or a woodcutter, wearing wooden shoes, linen trousers, and a blouse, and recognizable by one striking detail: instead of a cap or hat, he has two enormous horns on his head. That, indeed, ought to make him easy to recognize. This man is usually busy digging a hole. There are three ways to profit from meeting him. The first is to go up to him and speak to him. Then it turns out that the man is only a peasant; that he looks black because it is dusk; that he is not digging a hole at all, but cutting grass for his cows; and that what had been taken for horns is nothing more than a

dung fork slung across his back, whose prongs, in the evening light and from that angle, seemed to rise from his head. The man goes home and dies within the week. The second way is to watch him and wait until he has dug his hole, filled it in, and gone away. Then you run as fast as you can to the trench, open it again, and seize the “treasure” that the black man must have buried there. In that case, you die within the month. Finally, the last method is not to speak to the black man, not to look at him, and to run away as fast as your legs can carry you. Then you die within the year.

Since all three methods come with their own drawbacks, people usually choose the second one. Whatever else may be said for it, it does offer certain advantages, including the pleasure of possessing a treasure, even if only for a month. So daring men, tempted by any gamble, have often, we are told, opened the pits dug by the black man and tried to steal from the devil. The results seem to have been limited, at least if tradition is to be trusted, especially the two cryptic lines of barbarous Latin left on the subject by a wicked Norman monk, something of a sorcerer, named Tryphon. This Tryphon is buried at the Abbey of Saint-Georges de Bocherville, near Rouen, and toads breed on his grave.

So people go to enormous lengths. These pits are usually very deep. A man sweats, digs, and labors all night—for it has to be done at night. He soaks his shirt, burns down his candle, breaks his mattock, and when he finally reaches the bottom of the hole, when he puts 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 specter folded in four like a sheet of paper in a portfolio, sometimes nothing at all. This is what Tryphon's verses seem to warn the rash and curious:

"Fodit, et in fossa thesauros condit opaca, As, nummas, lapides, cadaver, simulacra, nihilque."

It seems that in our own time people sometimes find a powder-horn with bullets, and sometimes an old pack of cards, greasy and worn, that has plainly been used by the devil. Tryphon does not mention these two discoveries, since he lived in the twelfth century, and since the devil apparently lacked the ingenuity to invent powder before Roger Bacon's time, and cards before the time of Charles VI.

Besides, if you play with those cards, you are certain to lose everything you own. And as for the powder in the horn, it has the useful property of making your gun burst in your face.

Soon after the time when the public prosecutor came to believe that the escaped convict Jean Valjean had been wandering around Montfermeil during several days of flight, people in that village began to notice that an old road worker named Boulatruelle had "strange ways" in the forest. The locals thought they knew that Boulatruelle had once been in the galleys. He was under a certain amount of police watch, and since he could find work nowhere else, the authorities employed him at low wages as a road-mender at the crossroads from Gagny to Lagny.

The people of the district looked on Boulatruelle with suspicion. He seemed too respectful, too humble, too quick to take off his cap to everyone, and he trembled and smiled whenever gendarmes were near. They said he was probably connected with bands of robbers and suspected him of lurking at the edge of the woods at dusk. The only thing they counted in his favor was that he was a drunkard.

This is what people believed they had noticed:

Lately, Boulatruelle had begun leaving his stone-breaking and road work very early and heading into the forest with his pickaxe. Toward evening, people came across him in the most deserted clearings and the wildest thickets. He looked as though he were searching for something, and sometimes he was digging holes. The housewives who passed by first took him for Beelzebub; then they recognized Boulatruelle, which did not reassure them in the least. These encounters clearly annoyed him. It was obvious that he was trying to keep out of sight, and that there was some mystery in what he was doing.

People in the village said, "It's plain that the devil has appeared. Boulatruelle has seen him and is hunting for him. Truly, he's sly enough to pocket Lucifer's treasure."

The Voltairians added, "Will Boulatruelle catch the devil, or will the devil catch Boulatruelle?" The old women made the sign of the cross again and again.

Meanwhile, Boulatruelle stopped these excursions in the forest and went back to his regular road-mending work, and people moved on to gossip about something else.

Some people, though, were still curious. They suspected that behind all this there was probably not the legendary treasure of the old tales, but some valuable and very real stroke of luck—something far more substantial than the devil's banknotes—and that the road-mender had partly uncovered the secret. The most perplexed were the schoolmaster and Thénardier, the innkeeper, who was on good terms with everyone and had not thought it beneath him to join forces with Boulatruelle.

"He has been in the galleys," said Thénardier. "Ah! Good God! no one knows who has been there, or who will end up there."

One evening, the schoolmaster declared that in earlier times the law would have opened an inquiry into what Boulatruelle was doing in the forest, and that he would have been forced to talk. If necessary, he added, they would even have put him to torture, and Boulatruelle would not have stood up to the water test, for instance. "Let's give him the wine test," said Thénardier.

They tried, and managed to get the old road-mender drinking. Boulatruelle drank an enormous amount, but said very little. With remarkable skill and perfect balance, he combined the thirst of a glutton with the discretion of a judge. Still, by pressing him again and again, and by comparing and piecing together the few vague words he let slip, Thénardier and the schoolmaster

came to think they had worked out the following:

One morning at daybreak, as Boulatruelle was on his way to work, he had been surprised to see, in a corner of the forest among the underbrush, a shovel and a pickaxe, hidden away, so to speak.

Still, he might have assumed they were probably the shovel and pick of Father Six-Fours, the water-carrier, and thought nothing more of it. But that evening, while hidden behind a large tree, he saw—without being seen himself—"a person who did not belong in those parts, and whom he, Boulatruelle, knew well," heading toward the thickest part of the woods. In Thénardier's translation: _a former galley comrade_. Boulatruelle stubbornly refused to give his name. This person was carrying a package—something square, like a large box or a small trunk. Boulatruelle was surprised. Even so, it was not until seven or eight minutes had passed that he thought of following the "person." By then it was too late. The man was already deep in the thicket, night had fallen, and Boulatruelle could not catch up with him. So he decided to wait for him at the edge of the woods. "It was moonlight." Two or three hours later, Boulatruelle saw the man come out of the brush, no longer carrying the box, but a shovel and a pick. Boulatruelle let him pass and did not even think of speaking to him. As he explained it, the other man was three times as strong as he was and armed with a pickaxe; if he recognized Boulatruelle, and realized that Boulatruelle recognized him, he would probably smash his head in. A touching reunion between two old comrades. But the shovel and pick gave Boulatruelle a clue. He

hurried to the thicket the next morning and found neither shovel nor pick. From this he concluded that, once inside the forest, the man had dug a hole with the pick, buried the box, and filled the hole back in with the shovel. Now the box was too small to hold a body; therefore it must have contained money. Hence his search. Boulatruelle explored, probed, and searched the whole forest and the thicket. He dug wherever the ground seemed to have been recently disturbed. It was all in vain.

He “ferreted out” nothing. No one in Montfermeil thought about the matter anymore. Only a few bold gossips still said, “You can be sure the road-mender on the Gagny road did not go to all that trouble for nothing; he was certain the devil had come.”

CHAPTER III—THE ANKLE-CHAIN MUST HAVE BEEN PREPARED IN SOME WAY BEFORE IT COULD BE BROKEN WITH A SINGLE BLOW OF A HAMMER

Near the end of October in that same year, 1823, the people of Toulon saw the ship _Orion_ enter their harbor after rough weather. It had come in to repair some damage. The vessel was later used at Brest as a training ship, and at that time it was part of the Mediterranean squadron.

Even in its battered condition—for the sea had treated it harshly—the vessel made a striking sight as it entered the roadstead. It was flying flags that earned it the regulation salute of eleven guns, which it answered shot for shot, making twenty-two in all. It has been calculated that, counting salvos, royal and military courtesies, these polite exchanges of noise, signals of etiquette, the formalities of harbors and citadels,

sunrises and sunsets saluted every day by every fortress and every warship, the opening and closing of ports, and so on, the civilized world fires one hundred and fifty thousand useless shots across the earth every twenty-four hours. At six francs a shot, that amounts to nine hundred thousand francs a day, or three hundred million a year, all vanishing in smoke. This is only a minor detail. Meanwhile, the poor were dying of hunger.

The year 1823 was what the Restoration called “the era of the Spanish war.”

This war packed many different events into one and was full of odd contradictions. It was a great family matter for the House of Bourbon: the French branch came to the aid of the Madrid branch and protected it, in other words carrying out a duty that fell to the elder line. It seemed, on the surface, like a return to our national traditions, yet it was entangled with servitude and submission to the cabinets of the North. M. le Duc d’Angoulême, whom the liberal newspapers called _the hero of Andujar_, struck a triumphant pose that did not quite match his mild appearance. In him, the old and very real terror of the Holy Office stood opposed to the imagined terror of the liberals. The _sansculottes_ reappeared, to the great alarm of dowagers, under the name of _descamisados_. Monarchy set itself up as a barrier against a progress it described as anarchy. The theories of ’89 were brutally cut off in their growth. Europe called a halt to the French idea just as it was making its way around the world. Alongside the son of France serving as generalissimo stood the Prince de Carignan, later Charles Albert, who enlisted as a volunteer in that crusade of kings against peoples, wearing grenadier

epaulets of red worsted. The soldiers of the Empire marched off on a new campaign, but now they were older and sadder, after eight years of rest, and under the white cockade. A heroic handful of Frenchmen carried the tricolored flag abroad, just as the white flag had been carried thirty years earlier at Coblentz. Monks marched among our troops. The spirit of liberty and innovation was brought to its senses by bayonets. Principles were cut down by cannon fire. France used her arms to undo what she had once done with her mind. And beyond all that, enemy leaders were bought off, soldiers hesitated, and cities were besieged at enormous cost. There were no real military dangers, yet there could still be sudden explosions, as in any mine that is caught by surprise and invaded. Very little blood was shed. Very little honor was won. For some there was shame; for no one was there glory. Such was this war, undertaken by princes descended from Louis XIV and led by generals who had served under Napoleon. Its unhappy fate was to recall neither great war nor great politics.

Some military exploits in this campaign were real enough; the capture of the Trocadéro, for example, was a notable operation. But even so, we must say again that the fanfare surrounding this war rang hollow. The whole result was questionable. History credits France for hesitating to accept this false triumph. It was clear that some Spanish officers assigned to defend their positions gave way too easily. The victory carried a suspicion of corruption. It seemed less as if battles had been won than as if generals had been bought, and the victorious soldier came home humiliated. In short, it was a degrading war, one in which you could read the $_{\text{Bank}}$ of France_ in the folds of the flag.

The soldiers of the 1808 war, who had seen Saragossa collapse in terrible destruction, looked with anger in 1823 at how easily the citadels surrendered, and they began to miss Palafox. It is in France's nature to prefer facing a Rostopchine rather than a Ballesteros.

From an even more serious point of view, and one that must also be stressed here, this war, while it injured France's military spirit, also inflamed its democratic spirit. It was an enterprise of enslavement. In that campaign, the French soldier, the son of democracy, was being used to impose a yoke on others. A dreadful contradiction. France is meant to awaken the soul of nations, not to smother it. Every revolution in Europe since 1792 comes from the French Revolution: liberty sends out its rays from France. That is a fact as plain as the sun. Blind is the man who refuses to see it. Bonaparte himself said so.

The war of 1823, an outrage against the generous Spanish nation, was at the same time an outrage against the French Revolution. France committed this monstrous act of violence, and by shameful means, because, except in wars of liberation, everything armies do is done by shameful means. The words _passive obedience_ say as much. An army is a strange masterpiece of organization in which strength comes from an immense accumulation of powerlessness. That is how war can be understood: humanity making war against humanity, in spite of humanity itself.

As for the Bourbons, the war of 1823 proved disastrous for them. They mistook it for a triumph. They failed to see the danger in having an idea deliberately crushed. In their blindness, they went so far astray that they treated the deep weakening effect of a crime as if it were a source of strength for their rule. The spirit of the ambush entered their politics. The seeds of 1830 were already present in 1823. In their councils, the Spanish campaign became an argument for force and for ventures justified by divine right. If France had restored _el rey netto_ in Spain, then it might just as well restore the absolute king at home. They made the grave mistake of confusing a soldier's obedience with a nation's consent. That kind of confidence ruins thrones. No one is allowed to fall asleep, whether in the shade of a manchineel tree or in the shadow of an army.

Let us return to the ship _Orion_.

While the army under the prince generalissimo was carrying out its operations, a squadron had been cruising in the Mediterranean. As we have just said, the _Orion_ belonged to that fleet, and mishaps at sea had brought it into the port of Toulon.

There is something about a warship in port that draws a crowd and holds its attention. It is because the ship is grand, and crowds are drawn to grandeur.

A ship of the line is made at once from the heaviest and the lightest materials imaginable, because it must deal with three forms of matter at the same time—solid, liquid, and air—and it must struggle against all three. It has eleven iron claws to grip the granite at the bottom of the sea, and more wings and feelers than any winged insect to catch the wind in the clouds. Its breath bursts from its hundred and twenty cannons like the blast of enormous trumpets, answering thunder with pride. The ocean tries to mislead it with the frightening sameness of its waves, but the ship has a soul—its compass—which guides it and always points north. On the darkest nights, its lanterns take the place of the stars. So, against the wind, it has its rigging and sails; against the water, wood; against the rocks, iron, brass, and lead; against the darkness, light; against immensity, a needle.

If you want a sense of the enormous scale that makes up a ship of the line, you need only step into one of the six-story covered building sheds at the ports of Brest or Toulon. The ships under construction stand there as if enclosed beneath a glass dome. That colossal spar is a yard. That huge wooden shaft lying along the ground as far as the eye can see is the mainmast. From its

base in the stocks to its tip high in the air, it measures sixty fathoms, and at the bottom it is three feet thick. An English mainmast rises two hundred and seventeen feet above the waterline. In our fathers' navy, ships used cables; in ours, they use chains. On a hundred-gun ship, the heap of chain alone stands four feet high, twenty feet wide, and eight feet deep. And how much timber does it take to build such a ship? Three thousand cubic meters. It is a floating forest.

And remember, this describes only the warship of forty years ago, the ordinary sailing vessel. Steam, then still in its infancy, has since added new wonders to that marvel called a warship. Today, for example, the mixed vessel with a screw is an astonishing machine, driven by three thousand square meters of sail and by an engine of two thousand five hundred horsepower.

Even without these new marvels, the old vessel of Christopher Columbus and De Ruyter is one of humanity's masterpieces. Its power is as unfailing as the Infinite in a gale. It gathers the wind into its sails. It moves with precision across the vast uncertainty of the waves. It floats, and it rules.

And yet there comes a moment when the gale snaps that sixty-foot yard like a straw, when the wind bends that mast four hundred feet high, when that anchor, weighing many thousands, is twisted in the jaws of the waves like a fisherman's hook in the mouth of a pike, when those monstrous cannons let out mournful, useless roars that the hurricane carries off into the emptiness and the night, when all that power and all that majesty are swallowed up by a power and majesty greater still.

Whenever immense power ends in immense weakness, it gives people something to think about. That is why, in the ports, crowds gather around these remarkable machines of war and travel, even if they cannot quite explain their fascination. So every day, from morning to night, the quays, sluices, and jetties of the port of Toulon were filled with a mass of idlers and loungers, as they say in Paris, whose sole occupation was staring at the _Orion_.

The _Orion_ was a ship that had been in poor condition for a long time. During its earlier voyages, thick layers of barnacles had built up on its keel until they cut its speed in half. The year before, it had gone into dry dock to have them scraped away, and then it had returned to sea. But that cleaning had weakened the keel bolts. Near the Balearic Islands, the ship's sides had been strained and had opened; and because hull plating in those days was not made of sheet iron, the vessel began to leak. Then a violent equinoctial gale arose. It first smashed a grating and a porthole on the larboard side and damaged the foretop-gallant shrouds. Because of this damage, the _Orion_ put back into Toulon.

It dropped anchor near the Arsenal, fully rigged, and repairs began. The hull had suffered no damage on the starboard side, but some of the planks had been removed here and there, as was customary, to let air into the hold.

One morning, the crowd watching it saw an accident.

[Illustration: The Ship Orion, an Accident]

The crew was busy bending the sails. The topman, whose task was to take the upper corner of the main-topsail on the starboard side, lost his balance. People saw him stagger, and the crowd packed along the Arsenal quay cried out. His head tipped forward beyond his body, and he fell around the yard, his hands stretched out over the abyss. As he fell, he caught the footrope, first with one hand and then with the other, and ended hanging from it. The sea lay far below him at a terrifying depth. The force of his fall had set the footrope swinging violently, and the man swayed back and forth at the end of it like a stone in a sling.

Going to help him meant taking a terrifying risk, and not one of the sailors—coast fishermen who had only recently been pressed into service—dared to try. Meanwhile, the unfortunate topman was losing strength. His face did not show his agony, but every limb revealed his exhaustion. His arms were drawn up in dreadful spasms. Every attempt to climb back up only made the foot-rope swing more violently. He did not cry out, for fear of wasting what strength he had left. Everyone was waiting for the moment when he would lose his grip on the rope, and again and again people turned their heads away so they would not

have to see him fall. There are moments when a scrap of rope, a pole, or a tree branch is life itself, and it is a terrible thing to watch a living being let go of it and drop like ripe fruit.

Suddenly, a man was seen climbing into the rigging with the quickness of a wildcat. He was dressed in red. He was a convict. He wore a green cap. He was serving a life sentence. When he reached the level of the top, a gust of wind snatched away his cap and revealed a completely white head: he was not a young man.

In fact, a convict working on board with a detachment from the galleys had, at the very first moment, rushed to the officer of the watch. In the middle of the crew's panic and hesitation, while all the sailors trembled and shrank back, he asked the officer for permission to risk his life to save the topman. At a sign of approval from the officer, he struck the chain riveted to his ankle once with a hammer and broke it. Then he seized a rope and hurled himself into the rigging. At the time, no one noticed how easily that chain had been broken; it was only later that people remembered it.

In an instant he was out on the yard. He paused for a few seconds, seeming to judge the distance with his eye. Those few seconds, while the breeze rocked the sailor at the end of what looked like a thread, felt like centuries to everyone watching. At last the convict lifted his eyes to heaven and stepped forward. The crowd drew a long breath. They saw him move out along the yard. When he reached the end, he tied the rope he had brought with him and let the other end drop. Then he began to climb down it, hand over hand. And then—to the horror of

everyone watching—instead of one man hanging over the abyss, there were two.

It looked like a spider going to catch a fly, except that this spider brought life, not death. Ten thousand eyes were fixed on the two men. No one cried out; no one spoke. The same shudder tightened every face. Everyone seemed to hold their breath, as if they feared that even the slightest puff of air might add to the wind that was swaying the two unfortunate men.

Meanwhile, the convict managed to lower himself close to the sailor. It was just in time. One minute more, and the exhausted, desperate man would have let himself fall into the abyss. Clinging with one hand, the convict secured him firmly with the rope while working with the other. At last they saw him climb back onto the yard and pull the sailor up after him. He kept him there for a moment so he could recover his strength. Then he took him in his arms and carried him, walking along the yard 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 burst into applause. Even old convict-sergeants were weeping, women embraced each other on the quay, and voices everywhere cried out with a kind of fierce tenderness, “Pardon for that man!”

Meanwhile, he had already begun climbing down to rejoin his detachment. To reach them more quickly, he dropped into the rigging and ran along one of the lower yards. Every eye followed him. Then, at one moment, fear seized the crowd. Whether he was exhausted or had grown dizzy, they thought

they saw him falter and sway. Suddenly the crowd gave a great cry: the convict had fallen into the sea.

The fall was dangerous. The frigate _Algésiras_ was anchored beside the _Orion_, and the poor convict had fallen between the two ships. People feared he would be pulled under one of them. Four men quickly threw themselves into a boat, and the crowd shouted encouragement. Everyone was tense again. The man did not come back to the surface. He vanished into the sea without leaving even a ripple, as if he had fallen into a barrel of oil. They sounded the water and they dived, but it was useless. The search went on until evening. They did not even find the body.

The next day, the Toulon newspaper printed these lines:

“Nov. 17, 1823. Yesterday, a convict from the detachment aboard the _Orion_, while returning after helping a sailor, fell into the sea and drowned. The body has not yet been found. It is believed to be caught among the piles at the point of the Arsenal. This man was registered under the number 9,430, and his name was Jean Valjean.”

CHAPTER I—THE QUESTION OF WATER AT MONTFERMEIL

Montfermeil lies between Livry and Chelles, on the southern edge of the high plateau that separates the Ourcq from the Marne. Today it is a fairly large town, decorated year-round with stucco villas and, on Sundays, with smiling middle-class residents. In 1823, Montfermeil had neither so many white houses nor so many contented citizens. It was only a village in the woods. There were, it is true, a few country houses from the previous century, easy to recognize by their stately appearance, their wrought-iron balconies, and their tall windows, whose small panes cast all sorts of shifting green shades onto the white of the closed shutters. But Montfermeil was still a village. Retired cloth merchants and lawyers spending time in the country had not yet discovered it. It was a peaceful, charming place that lay on the way to nowhere. People lived there, and lived cheaply, in that abundant, easy rural life of the peasants. Only one thing was scarce there: water, because of the height of the plateau.

The water had to be brought from quite a long way off. The end of the village toward Gagny got its water from the magnificent ponds in the woods there. The other end, around the church and toward Chelles, could get drinking water only from a small spring halfway down the slope, near the road to Chelles, about a quarter of an hour from Montfermeil.

So every household had a hard time keeping enough water on hand. The larger houses—the well-to-do families, including the Thénardier tavern—paid half a farthing per bucket to a man who made a living from it and earned about eight sous a day supplying Montfermeil with water. But this good man worked only until seven o'clock in the evening in summer and five in winter. Once night fell and the ground-floor shutters were closed, anyone who had no drinking water had to go get it personally or go without.

This was the terror of the poor child whom the reader has probably not forgotten: little Cosette. You will remember that Cosette was useful to the Thénardiers in two ways: they made her mother pay them, and they made the child work for them. So when the mother stopped paying altogether, for the reason explained in earlier chapters, the Thénardiers kept Cosette. She took the place of a servant in their house. In that role, she was the one sent to fetch water whenever it was needed. So the child, who was terribly afraid of going to the spring at night, was very careful to make sure there was never any shortage of water in the house.

Christmas in 1823 was especially lively at Montfermeil. The winter had started off mild, and so far there had been no snow or frost. Some showmen from Paris had received the mayor's permission to set up their booths in the village's main street, and a group of traveling merchants, allowed under the same indulgence, had put up stalls in the Church Square and even stretched them into Boulanger Alley, where, as the reader may remember, the Thénardiers' inn stood. These visitors filled the

inns and taverns and brought a noisy, cheerful energy to that quiet little place. To be completely accurate as historians, we should also add that among the attractions in the square there was a menagerie. In it, alarming clowns dressed in rags and coming from no one knew where showed the peasants of Montfermeil, in 1823, one of those dreadful Brazilian vultures that our Royal Museum did not acquire until 1845, and whose eye bears a tricolored cockade. I believe naturalists call this bird Caracara Polyborus. It belongs to the order of the Apicides and the vulture family. Some old Bonapartist soldiers who had retired to the village went to see the creature with great reverence. The showmen claimed that the tricolored cockade was a unique marvel created by God expressly for their menagerie.

On Christmas Eve itself, several men—carters and peddlers—sat at table in the public room of Thénardier's inn, drinking and smoking by the light of four or five candles. The room looked like any tavern room: tables, pewter jugs, bottles, drinkers, smokers; very little light and a great deal of noise. Still, two objects showed that the year was 1823, since both were then fashionable among the middle class: a kaleidoscope and a ribbed tin lamp. Madame Thénardier was seeing to the supper, which was roasting before a bright fire, while her husband drank with his customers and talked politics.

Along with the political talk, mostly about the Spanish war and Monsieur le Duc d'Angoulême, sharply local remarks like the following could also be heard through the uproar:

“Around Nanterre and Suresnes, the vines have done very well. Where people expected ten measures, they got twelve. The grapes produced a great deal of juice in the press.” “But the grapes can’t be ripe?” “In those parts, the grapes are not supposed to ripen; as soon as spring comes, the wine turns oily.” “Then it’s very thin wine?” “There are wines even worse than that. The grapes have to be picked while they are still green.” Etc.

Or a miller might call out:

“Are we to blame for what is in the sacks? We find all sorts of small seeds in them that we cannot sift out, and we have no choice but to run them through the millstones. There are tares, fennel, vetches, hempseed, foxtail, and a whole mass of other weeds, not to mention pebbles, which are common in some kinds of wheat, especially Breton wheat. I dislike grinding Breton wheat just as much as a long-sawyer dislikes sawing beams with nails in them. You can imagine the bad dust it makes when it is ground. And then people complain about the flour. They are mistaken. The flour is not our fault.”

In the space between two windows, a mower sat at the table with a landowner who was settling on a price for some meadow work to be done in the spring, and he was saying:

“It does no harm if the grass is wet. It cuts better that way. Dew is a good thing, sir. With that grass, it makes no difference. Your grass is young and still very hard to cut. It’s terribly soft. It gives way under the blade.” Etc.

Cosette was in her usual place, sitting on the crossbar of the kitchen table near the fireplace. She was dressed in rags. Her bare feet were stuck into wooden shoes, and in the firelight she was knitting woolen stockings for the young Thénardiers. A very young kitten was playing among the chairs. From the next room came laughter and chatter in two bright children’s voices: Éponine and Azelma.

In the corner of the fireplace, a cat-o’-nine-tails hung from a nail.

Every so often, the cry of a very young child somewhere in the house cut through the noise of the tavern. It was a little boy the Thénardiers had had during one of the previous winters—"she did not know why," she said, "it was because of the cold"—and he was a little over three years old. His mother had nursed him, but she did not love him. When the child's constant crying became too irritating, Thénardier would say, "Your son is bawling; go and see what he wants." "Bah!" the mother would answer. "He annoys me." And the neglected child went on screaming in the dark.

CHAPTER II—TWO COMPLETE PORTRAITS

Up to this point in the book, we have seen the Thénardiers only in profile. Now the time has come to go all the way around this couple and look at them from every side.

Thénardier had just turned fifty. Madame Thénardier was nearing forty, which in a woman amounted to fifty; so husband and wife were evenly matched in age.

Our readers may still remember Madame Thénardier from her first appearance: tall, fair-haired, ruddy, fat, bony, square, huge, and quick. As we have said, she belonged to that breed of giant, savage women who twist themselves about at fairs with paving stones hanging from their hair. She did everything in the house: made the beds, washed the clothes, cooked the meals, and handled the rest. Cosette was her only servant—a mouse working for an elephant. Everything shook at the sound of her voice: windowpanes, furniture, and people. Her broad face, speckled with red blotches, looked like a skimmer. She had a beard. She was the perfect image of a market porter in women's clothing. She swore magnificently and bragged that she could crack a nut with a single blow of her fist. If not for the novels she had read, which now and then made a pretentious lady show through the ogress in a very odd way, no one would ever have thought to say, "That is a woman." This female Thénardier seemed like a serving girl grafted onto a fishwife. When you heard her speak, you said, "That is a policeman." When you saw her drink, you said, "That is a carter." When you saw her with

Cosette, you said, "That is the executioner." One of her teeth stuck out when her face was at rest.

Thénardier was a small, thin, pale, sharp-boned, frail-looking man who seemed sickly and yet was remarkably healthy. That was where his cunning showed itself first: as a precaution, he wore a constant smile and was almost polite to everyone, even the beggar to whom he would not give half a farthing. He had the eyes of a polecat and the manner of a man of letters. He looked very much like the portraits of Abbé Delille. His idea of elegance was drinking with the carters. No one had ever managed to get him drunk. He smoked a large pipe. He wore a smock, and under it an old black coat. He liked to pose as a man of literature and a materialist. To back up whatever he happened to be saying, he often dropped certain names—Voltaire, Raynal, Parny, and, oddly enough, Saint Augustine. He claimed to have "a system." On top of that, he was a great swindler: a filousophe– [philosophe], a scholarly thief. The type exists. It will be remembered that he claimed to have served in the army. He loved to tell, with great flourish, how, as a sergeant in the 6th or 9th Light Something-or-Other at Waterloo, he had single-handedly, in full view of a squadron of deadly hussars, shielded with his own body and saved from death, amid a storm of grapeshot, "a general who had been dangerously wounded." That story gave him the gaudy sign on his wall and the name by which his inn was known in the neighborhood: "the Sergeant of Waterloo tavern." He was a liberal, a classicist, and a Bonapartist. He had subscribed to the Champ d'Asile. People in the village said that he had once studied for the priesthood.

We believe he had simply trained in Holland to be an innkeeper. This rascal of mixed nationality was, in all likelihood, a Fleming from Lille in Flanders, a Frenchman in Paris, a Belgian in Brussels—comfortably planted across both borders. As for his exploits at Waterloo, the reader already knows about them. It is clear that he exaggerated them a little. Drift, wandering, and adventure were the very substance of his life. A ragged conscience leads to a broken, unsettled existence. And it seems that during the stormy days around June 18, 1815, Thénardier belonged to that class of marauding camp followers we have already described: roaming the countryside, selling to some, stealing from others, and traveling like a family man with wife and children in a shaky cart behind marching troops, with an instinct for always attaching himself to the winning army. When the campaign ended, and with, as he put it, “some quibus,” he came to Montfermeil and opened an inn there.

This “quibus,” made up of purses and watches, gold rings and silver crosses, gathered at harvest time from furrows sown with corpses, did not come to much in the end, and it did not carry this sutler turned tavern-keeper very far.

Thénardier had a certain stiff directness in his gestures that, with an oath, brought the barracks to mind, and with the sign of the cross, the seminary. He was an excellent talker. He liked people to think he was an educated man. Even so, the schoolmaster had noticed that he mispronounced words.

He wrote the travelers’ rate card in an impressive style, but sharp eyes could sometimes spot spelling mistakes in it. Thénardier was cunning, greedy, lazy, and clever. He did not

look down on his servant girls, which led his wife to do without them. This giant of a woman was jealous. She seemed to think that this thin, yellow-faced little man must be desired by everyone.

Thénardier, who was above all a shrewd and level-headed man, was a restrained sort of scoundrel. That is the worst kind, because hypocrisy is part of it.

It was not that Thénardier could never be as furious as his wife; he could, at times, reach the same pitch of rage. But that was rare. And when it happened, it was because he was angry with the whole human race, carrying inside him a deep furnace of hatred. He was one of those people who are always taking revenge for their injuries, who blame everything in front of them for everything that has ever happened to them, and who are always ready to dump onto the first person at hand, as if it were a justified complaint, the full weight of the deceptions, bankruptcies, and disasters of their lives. When all that bitterness was stirred up in him and burst out through his mouth and eyes, he was terrifying. Woe to anyone who fell under his anger at such a moment!

Along with his other traits, Thénardier was observant and sharp, quiet or talkative as the situation required, and always highly intelligent. He had something of the look of sailors, used to narrowing their eyes as they peer through spyglasses. Thénardier was a statesman.

Every newcomer who walked into the tavern, the moment they saw Madame Thénardier, said, “There is the master of the

house." They were mistaken. She was not even the mistress. Her husband was both master and mistress. She did the work; he did the inventing. He controlled everything through a kind of invisible, constant force. A word from him was enough, sometimes just a gesture, and the mastodon obeyed. In Madame Thénardier's eyes, Thénardier was a peculiar and absolute being, though she did not fully understand this herself. She had virtues of her own sort. If she had ever disagreed with "Monsieur Thénardier" about any detail—which, by the way, was an unthinkable idea—she would never have blamed him in public for anything. She would never have made, "before strangers," the mistake so many women make, and which parliamentary language calls "exposing the crown." Although their harmony produced nothing but evil, there was still a kind of reverence in Madame Thénardier's submission to her husband. That mountain of noise and flesh moved at the touch of that frail despot's little finger. Seen in its shrunken and grotesque form, this was that great and universal thing: the worship of mind by matter. For some ugly traits have their source in the deepest reaches of eternal beauty. There was something unknown in Thénardier, and that gave him absolute power over this woman. At times she saw him like a burning candle; at others she felt him like a claw.

This woman was a formidable creature. She loved no one except her children, and feared no one except her husband. She was a mother because she was a mammal. But her motherhood went no farther than her daughters and, as we shall see, did not extend to boys. The man had only one idea: how to make himself rich.

He did not succeed. A stage worthy of his great talent was missing. Thénardier was ruining himself at Montfermeil—if zero can be ruined. In Switzerland or the Pyrenees, this penniless scoundrel would have become a millionaire. But an innkeeper must graze where fate has tethered him.

It should be understood that the word innkeeper is used here in a limited sense and is not meant to apply to the whole class.

In that same year, 1823, Thénardier was weighed down by about fifteen hundred francs in small debts, and this made him anxious.

Whatever stubborn injustice fate may have shown in this case, Thénardier was one of those men who understood, more deeply and in a more modern way than most, that thing which is a virtue among barbarous peoples and a commodity among civilized ones: hospitality. He was also an excellent poacher, famous for his skill with a gun. He had a cool, calm laugh that was especially dangerous.

His ideas about being an innkeeper sometimes came out in sudden flashes. He had professional maxims that he drilled into his wife. “An innkeeper’s duty,” he said to her one day, fiercely and in a low voice, “is to sell the first person who comes along

stew, rest, light, fire, dirty sheets, a servant, lice, and a smile; to stop travelers, empty small purses, and honestly lighten heavy ones; to give respectable shelter to traveling families; to shave the man, fleece the woman, and strip the child of everything; to set a price on the window open, the window shut, the chimney corner, the armchair, the chair, the ottoman, the stool, the feather bed, the mattress, and the bundle of straw; to know how much the shadow wears out the mirror, and charge for that too; and, by five hundred thousand devils, to make the traveler pay for everything, even the flies his dog eats!"

This man and this woman were cunning and fury joined in marriage—a hideous and terrible pair.

While the husband calculated and schemed, Madame Thénardier never thought about absent creditors, paid no attention to yesterday or tomorrow, and lived entirely in sudden fits of anger.

Cosette was caught between them, crushed by pressure from both sides, like a creature being ground in a mill and torn apart with pincers at the same time. The man and the woman each had their own method: the woman buried Cosette under blows; the man made her go barefoot in winter.

Cosette ran up and down the stairs, washed, swept, scrubbed, dusted, hurried from place to place, fluttered about, gasped for breath, moved heavy things, and, weak as she was, did the roughest work. No one showed her mercy. She had a savage mistress and a poisonous master. The Thénardier inn was like a spider's web, with Cosette trapped inside it, trembling. In that

dark household, oppression reached its ideal form. It was like a fly made to serve spiders.

The poor child said nothing and quietly kept still.

What happens inside these souls when they have only just left God and, at the very beginning of life, find themselves so small, so helpless, and completely exposed among other people?

CHAPTER III—MEN NEED WINE, AND HORSES NEED WATER

Four new travelers had arrived.

Cosette was thinking sadly. Although she was only eight years old, she had already suffered so much that she brooded with the gloomy look of an old woman. Her eye was black from a blow from Madame Thénardier's fist, which led Madame Thénardier to say from time to time, "How ugly she looks with that fist-blow on her eye!"

Cosette was thinking that it was dark—very dark—that the pitchers and carafes in the rooms of the newly arrived travelers must already have been filled, and that there was no more water in the cistern.

She felt a little reassured, because no one in the Thénardier inn drank much water. There were never any shortage of thirsty people there, but theirs was the kind of thirst that turned to the jug rather than the pitcher. If anyone had asked for a glass of water in the middle of all that wine, these men would have thought him a savage. But then came a moment when the child began to tremble. Madame Thénardier lifted the lid of a stewpan boiling on the stove, then took a glass and quickly went to the cistern. She turned the tap. The child had raised her head and was following every movement. A thin stream of water ran from the tap and filled the glass halfway. “Well,” she said, “there’s no more water!” A brief silence followed. The child did not breathe.

“Bah!” Madame Thénardier went on, looking at the half-filled glass. “This will be enough.”

Cosette bent over her work again, but for a quarter of an hour her heart kept jumping in her chest like a great snowflake.

She counted the minutes as they passed and wished morning would come.

From time to time one of the drinkers looked out into the street and cried, “It’s black as an oven!” or, “You’d have to be a cat to go through the streets without a lantern at this hour!” And Cosette trembled.

Suddenly, one of the peddlers staying at the inn came in and said in a harsh voice:

“My horse hasn’t been watered.”

“Yes, it has,” said Madame Thénardier.

“I’m telling you it hasn’t,” the peddler shot back.

Cosette had come out from under the table.

“Oh yes, sir!” she said. “The horse had a drink. He drank from a bucket, a whole bucketful, and I was the one who brought him the water, and I spoke to him.”

It was not true. Cosette was lying.

“Here’s a brat no bigger than my fist telling lies as big as the house,” cried the peddler. “I’m telling you he hasn’t been watered, you little wretch! He has a way of blowing when he hasn’t had water, and I know it well.”

Cosette insisted, and added in a voice made hoarse by anguish, so faint it was barely audible:

“And he drank eagerly.”

“Come now,” said the peddler angrily, “this won’t do. Have my horse watered, and let that be the end of it!”

Cosette crept back under the table.

“Well, that’s only fair,” said Madame Thénardier. “If the beast hasn’t been watered, then it must be.”

Then she glanced around her:

“Well now! Where’s that other beast?”

She bent down and found Cosette cowering at the far end of the table, almost under the drinkers’ feet.

“Are you coming?” shrieked Madame Thénardier.

Cosette crawled out of the kind of hole where she had hidden. Then Thénardier went on:

“Mademoiselle Dog-no-name, go water that horse.”

“But, Madame,” Cosette said weakly, “there isn’t any water.”

Thénardier threw the street door wide open:

“Then go get some!”

Cosette lowered her head and went to get an empty bucket standing near the corner of the chimney.

The bucket was bigger than she was, and the child could have sat down inside it comfortably.

Thénardier went back to her stove and tasted what was in the stewpan with a wooden spoon, grumbling all the while:

“There’s plenty at the spring. There never was such a spiteful creature as that one. I think I would have done better to strain my onions.”

Then she rummaged through a drawer that held sous, pepper, and shallots.

“Look here, Mam’selle Toad,” she added. “On your way back, get a large loaf from the baker. Here’s a fifteen-sou piece.”

Cosette had a small pocket on one side of her apron. She took the coin without a word and slipped it into that pocket.

Then she stood still, bucket in hand, with the open door in front of her. She seemed to be waiting for someone to come and save her.

“Be off with you!” screamed Thénardier.

Cosette went out. The door shut behind her.

CHAPTER IV—A DOLL ENTERS THE SCENE

As the reader will remember, the row of open-air booths began at the church and stretched as far as the Thénardiers' inn. All the booths were lit up, because the townspeople would soon be passing on their way to midnight mass, carrying candles in paper funnels, which, as the schoolmaster sitting at the Thénardiers' table remarked, created "a magical effect." In return, not a single star could be seen in the sky.

The last of these stalls, set up directly opposite the Thénardiers' door, was a toy shop glittering with tinsel, glass, and splendid tin objects. In the front row, pushed well forward, the shopkeeper had placed, against a background of white napkins, an enormous doll nearly two feet tall. She wore a pink crepe dress, had golden wheat ears on her head, real hair, and enamel eyes. All day long, this marvel had been on display, amazing every passerby under the age of ten, yet in all Montfermeil not a single mother was rich enough—or extravagant enough—to buy it for her child. Éponine and Azelma had spent hours gazing at it, and even Cosette had dared to steal a glance at it, though only in secret.

When Cosette came out, bucket in hand, sad and weighed down as she was, she could not help raising her eyes to that marvelous doll—to "the lady," as she called it. The poor child stopped in astonishment. She had never seen that doll up close before. To her, the whole shop looked like a palace, and the doll was not a doll at all, but a vision. It was joy, splendor, wealth,

happiness, appearing in a kind of magical glow before that unhappy little creature, so deeply buried in cold, dark misery. With the sad, innocent insight of childhood, Cosette measured the gulf between herself and that doll. She told herself that to own such a “thing,” one would have to be a queen, or at least a princess. She looked at the lovely pink dress and the beautiful smooth hair, and thought, “How happy that doll must be!” She could not take her eyes off that enchanted display. The longer she looked, the more dazzled she became. She felt as though she were looking at paradise. Behind the large doll were others, which seemed to her like fairies and genies. The shopkeeper, walking back and forth in front of his store, seemed to her almost like the Eternal Father.

Lost in this worship, she forgot everything, even the errand she had been sent on.

Suddenly Thénardier’s harsh voice brought her back to reality: “What, you stupid brat! You haven’t gone yet? Just wait! I’ll deal with you! I’d like to know what you’re doing there! Move along, you little monster!”

Thénardier had glanced into the street and caught sight of Cosette standing there in rapture.

Cosette ran off, dragging her bucket and taking the longest steps she could manage.

CHAPTER V—THE LITTLE ONE ALL ALONE

Since the Thénardier inn stood in the part of the village near the church, Cosette had to go to the spring in the forest, in the direction of Chelles, to fetch water.

She did not so much as look at any other merchant's display. As long as she was still in Boulanger Lane, near the church, the lit stalls cast light across the road. But before long, the glow from the last stall disappeared. The poor child was left in the dark. She went on into it. Only, as a certain fear came over her, she swung the bucket handle as much as she could while she walked. The noise kept her company.

The farther she went, the thicker the darkness grew. No one was in the streets. Still, she did meet a woman, who turned when she saw her and stopped, muttering under her breath, "Where can that child be going? Is she a werewolf child?" Then the woman recognized Cosette. "Well," she said, "it's the Lark!"

In this way Cosette made her way through the maze of winding, deserted streets that end at the village of Montfermeil on the Chelles side. As long as there were houses—or even just walls—on both sides of her, she went on with some degree of courage. From time to time she caught the flicker of a candle through a crack in a shutter. That meant light and life; people were there, and it reassured her. But the farther she went, the more her pace slowed, almost without her knowing it. When she had passed the corner of the last house, Cosette stopped. It had

been hard enough to go beyond the last stall; it was impossible to go beyond the last house. She set her bucket on the ground, pushed her hand into her hair, and slowly began to scratch her head—a gesture children often make when they are frightened and do not know what to do. This was no longer Montfermeil; it was the open country. Before her lay black, empty space. In despair, she stared into that darkness, where no one was left, where there were beasts, where there might even be ghosts. She peered hard and heard the beasts moving through the grass, and she clearly saw ghosts stirring in the trees. Then she grabbed her bucket again; fear had given her boldness. “Bah!” she said. “I’ll tell him there was no more water!” And she turned back into Montfermeil with determination.

She had barely gone a hundred paces when she stopped and scratched her head again. Now she saw Thénardier in her mind, with her hideous hyena-like mouth and anger blazing in her eyes. The child cast a miserable glance ahead and behind. What was she supposed to do? What would happen to her? Where could she go? In front of her stood the specter of Thénardier; behind her were all the phantoms of the night and the forest. It was Thénardier who frightened her more. She set off again toward the spring and began to run. She left the village and rushed into the forest, no longer looking or listening to anything. She stopped only when she was out of breath, but even then she did not turn back. In despair, she kept going straight ahead.

As she ran, she felt like crying.

The forest's nighttime trembling closed in around her completely.

She no longer thought; she no longer saw. The vastness of the night stood before this tiny creature. On one side, endless shadow; on the other, a speck.

It was only a seven- or eight-minute walk from the edge of the woods to the spring. Cosette knew the path because she had taken it many times in daylight. Strangely enough, she did not lose her way. Some last trace of instinct guided her dimly. But she did not look to the right or the left, afraid she might see something in the branches or the brush. In this way she reached the spring.

It was a small natural basin, worn out by the water in clay soil, about two feet deep, ringed with moss and those tall, curled grasses called Henry IV's frills, with several large stones lining the bottom. A brook flowed out of it with a soft, steady sound.

Cosette did not stop to catch her breath. It was very dark, but she was used to coming to this spring. With her left hand, she felt through the darkness for a young oak leaning over the water, the tree she usually used for support. She found a branch, gripped it, bent down, and plunged the bucket into the spring. She was so intensely agitated that her strength seemed tripled. As she bent there, she did not notice that the pocket of her apron had emptied into the water. The fifteen-sou piece fell into the spring. Cosette neither saw nor heard it fall. She pulled the bucket out nearly full and set it on the grass.

After that, she realized she was exhausted. She would have liked to start walking again at once, but drawing the bucket had taken so much effort that she could not manage another step. She had to sit down. She sank onto the grass and stayed there, crouched over.

She closed her eyes, then opened them again, not knowing why, except that she could not help it. The water sloshing in the bucket beside her moved in circles that looked like snakes of tin.

Above her, the sky was covered with huge black clouds like masses of smoke. The tragic mask of shadow seemed to bend dimly over the child.

Jupiter was sinking low in the distance.

The child stared in confusion at this great star, which she did not know and which filled her with fear. In fact, the planet was very close to the horizon and was passing through a thick layer of mist that gave it a dreadful reddish color. The dark purple mist made the star look larger. It might have been taken for a glowing wound.

A cold wind was blowing across the plain. The forest was dark, and not a leaf moved; none of the faint, fresh glimmers of summer remained. Great branches rose in terrifying shapes. Thin, twisted bushes whistled in the clearings. The tall grass rippled like eels under the north wind. The nettles seemed to stretch out long, clawed arms in search of prey. Bits of dry heather, caught by the breeze, flew quickly past and looked as though they were fleeing in terror from something chasing

them. On every side, the land stretched out in mournful emptiness.

The darkness was overwhelming. Human beings need light. Anyone who sinks into the opposite of day feels their heart tighten. When the eye sees blackness, the heart senses danger. In the deep night, in that sooty darkness, even the bravest feel anxious. No one walks alone through a forest at night without trembling. Shadows and trees—two terrible masses. In those blurred depths, an unreal kind of reality seems to appear. A few steps away, the unimaginable takes shape with a ghostly clarity. You seem to see something vague and untouchable drifting either in the air or in your own mind—you cannot tell which—like the dreams of sleeping flowers. Fierce shapes seem to rise on the horizon. You breathe in the exhalation of the vast black emptiness. You are afraid to look behind you, and yet you want to. The hollows of the night, gaunt things, silent profiles that vanish as you approach, dim tangles, bristling clumps, pale pools, mournful reflections in funeral gloom, the grave-like vastness of silence, unknown but possible beings, the bending of mysterious branches, the alarming trunks of trees, long handfuls of trembling plants—against all this, you have no defense. No courage is so great that it does not shudder and feel the nearness of anguish. You become aware of something hideous, as if your soul were merging with the darkness. For a child, this entering into the shadows is indescribably sinister.

Forests are like apocalypses, and beneath their monstrous vaults, the flutter of a tiny soul's wings sounds like agony.

Without understanding what she was feeling, Cosette knew that this black vastness of nature had seized her. It was no longer just terror taking hold of her. It was something even worse than terror. She trembled. No words can express the strangeness of that shiver, which chilled her to the very bottom of her heart. Her eyes grew wild. She thought she felt that she would not be able to keep herself from coming back there at the same hour the next day.

Then, almost by instinct, she began counting out loud—one, two, three, four, and so on up to ten—to escape that strange state she did not understand but that filled her with terror. When she reached ten, she started again. Little by little, this brought her back to a clear sense of the things around her. Her hands, wet from drawing the water, felt cold. She stood up. Her fear—a natural fear she could not overcome—had returned. Now she had only one thought: to run as fast as she could through the forest, across the fields, toward the houses, the windows, the candlelight. Her eyes fell on the bucket of water in front of her. Such was the fear Thénardier inspired in her that she did not dare run away without it. She grabbed the handle with both hands. She could barely lift the bucket.

In this way she managed to go a dozen steps, but the bucket was full and heavy, and she had to set it down again. She stopped for a moment to catch her breath, then lifted the handle once more and went on. This time she got a little farther, but again she had to stop. After a few seconds of rest, she started again. She walked bent forward, her head hanging down, like an old woman. The weight of the bucket pulled at her thin arms and

made them stiff. The iron handle numbed and froze her small wet hands even more. From time to time she had to stop, and whenever she did, cold water splashed from the bucket onto her bare legs. All this was happening deep in a forest, at night, in winter, far from any human eye. She was a child of eight. No one but God saw that sorrowful sight.

And her mother, no doubt—alas!

For there are things that make the dead open their eyes in their graves.

She was breathing in a harsh, painful rattle. Sobs tightened her throat, but she did not dare cry. She was too afraid of Thénardier, even from far away. She was used to imagining Thénardier as always there.

But she could not get far that way, and she moved on very slowly. Even though she stopped for less time and walked as far as she could between rests, she realized in despair that at this rate it would take her more than an hour to get back to Montfermeil, and that the Thénardier would beat her. That despair mixed with her fear of being alone in the woods at night. She was exhausted, and she had still not come out of the forest. When she reached an old chestnut tree she knew, she made one last stop, longer than the others, so that she could rest fully. Then she gathered all her strength, picked up her bucket again, and bravely went on. But the poor little creature, driven to desperation, could not help crying, "O my God! my God!"

At that moment she suddenly felt that her bucket no longer weighed anything. A hand, which seemed enormous to her, had

just taken hold of the handle and lifted it strongly. She looked up. A tall black shape, straight and upright, was walking beside her in the darkness. It was a man who had come up behind her without her hearing him. Without saying a word, he had taken hold of the handle of the bucket she was carrying.

There are instincts for every encounter in life.

The child was not afraid.

CHAPTER VI—WHICH MAY POSSIBLY PROVE BOULATRUELLE'S INTELLIGENCE

On the afternoon of that same Christmas Day in 1823, a man had been walking for quite a long time through the most deserted part of the Boulevard de l'Hôpital in Paris. He looked like someone searching for a place to stay, and he seemed to stop most often at the humblest houses along that run-down edge of the faubourg Saint-Marceau.

We shall see later that this man had in fact rented a room in that isolated neighborhood.

In his clothes, as in everything about him, this man perfectly embodied what might be called the well-bred beggar: utter misery joined to spotless neatness. It is a rare combination, and it stirs thoughtful people with a double respect—the respect one feels for someone who is very poor, and for someone who is deeply honorable. He wore a very old but carefully brushed round hat; a coarse coat, completely worn thin, in an ochre yellow that was not at all unusual in those days; a large waistcoat with old-fashioned pockets; black breeches faded gray at the knees; black worsted stockings; and heavy shoes with copper buckles. One might have taken him for a tutor in a respectable household, returned from exile. His perfectly white hair, wrinkled forehead, pale lips, and face—where everything suggested discouragement and weariness with life—made him

look well over sixty. Yet his steady step and the striking strength in all his movements would have made one think him hardly fifty. The lines in his forehead were well formed and would have won the sympathy of anyone who looked at him closely. His lip tightened in a strange expression that seemed both stern and humble. In the depth of his gaze there was an indescribable, melancholy calm. In his left hand he carried a small bundle tied in a handkerchief. In his right he leaned on a kind of club cut from a hedge. The stick had been carefully trimmed and did not look too threatening. Its knots had been made the most of, and it had been given a coral-like knob of red wax. It was a club, yet it looked like a cane.

Few people pass along that boulevard, especially in winter. The man seemed to avoid them rather than seek them out, though he did so without any show or self-consciousness.

At that time, King Louis XVIII went to Choisy-le-Roi almost every day; it was one of his favorite outings. At about two o'clock, with remarkable regularity, the royal carriage and escort could be seen racing along the Boulevard de l'Hôpital.

This took the place of a watch or clock for the poor women of the neighborhood, who would say, "It is two o'clock; there he is, returning to the Tuileries."

Some people rushed forward, while others lined up, because a king passing by always caused a stir. And Louis XVIII's appearances in the streets of Paris had a particular effect of their own. He came and went quickly, yet with majesty. This powerless king liked speed; since he could not walk, he wanted

to race. That cripple would gladly have had himself carried by lightning. He passed, peaceful and stern, through a forest of drawn swords. His huge carriage, covered in gilding, with great sprays of lilies painted on its panels, rumbled loudly past. There was barely time to catch a glimpse of it. In the rear right corner, on tufted white satin cushions, one could make out a large, solid, ruddy face; a brow freshly powdered _à l'oiseau royal_; a proud, harsh, cunning eye; the smile of a cultivated man; two large 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 star of the Saint-Esprit, an enormous belly, and a broad blue ribbon: it was the king. Outside Paris, he kept his hat, trimmed with white ostrich plumes, on his knees wrapped in high English gaiters; when he re-entered the city, he put the hat on and rarely saluted. He looked coldly at the people, and they gave him the same look in return. The first time he appeared in the Saint-Marceau quarter, the full measure of his success was summed up in one remark made by a resident of the faubourg to his companion: "That big fellow over there is the government."

So the king's unfailing passage at the same hour became the daily event on the Boulevard de l'Hôpital.

The man strolling in the yellow coat clearly did not belong to the neighborhood, and probably not to Paris either, since he knew nothing of this local routine. So when, at two o'clock, the royal carriage, surrounded by a squadron of bodyguards glittering with silver lace, emerged onto the boulevard after turning by the Salpêtrière, he seemed surprised, almost frightened. He was the

only person in that side lane. He quickly stepped back behind the corner of an enclosing wall, though that did not keep M. le Duc de Havré from noticing him.

M. le Duc de Havré, who was serving as captain of the guard that day, sat in the carriage opposite the king. He said to His Majesty, “There is an evil-looking man over there.” The police officers clearing the king’s route had noticed the man as well, and one of them was ordered to follow him. But the man disappeared into the empty little streets of the faubourg, and as dusk began to fall, the officer lost him, as stated in a report sent that same evening to M. le Comte d’Anglès, Minister of State and Prefect of Police.

Once the man in the yellow coat had shaken off the officer, he quickened his pace, though he kept turning around to make sure no one was following him. At a quarter past four, when night had fully fallen, he passed in front of the Porte Saint-Martin theatre, where _The Two Convicts_ was playing that day. The poster, lit by the theatre lanterns, caught his eye. Though he was walking quickly, he stopped to read it. A moment later he was in the blind alley of La Planchette, and he went into the _Plat d’Etain_ [the Pewter Platter], where the Lagny coach office was then located. The coach left at half past four. The horses were already harnessed, and the passengers, called by the coachman, were hurrying up the tall iron ladder into the vehicle.

The man asked:

“Do you have a seat?”

“Only one—up beside me on the box,” said the coachman.

“I’ll take it.”

“Climb up.”

Even so, before they set out, the coachman looked over the traveler’s shabby clothes and the small size of his bundle, and made him pay his fare in advance.

“Are you going all the way to Lagny?” the coachman asked.

“Yes,” said the man.

The traveler paid the fare to Lagny.

They set off. After they had passed the barrier, the coachman tried to strike up a conversation, but the traveler answered only in single words. The coachman gave up and began whistling and cursing at his horses.

The coachman wrapped himself in his cloak. It was cold. The man did not seem to notice. In this way they passed Gournay and Neuilly-sur-Marne.

Around six o’clock that evening, they arrived at Chelles. The coachman stopped in front of the carters’ inn, which occupied the old buildings of the Royal Abbey, to give his horses a short rest.

“I get off here,” said the man.

He picked up his bundle and his cudgel and jumped down from the coach.

A moment later, he had vanished.

He did not go into the inn.

When the coach left for Lagny a few minutes later, it did not pass him in the main street of Chelles.

The coachman turned to the passengers inside.

“There,” he said, “is a man who does not belong here, because I do not know him. He did not look as though he owned a sou, yet he does not care about money; he paid for Lagny, and he only came as far as Chelles. It is night, all the houses are closed, he does not go into the inn, and he is nowhere to be found. So he must have sunk into the earth.”

The man had not sunk into the earth. He had simply gone striding through the darkness along the main street of Chelles. Then, before reaching the church, he turned right onto the road leading to Montfermeil, like someone who knew the area and had been there before.

He moved quickly along this road. At the point where it crossed the old tree-lined road running from Gagny to Lagny, he heard people approaching. He quickly hid in a ditch and waited there until they had gone some distance away. The precaution was almost unnecessary, however, for, as we have already said, it was a very dark December night. No more than two or three stars could be seen in the sky.

This is where the climb up the hill begins. The man did not go back to the road to Montfermeil; instead, he cut across the fields to the right and entered the forest with long strides.

Once he was in the forest, he slowed down and carefully examined the trees, moving forward step by step, as if he were following some hidden path known only to him. At one point he seemed to lose his way and stopped, uncertain. At last, by feeling his way forward inch by inch, he reached a clearing where a large pile of pale stones lay. He went straight to them and studied them closely through the night mist, as if inspecting them one by one. A large tree, covered with the growths that are like warts on plants, stood a few paces from the pile. He went to it and ran his hand over the trunk, as though trying to identify and count every one of those knots.

Opposite this tree, which was an ash, stood a chestnut tree with bark peeling away, and a strip of zinc had been nailed to it as a kind of bandage. He rose onto his tiptoes and touched the zinc strip.

Then he walked back and forth for a while over the ground between the tree and the pile of stones, like someone trying to make sure the earth had not been disturbed recently.

After that, he got his bearings and continued on through the forest.

It was the man who had just met Cosette.

As he made his way through the undergrowth toward Montfermeil, he had caught sight of a tiny shadow moving along with a groan, setting a burden down on the ground, then picking it up and starting again. He came closer and saw that it was a very young child carrying an enormous bucket of water. Then he went up to the child and silently took hold of the bucket's

handle.

CHAPTER VII—COSETTE WALKING BESIDE THE STRANGER IN THE DARK

As we have said, Cosette was not afraid.

The man spoke to her. His voice was deep and serious.

“My child, what you’re carrying is very heavy for you.”

Cosette lifted her head and replied:

“Yes, sir.”

“Give it to me,” said the man. “I’ll carry it for you.”

Cosette let go of the bucket handle. The man walked beside her.

“It really is very heavy,” he muttered under his breath. Then he added:

“How old are you, little one?”

“Eight, sir.”

“Have you come a long way like this?”

“From the spring in the forest.”

“Are you going far?”

“About a quarter of an hour’s walk from here.”

The man said nothing for a moment. Then he said abruptly:

“So you don’t have a mother.”

“I don’t know,” the child answered.

Before the man could speak again, she added:

“I don’t think so. Other people have mothers. I don’t.”

After a silence, she went on:

“I think I never had one.”

The man stopped. He set the bucket on the ground, bent down, and put both hands on the child’s shoulders, trying to look at her and make out her face in the dark.

Cosette’s thin, sickly face was faintly outlined by the pale light in the sky.

“What is your name?” the man said.

“Cosette.”

The man seemed to be struck by a shock. He looked at her again, then took his hands from Cosette’s shoulders, picked up the bucket, and started on once more.

After a moment, he asked:

“Where do you live, little one?”

“At Montfermeil, if you know where that is.”

“That’s where we’re going?”

“Yes, sir.”

He paused, then began again:

“Who sent you into the forest for water at this hour?”

“Madame Thénardier did.”

The man went on in a voice he tried to keep casual, though it still shook strangely:

“What does your Madame Thénardier do?”

“She is my mistress,” said the child. “She keeps the inn.”

“The inn?” the man said. “Well, I’m going to stay there tonight. Show me the way.”

“We’re already on the way there,” said the child.

The man walked fairly quickly. Cosette kept up with him easily. She no longer felt tired. Now and then she looked up at him with a kind of calm and an indescribable trust. She had never been taught to turn to Providence or to pray; still, she felt something inside her like hope and joy rising toward heaven.

Several minutes passed. The man spoke again:

“Is there no servant in Madame Thénardier’s house?”

“No, sir.”

“Are you there alone?”

“Yes, sir.”

There was another pause. Cosette spoke up:

“That is, there are two little girls.”

“What little girls?”

“Ponine and Zelma.”

This was how the child shortened the romantic names that Madame Thénardier was so fond of.

“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 on them, all dressed up. They play. They enjoy themselves.”

“All day long?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And you?”

“Me? I work.”

“All day long?”

The child lifted her large eyes, with a tear hanging in them that could not be seen in the dark, and answered gently:

“Yes, sir.”

After a moment of silence, she went on:

“Sometimes, when I have finished my work and they let me, I play too.”

“How do you play?”

“The best way I can. They leave me by myself, but I do not have many toys. Ponine and Zelma will not let me play with their dolls. I only have a little lead sword, no longer than that.”

The child held up her tiny finger.

“And it does not cut?”

“Yes, sir,” said the child. “It cuts salad and the heads off flies.”

They arrived at the village, and Cosette led the stranger through the streets. They passed the bakery, but Cosette no longer thought about the bread she had been sent to get. The man had stopped questioning her and now walked on in gloomy silence.

After they had passed the church, the man noticed all the stalls set up outside and asked Cosette:

“So there’s a fair here?”

“No, sir. It’s Christmas.”

As they drew near the tavern, Cosette shyly touched his arm:

“Monsieur?”

“What is it, my child?”

“We’re very close to the house now.”

“Well?”

“Will you let me carry my bucket now?”

“Why?”

“If Madame sees that someone carried it for me, she’ll beat me.”

The man gave her the bucket. A moment later, they were at the tavern door.

CHAPTER VIII—HOW UNPLEASANT IT IS TO TAKE IN A POOR MAN WHO MAY TURN OUT TO BE RICH

Cosette could not help giving the large doll, still on display at the toy seller's, a sideways glance before she knocked. The door opened. Madame Thénardier stood there with a candle in her hand.

"Ah, so it's you, you little wretch! Good Lord, you took long enough! The hussy's been amusing herself!"

"Madame," Cosette said, trembling from head to foot, "here is a gentleman who wants a room."

Madame Thénardier quickly exchanged her harsh manner for the pleasant grimace common to innkeepers and eagerly looked past Cosette at the newcomer.

"This is the gentleman?" she said.

"Yes, Madame," the man replied, lifting a hand to his hat.

Rich travelers are not usually so polite. That gesture, along with the quick look Madame Thénardier gave his clothes and luggage, made her pleasant expression disappear and her rough manner return. Dryly, she said:

"Come in, my good man."

The “good man” came in. Madame Thénardier gave him a second look, paying close attention to his completely threadbare frock coat and his slightly battered hat. With a toss of her head, a wrinkle of her nose, and a narrowing of her eyes, she silently consulted her husband, who was still drinking with the carters. He answered with a barely noticeable movement of his forefinger, reinforced by a puffing out of his lips, the sort of gesture that in such cases means: a plain beggar. At that, Madame Thénardier exclaimed:

“Ah! Look here, my good man, I am very sorry, but I have no room left.”

“Put me wherever you like,” said the man. “In the attic, in the stable. I will pay as if I had a room.”

“Forty sous.”

“Forty sous. Agreed.”

“Very well, then!”

“Forty sous!” said a carter quietly to Madame Thénardier. “Why, the price is only twenty sous!”

“It is forty for him,” Madame Thénardier shot back in the same low tone. “I don’t take in poor people for less.”

“That’s true,” her husband added mildly. “It ruins a house to have people like that in it.”

Meanwhile, the man set his bundle and his cudgel on a bench and sat down at a table, where Cosette quickly placed a bottle of wine and a glass. The peddler who had asked for the bucket

of water took it to his horse himself. Cosette went back to her place under the kitchen table and resumed her knitting.

The man, who had barely wet his lips with the wine he had poured for himself, watched the child with particular attention.

Cosette was ugly. If she had been happy, she might have been pretty. We have already sketched that dark little figure. Cosette was thin and pale. She was nearly eight years old, but looked barely six. Her large eyes, sunk in shadow, were almost blinded from crying. The corners of her mouth had the set of constant misery, the kind seen in condemned prisoners and the desperately ill. Her hands were, as her mother had foreseen, "ruined with chilblains." The fire lighting her at that moment threw every bone into sharp relief and made her thinness terrifyingly plain. Because she was always cold and trembling, she had fallen into the habit of pressing her knees together. All her clothing amounted to a rag that would have stirred pity in summer and inspired horror in winter. She wore nothing but torn linen full of holes, without a scrap of wool. Her skin showed through in places, and black-and-blue marks could be seen everywhere the Thénardier woman had laid hands on her. Her bare legs were thin and red. The hollows at her neck were enough to bring tears to the eyes. Everything about this child—her appearance, her bearing, her posture, the sound of her voice, the pauses between her words, her look, her silence, her smallest movement—expressed and revealed a single thing: fear.

Fear had spread through her whole being; she was covered in it, so to speak. It pulled her elbows tight against her sides, tucked her heels under her petticoat, and made her take up as little space as possible. It allowed her only the breath she absolutely needed. It had become, one might say, the habit of her body, with no possible change except to grow worse. In the depths of her eyes there was a startled corner where terror hid.

Her fear was so great that when she arrived, soaked as she was, Cosette did not dare go near the fire to dry herself. She quietly sat down and went back to her work.

The look in that eight-year-old child's eyes was usually so dark, and sometimes so tragic, that at certain moments she seemed on the edge of becoming either an idiot or a demon.

As we have said, she had never known what it was to pray. She had never set foot in a church. "Do I have the time?" said the Thénardier.

The man in the yellow coat never took his eyes off Cosette.

Suddenly, Thénardier cried out:

"By the way, where's that bread?"

As she always did whenever Thénardier raised her voice, Cosette hurried out from under the table.

She had completely forgotten the bread. She did what children do when they live in constant fear: she lied.

"Madame, the baker's shop was closed."

“You should have knocked.”

“I did knock, Madame.”

“Well?”

“He didn’t open the door.”

“I’ll find out tomorrow whether that’s true,” said Thénardier. “And if you’re lying to me, you’ll pay for it. In the meantime, give me back my fifteen-sou piece.”

Cosette thrust her hand into her apron pocket and went pale. The fifteen-sou piece was gone.

“Well now,” said Madame Thénardier, “did you hear me?”

Cosette turned her pocket inside out. There was nothing in it. What could have happened to the money? The poor child could not find a single word to say. She was frozen with terror.

“Have you lost that fifteen-sou piece?” Thénardier screamed hoarsely. “Or are you trying to steal it from me?”

At the same time, she reached toward the cat-o’-nine-tails hanging from a nail in the corner of the chimney.

That terrifying gesture gave Cosette just enough strength to cry out:

“Mercy, Madame, Madame! I won’t do it again!”

Thénardier took down the whip.

Meanwhile, the man in the yellow coat had been feeling around in his waistcoat pocket chain, and no one had noticed. Besides, the other travelers were drinking or playing cards and paying

attention to nothing else.

Cosette curled herself into a ball in the corner by the chimney, sick with fear, trying to draw in and hide her poor half-bare limbs. Thénardier lifted her arm.

“Pardon me, Madame,” said the man, “but just now I saw something fall from this little girl’s apron pocket and roll away. Perhaps this is it.”

At the same moment, he bent down and seemed to search the floor for a moment.

“Exactly—here it is,” he said, straightening up.

And he held out a silver coin to the Thénardier.

“Yes, that’s it,” she said.

It was not it, because it was a twenty-sou piece; but that suited the Thénardier perfectly well. She slipped the coin into her pocket and limited herself to throwing the child a fierce look and saying, “Don’t ever let this happen again!”

Cosette went back to what the Thénardier called “her kennel,” and her large eyes, fixed on the traveller, began to show an expression they had never held before. Up to this point, it was only innocent astonishment, but mixed with it was a kind of dazed trust.

“By the way, would you like some supper?” the Thénardier asked the traveller.

He did not answer. He seemed lost in thought.

“What kind of man is that?” she muttered under her breath. “He’s some terribly poor wretch. He hasn’t a sou to pay for supper. Will he even pay for his lodging? Still, it’s very lucky it never occurred to him to steal the money that was lying on the floor.”

Meanwhile, a door opened, and Éponine and Azelma came in.

They were two truly pretty little girls, looking more bourgeois than peasant, and very charming: one with shining chestnut hair, the other with long black braids down her back. Both were lively, neat, plump, rosy, healthy, and delightful to look at. They were warmly dressed, but with so much maternal skill that the heavy fabric did nothing to spoil the stylish effect. There was a touch of winter in their clothes, though spring had not entirely disappeared. These two little creatures seemed to give off light. More than that, they were on the throne. In their clothes, their gaiety, and the noise they made, there was a kind of royalty. When they came in, the Thénardier said to them in a grumbling voice full of adoration, “Ah! there you are, children!”

Then she drew them to her knees one by one, smoothed their hair, retied their ribbons, and sent them off again with that gentle little push that seems peculiar to mothers. “What little frightful things they are!” she exclaimed.

They went and sat in the chimney-corner. They had a doll, and they turned it over and over on their knees, chattering happily all the while. From time to time, Cosette looked up from her knitting and watched them play with a sad expression.

Éponine and Azelma did not look at Cosette. To them, she was no more than a dog. These three little girls did not yet add up to twenty-four years between them, and yet they already reflected the whole of human society: envy on one side, contempt on the other.

The Thénardier sisters' doll was badly faded, very old, and half broken. Even so, it seemed wonderful to Cosette, who had never had a doll in her life—a real doll, to use the phrase every child will understand.

Suddenly Madame Thénardier, who had been pacing back and forth across the room, noticed that Cosette's attention had wandered and that, instead of working, she was watching the little girls play.

"Ah! So I've caught you!" she cried. "So this is how you work! I'll teach you to work to the crack of the whip, I will."

The stranger turned toward Madame Thénardier without getting up from his chair.

"Come now, Madame," he said, almost timidly, "let her play."

A request like that, coming from a traveler who had eaten a slice of mutton and drunk a couple of bottles of wine with his supper, and who did not seem desperately poor, would have amounted to an order. But for a man in such a hat to allow himself such a request, and for a man in such a coat to presume to have a will of his own, was something Madame Thénardier had no intention of putting up with. She answered sharply:

"She has to work, since she eats. I don't feed her for nothing."

“What is she making?” the stranger went on in a gentle voice, oddly at odds with his ragged clothes and his porter’s broad shoulders.

Madame Thénardier condescended to reply:

“Stockings, if you please. Stockings for my little girls, who practically have none and are completely barefoot at the moment.”

The man looked at Cosette’s poor little red feet and went on:

“When will she finish this pair of stockings?”

“She still has at least three or four solid days of work left on them, the lazy thing!”

“And what will that pair of stockings be worth when she’s finished?”

Thénardier gave him a scornful look.

“At least thirty sous.”

“Will you sell them for five francs?” the man went on.

“Good heavens!” cried a carter who had been listening, bursting into loud laughter. “Five francs! Of course! Five whole balls!”

Thénardier decided it was time to step in.

“Yes, sir. If that is your wish, you may have that pair of stockings for five francs. We never refuse travelers anything.”

“You must pay at once,” said Thénardier’s wife in her short, sharp way.

“I will buy that pair of stockings,” the man replied. Then he pulled a five-franc piece from his pocket, set it on the table, and added, “And I will pay for them.”

Then he turned to Cosette.

“Now I own your work. Go play, my child.”

The carter was so struck by the five-franc piece that he left his glass and hurried over.

“Why, it’s true!” he cried, looking it over. “A real hind wheel, and not a counterfeit!”

Thénardier came over and silently slipped the coin into his pocket.

Thénardier’s wife had no answer. She bit her lips, and her face took on a look of hatred.

Meanwhile, Cosette was trembling. She dared to ask:

“Is it true, Madame? May I play?”

“Play!” said Thénardier’s wife in a terrible voice.

“Thank you, Madame,” said Cosette.

And while her mouth thanked Thénardier’s wife, her whole little soul thanked the traveler.

Thénardier had gone back to his drinking; his wife whispered in his ear:

“Who could this yellow man be?”

“I’ve seen millionaires wearing coats like that,” Thénardier replied with an air of authority.

Cosette had let her knitting fall, but she had not left her seat. She 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 happening. They had just carried out a very important operation: they had captured the cat. They had thrown their doll on the floor, and Éponine, the older of the two, was wrapping the little cat in a pile of clothes and red and blue scraps, despite its mewing and squirming. As she worked at this serious and difficult task, she spoke to her sister in that sweet, charming language of children, whose grace vanishes the moment one tries to pin it down, like the shimmer on a butterfly’s wing.

“You see, sister, this doll is more fun than the other one. She wriggles, she cries, she’s warm. Look, sister, let’s play with her. She’ll be my little girl. I’ll be a lady. I’ll come to visit you, and you can look at her. Little by little, you’ll notice her whiskers, and that will surprise you. Then you’ll see her ears, and then you’ll see her tail, and that will amaze you. And you’ll say to me, ‘Ah! Mon Dieu!’ and I’ll say to you, ‘Yes, Madame, she is my little girl. That’s how little girls are made just now.’”

Azelma listened to Éponine with admiration.

Meanwhile, the drinkers had begun singing an obscene song and laughing over it until the ceiling shook. Thénardier joined in and egged them on.

Just as birds build nests out of whatever they find, children make dolls out of anything at hand. While Éponine and Azelma were wrapping up the cat, Cosette, for her part, had dressed up her sword. When she had finished, she laid it in her arms and sang to it softly to lull it to sleep.

A doll is one of the strongest needs of a girl's childhood, and at the same time one of its sweetest instincts. Caring for it, clothing it, decorating it, dressing and undressing it, dressing it again, teaching it, scolding it a little, rocking it, bouncing it, lulling it to sleep, imagining that a thing is a person—within all that lies a woman's whole future. While she dreams and chatters, making tiny outfits and baby clothes, sewing little dresses, corsages, and bodices, the child becomes a young girl, the young girl a grown girl, and the grown girl a woman. The first child is the continuation of the last doll.

A little girl without a doll is almost as unhappy—and just as unnatural—as a woman without children.

So Cosette had made herself a doll out of the sword.

Madame Thénardier came over to the yellow man. "My husband is right," she thought. "Perhaps it is M. Laffitte; there are such strange rich men!"

She came up and planted her elbows on the table.

"Monsieur," she said. At that word, Monsieur, the man turned; until then, the Thénardiers had addressed him only as brave homme or bonhomme.

“You see, sir,” she went on, putting on a sugary expression even more unpleasant than her usual fierce look, “I don’t mind letting the child play. I’m not against it. But it can only happen once, because you are generous. You see, she has nothing; she has to work.”

“Then this child is not yours?” the man asked.

“Oh! mon Dieu! No, sir! She is a little beggar we took in out of charity, a sort of half-witted child. She must have water on the brain; she has a large head, as you can see. We do what we can for her, for we are not rich. We have written to her native place in vain, and for six months we have had no reply. Her mother must be dead.”

“Ah!” said the man, and sank back into his reverie.

“Her mother was no good,” Thénardier added. “She abandoned her child.”

Throughout this whole conversation, Cosette, as if some instinct had warned her that they were talking about her, never took her eyes off Thénardier’s face. She listened vaguely and caught a few words here and there.

Meanwhile, the drinkers, all three-quarters drunk, were repeating their filthy chorus with even more noisy cheer. It was a bawdy, indecent song that brought in the Virgin and the infant Jesus. Thénardier went over to join in the laughter. From her place under the table, Cosette stared at the fire, its glow reflected in her fixed eyes. She had begun rocking the makeshift baby she had made, and as she rocked it she sang

softly, “My mother is dead! my mother is dead! my mother is dead!”

After the hostess urged him again, the yellow-faced man, “the millionaire,” finally agreed to have some supper.

“What would Monsieur like?”

“Bread and cheese,” said the man.

“He is definitely a beggar,” thought Madame Thénardier.

The drunken men were still singing their song, and the child under the table was still singing hers.

All at once, Cosette stopped. She had just turned and caught sight of the little Thénardiers’ doll, which they had dropped for the cat and left on the floor a few steps from the kitchen table.

Then she let go of the swaddled sword, which only half satisfied her, and slowly looked around the room. Madame Thénardier was whispering to her husband and counting money. Ponine and Zelma were playing with the cat. The travelers were eating, drinking, or singing. No one was looking at her. She had no time to lose. She crawled out from under the table on her hands and knees, checked once more that no one was watching, then quickly slipped over to the doll and grabbed it. A moment later she was back in her place, sitting perfectly still, turned only enough to cast a shadow over the doll in her arms. The joy of playing with a doll was so rare for her that it carried all the intensity of rapture.

No one had seen her except the traveler, who was slowly eating his meager supper.

This happiness lasted about a quarter of an hour.

But for all the care Cosette had taken, she did not notice that one of the doll's legs was sticking out and that the fire on the hearth lit it up brightly. That pink, gleaming foot, jutting out of the shadow, suddenly caught Azelma's eye, and she said to Éponine, "Look, sister."

The two little girls stopped short in astonishment; Cosette had actually dared to take their doll!

Éponine got up and, still holding the cat, ran to her mother and began tugging at her skirt.

"Leave me alone!" her mother said. "What do you want?"

"Mother," said the child, "look over there!"

And she pointed at Cosette.

Cosette was so lost in the joy of having the doll that she no longer saw or heard anything.

Madame Thénardier's face took on that particular expression in which something terrible mixes with the petty details of everyday life, the look that has earned women of this kind the name Megaeras–.

This time, her wounded pride made her anger even worse. Cosette had gone too far; Cosette had actually laid hands on the doll belonging to "these young ladies." A czarina seeing a muzhik trying on her imperial son's blue ribbon could not have

looked more outraged.

She screamed in a voice gone hoarse with indignation:

“Cosette!”

Cosette jumped as if the ground had shaken beneath her and turned around.

“Cosette!” Thénardier repeated.

Cosette took the doll and gently set it on the floor with a kind of reverence mixed with despair. Then, without taking her eyes off it, she clasped her hands and—terrible as it is to say of a child that young—began to wring them. Then, though nothing else that had happened that day—not the walk to the forest, not the heavy bucket of water, not the lost money, not the sight of the whip, not even the cruel words she had heard Madame Thénardier speak—had been able to force this from her, she cried; she burst into sobs.

Meanwhile, the traveller had gotten to his feet.

“What is the matter?” he asked Thénardier.

“Can’t you see?” said Thénardier, pointing to the corpus delicti_ lying at Cosette’s feet.

“Well, so what?” the man replied.

“That little beggar,” Thénardier answered, “actually allowed herself to touch the children’s doll!”

“All this fuss over that!” said the man. “Well, what if she did play with the doll?”

“She touched it with her filthy hands!” Thénardier went on. “With those horrible hands!”

At that, Cosette burst into even louder sobs.

“Will you stop that noise?” Thénardier screamed.

The man walked straight to the street door, opened it, and went outside.

As soon as he was gone, Thénardier took advantage of his absence and gave Cosette a hard kick under the table, making the child cry out loudly.

The door opened again, and the man came back. In both hands he carried the magnificent doll we have already mentioned, the one all the village children had been staring at since morning. He set it upright in front of Cosette and said:

“Here. This is for you.”

We must assume that during the hour or more he had spent there, he had vaguely noticed, through his daydreaming, that toy shop glowing with braziers and candles, so brilliantly lit that it shone through the tavern window like a festive display.

Cosette lifted her eyes. She looked at the man coming toward her with that doll as if she were looking at the sun. She heard the unbelievable words, “It is for you.” She stared at him. She stared at the doll. Then she slowly backed away and hid herself at the far end, under the table in the corner by the wall.

She was not crying anymore. She was not even weeping. She looked as though she hardly dared to breathe.

Thénardier, Éponine, and Azelma seemed frozen like statues. Even the drinkers had stopped. A heavy silence filled the whole room.

Madame Thénardier, stunned and speechless, began guessing again: “Who is that old man? Is he poor? Is he a millionaire? Maybe he is both—that is, a thief.”

The face of Thénardier the man took on that telling look which sharpens a human expression whenever a ruling instinct shows itself in all its animal force. The innkeeper stared first at the doll, then at the traveler. He seemed to be sniffing the man out, the way he would sniff out a bag of money. It lasted no longer than a lightning flash. He stepped over to his wife and said to her in a low voice:

“That machine costs at least thirty francs. No foolishness. Get down on your belly in front of that man!”

Crude natures have this in common with innocent ones: they know no middle ground.

“Well, Cosette,” said Thénardier in a voice trying to sound sweet, though it carried the bitter sweetness of a malicious woman, “aren’t you going to take your doll?”

Cosette cautiously came out of her corner.

“The gentleman has given you a doll, my little Cosette,” said Thénardier, in a coaxing tone. “Take it. It’s yours.”

Cosette stared at the wonderful doll in a kind of terror. Tears still covered her face, but her eyes began to fill, like the sky at dawn, with strange rays of joy. What she felt in that moment

was something like what she would have felt if someone had suddenly told her, “Little one, you are the Queen of France.”

It seemed to her that if she touched the doll, lightning would shoot out of it.

And in a way, that was true, because she told herself that Thénardier would scold her and beat her.

Still, desire won in the end. She finally came closer and timidly murmured, turning toward Madame Thénardier:

“May I, Madame?”

No words can capture that expression, all at once despairing, frightened, and ecstatic.

“Of course!” cried Thénardier. “It’s yours. The gentleman gave it to you.”

“Really, sir?” said Cosette. “Is it true? Is the ‘lady’ mine?”

The stranger’s eyes seemed full of tears. He looked as though he had reached that point of emotion where a man does not speak for fear of weeping. He nodded to Cosette and placed the ‘lady’s’ hand in her little hand.

Cosette quickly pulled her hand back, as if the ‘lady’s’ hand burned her, and began staring at the floor. We must add that at that moment she stuck out her tongue to an excessive degree. Then, all at once, she spun around and snatched up the doll in a burst of joy.

“I shall call her Catherine,” she said.

It was a strange moment when Cosette's rags met and embraced the doll's ribbons and fresh pink muslin.

"Madame," she said again, "may I put her on a chair?"

"Yes, my child," Thénardier replied.

Now it was Éponine and Azelma's turn to look at Cosette with envy.

Cosette set Catherine on a chair, then sat down on the floor in front of her. She stayed perfectly still, without saying a word, gazing at her in quiet wonder.

"Play, Cosette," said the stranger.

"Oh! I am playing," the child replied.

This stranger, this unknown man, seemed like a visit from Providence to Cosette. At that moment, he was the person Thénardier hated more than anyone else in the world. Still, she had to keep herself under control. She was used to hiding her feelings, having tried to imitate her husband in everything, but this was almost more than she could bear. She hurried to send her daughters to bed, then asked the man's permission to send Cosette off as well. "She has worked hard all day," she added, with a motherly air. Cosette went to bed carrying Catherine in her arms.

From time to time Thénardier went to the other end of the room, where her husband was, to "relieve her soul," as she put it. She traded words with him that were all the more furious because she did not dare say them out loud.

“Old brute! What has got into him, coming here and turning everything upside down like this! Wanting that little monster to play! Giving a forty-franc doll to a hussy I’d sell for forty sous, I truly would! A little more and he’ll be calling her ‘Your Majesty,’ as if she were the Duchesse de Berry! Is there any sense in it? Is that mysterious old fellow mad?”

“Why, it’s perfectly simple,” Thénardier replied. “If it amuses him, let it. It amuses you to make the little one work; it amuses him to make her play. That’s all right. A traveler can do as he likes when he pays for it. If the old fellow is a philanthropist, what is that to you? If he’s an imbecile, that’s none of your concern. Why are you getting upset, as long as he has money?”

It was the language of a master and the reasoning of an innkeeper, and neither allowed any reply.

The man rested his elbows on the table and slipped back into his thoughtful pose. All the other travelers, peddlers and carters alike, had drawn back a little and stopped singing. From a distance, they watched him with a kind of respectful awe. This poorly dressed man, who could pull out “hind-wheels” from his pocket so easily and shower huge dolls on grimy little children in wooden shoes, was clearly an impressive man—and one to be feared.

Hours went by. Midnight mass ended. The bells fell silent. The drinkers left. The tavern closed. The public room stood empty. The fire died out. Still the stranger remained in the same place, in the same position. From time to time he shifted the elbow he was leaning on. That was all. He had not spoken a word since

Cosette left the room.

Only the Thénardiers had stayed in the room, partly out of politeness and partly out of curiosity.

“Is he going to spend the whole night like that?” Madame Thénardier grumbled. When the clock struck two in the morning, she admitted defeat and said to her husband, “I’m going to bed. Do as you please.” Her husband sat down at a table in the corner, lit a candle, and began reading the _Courrier Français_.

Another full hour passed like this. The worthy innkeeper had read the _Courrier Français_ at least three times, from the date at the top all the way to the printer’s name. The stranger did not move.

Thénardier fidgeted, coughed, spat, blew his nose, and made his chair creak. The man did not respond in the slightest. “Is he asleep?” Thénardier thought. He was not asleep, but nothing could rouse him.

At last Thénardier took off his cap, walked quietly over to him, and cautiously said:

“Is Monsieur not going to retire for the night?”

To say _not going to bed_ would have sounded too blunt and too familiar to him. _To retire_ suggested comfort and respect. Such words have the mysterious and admirable power of making the bill larger the next day. A room where one _sleeps_ costs twenty sous; a room where one _retires_ costs twenty francs.

“Well,” said the stranger, “you are right. Where is your stable?”

“Sir!” Thénardier exclaimed with a smile. “I will show you the way, sir.”

He took the candle. The man picked up his bundle and cudgel, and Thénardier led him to a room on the first floor. It was surprisingly grand, furnished entirely in mahogany, with a low bed hung with red calico curtains.

“What is this?” the traveller said.

“It’s actually our bridal chamber,” said the tavern-keeper. “My wife and I sleep in another room. This one is only used three or four times a year.”

“I would have liked the stable just as well,” the man said abruptly.

Thénardier pretended not to hear the unfriendly remark.

He lit two brand-new wax candles on the mantelpiece. A fine fire was flickering in the hearth.

On the mantelpiece, under a glass dome, stood a woman’s headdress made of silver wire and orange blossoms.

“And what is this?” the stranger asked again.

“That, sir,” said Thénardier, “is my wife’s wedding bonnet.”

The traveller looked at it with a glance that seemed to say, “So there really was a time when that monster was a girl?”

Thénardier was lying, however. When he had rented this shabby building to turn it into a tavern, he had found the room

decorated exactly like this. He bought the furniture and got the orange blossoms secondhand, thinking it would cast a graceful glow over “his spouse” and give his house what the English call respectability.

When the traveller turned around, the host was gone. Thénardier had slipped away discreetly, without daring to wish him good night. He did not want to show warm courtesy to a man he meant to fleece thoroughly the next morning.

The innkeeper went back to his room. His wife was in bed, though she was not asleep. When she heard her husband’s step, she turned over and said:

“You know, I’m going to throw Cosette out tomorrow.”

Thénardier answered coldly:

“You do go on!”

They said nothing more, and a few moments later their candle went out.

As for the traveler, he had set his stick and bundle down in a corner. Once the innkeeper was gone, he dropped into an armchair and sat lost in thought for a while. Then he took off his shoes, picked up one of the two candles, blew out the other, opened the door, and left the room, looking around as if he were searching for something. He went down a corridor and came to a staircase. There he heard a very soft, faint sound, like a child breathing. He followed it and came to a kind of triangular nook under the stairs, or rather made by the stairs themselves. It was simply the space beneath the steps. There, among old papers,

broken bits of crockery, dust, and cobwebs, was a bed—if that name can be given to a straw mattress so worn that the straw showed through, with a coverlet so torn that the mattress showed through it. There were no sheets. It lay directly on the floor.

Cosette was asleep in this bed.

The man came closer and looked down at her.

Cosette was fast asleep, fully dressed. In winter she did not undress, so that she would not be so cold.

The doll was pressed against her chest, its large eyes wide open and glinting in the dark. From time to time she let out a deep sigh, as if she were about to wake, and she clutched the doll in her arms almost convulsively. Beside her bed was only one of her wooden shoes.

An open door near Cosette's pallet looked into a fairly large, dark room. The stranger stepped inside. At the far end, through a glass door, he saw two small, very white beds. They belonged to Éponine and Azelma. Behind them, partly hidden, stood a wicker cradle without curtains, where the little boy who had been crying all evening was now asleep.

The stranger guessed that this room connected to the Thénardiers' chamber. He was about to go back when his eye fell on the fireplace—one of those huge inn chimneys that never seem to have much fire in them, when they have any at all, and always look cold. This one had no fire, not even any ashes. But something there still caught the stranger's attention. It was a

pair of tiny children's shoes, pretty in shape and different in size. The traveller remembered the charming old custom in which children place their shoes in the chimney on Christmas Eve, waiting in the dark for some glittering gift from their good fairy. Éponine and Azelma had not forgotten the custom, and each had placed one of her shoes on the hearth.

The traveller bent over them.

The fairy—in other words, their mother—had already come, and in each shoe he saw a brand-new, shining ten-sou piece.

The man straightened up and was about to leave when, deep in the darkest corner of the hearth, he noticed something else. He looked at it and recognized a wooden shoe, a dreadful shoe of the roughest kind, half broken down and covered with ashes and dried mud. It was Cosette's sabot. Cosette, with that moving trust children have—a trust that can always be deceived and yet never loses heart—had placed her shoe on the hearthstone as well.

Hope in a child who has known nothing but despair is a sweet and heartbreaking thing.

There was nothing in the wooden shoe.

The stranger reached into his waistcoat, bent down, and placed a louis d'or in Cosette's shoe.

Then he returned to his own room with the silent tread of a wolf.

CHAPTER IX—THÉNARDIER AND HIS SCHEMES

The next morning, at least two hours before dawn, Thénardier sat beside a candle in the tavern's public room, pen in hand, drawing up the bill for the traveller in the yellow coat.

His wife stood beside him, leaning halfway over him, watching his face. They did not speak. On one side was deep thought; on the other, the reverent awe with which one watches a marvel of the human mind come into being and take shape. A sound could be heard in the house: the Lark was sweeping the stairs.

After a full quarter of an hour had passed, and after making a few erasures, Thénardier produced the following masterpiece:

BILL FOR THE GENTLEMAN IN No. 1.

The word service was written as servisse–.

"Twenty-three francs!" cried the woman, with enthusiasm touched by a trace of hesitation.

Like all great artists, Thénardier was not satisfied.

"Peh!" he exclaimed.

It had the tone of Castlereagh reviewing France's bill at the Congress of Vienna.

“Monsieur Thénardier, you are right; he certainly does owe that,” murmured his wife, thinking of the doll given to Cosette in front of her daughters. “It is fair, but it is too much. He will not pay it.”

Thénardier gave his usual cold laugh and said:

“He will pay.”

That laugh was the ultimate expression of certainty and authority. Whatever he declared in that way had to happen. His wife said no more.

She began setting the table, while her husband paced the room. A moment later he added:

“I owe a full fifteen hundred francs!”

He went and sat in the chimney-corner, thinking, with his feet among the warm ashes.

“Ah, by the way,” his wife went on, “you haven’t forgotten that I’m turning Cosette out today? The little monster! That doll of hers breaks my heart! I would sooner marry Louis XVIII. than keep her in the house one more day!”

Thénardier lit his pipe and replied between puffs:

“You will give that bill to the man.”

Then he went out.

He had barely left the room when the traveller came in.

Thénardier immediately appeared again behind him and stood motionless in the half-open doorway, 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, she turned the bill over nervously in her hands, creasing it with her nails. There was something on her hard face that was unusual for her—hesitation and scruples.

It seemed hard for her to hand such a bill to a man who looked so completely like “a poor wretch.”

The traveller seemed distracted and lost in thought. He replied:

“Yes, Madame, I am leaving.”

“So Monsieur has no business in Montfermeil?”

“No, I was only passing through. That is all. What do I owe you, Madame?” he added.

Madame Thénardier silently handed him the folded bill.

The man unfolded the paper and glanced at it, but his mind was clearly somewhere else.

“Madame,” he went on, “is business good here in Montfermeil?”

“So-so, Monsieur,” Madame Thénardier replied, stunned that she had not seen a very different kind of outburst.

She continued in a bleak, mournful tone:

“Oh, Monsieur, times are so hard! And then we have so few bourgeois in the neighborhood! Everyone here is poor, you see. If we did not occasionally have rich and generous travellers like Monsieur, we would not manage at all. We have so many

expenses. Just look—that child is costing us dearly."

"What child?"

"Why, the little one, of course! Cosette—the Lark, as she is called around here!"

"Ah!" said the man.

She went on:

"How foolish these peasants are with their nicknames! She looks more like a bat than a lark. You see, sir, we do not ask for charity, and we cannot afford to give it. We earn nothing, and we have to pay out so much. The license, the taxes, the door and window tax, the hundredths! Monsieur knows the government demands a terrible amount of money. And then I have my daughters. I have no need to raise other people's children."

The man spoke again in a voice he tried to keep indifferent, though a tremor still remained in it:

"What if someone took her off your hands?"

"Who? Cosette?"

"Yes."

The landlady's red, harsh face lit up in a dreadful way.

"Ah, sir, dear sir, take her, keep her, lead her away, carry her off, spoil her, stuff her with truffles, drink her, eat her, and may the good Holy Virgin and all the saints in heaven bless you!"

"Agreed."

“Truly? You’ll take her away?”

“I will.”

“Right now?”

“Right now. Call the child.”

“Cosette!” Thénardier screamed.

“Meanwhile,” the man went on, “I’ll pay what I owe you. How much is it?”

He glanced at the bill and could not help starting in surprise:

“Twenty-three francs!”

He looked at the landlady and repeated:

“Twenty-three francs?”

The way he said the words, the second time, sounded halfway between an exclamation and a question.

Thénardier’s wife had had time to brace herself for the shock. She answered confidently:

“Good heavens, yes, sir, it is twenty-three francs.”

The stranger placed five five-franc coins on the table.

“Go get the child,” he said.

At that moment Thénardier stepped into the middle of the room and said:

“Monsieur still owes twenty-six sous.”

“Twenty-six sous!” his wife cried.

“Twenty sous for the room,” Thénardier continued coolly, “and six sous for his supper. As for the child, I need to discuss that matter a little with the gentleman. Leave us, wife.”

Madame Thénardier was stunned, as if by a sudden flash of lightning from an unexpected display of genius. She sensed that a great actor had just stepped onto the stage, said nothing, and left the room.

As soon as they were alone, Thénardier offered the traveler a chair. The traveler sat down. Thénardier stayed on his feet, his face taking on a strange look of friendliness and simplicity.

“Sir,” he said, “this is what I have to tell you: I adore that child.”

The stranger stared at him closely.

“What child?”

Thénardier went on:

“It’s strange how attached one can become. What money? Take back your hundred-sou piece. I adore the child.”

“Who do you mean?” the stranger asked.

“Why, our little Cosette! Aren’t you planning to take her away from us? Well, I’ll speak plainly: as sure as you are an honest man, I won’t agree to it. I would miss that child. I saw her first when she was just a tiny thing. It’s true she costs us money. It’s true she has her faults. It’s true we aren’t rich. It’s true I’ve spent more than four hundred francs on medicine for just one of her illnesses! But one must do something for the good Lord’s sake.

She has neither father nor mother. I've raised her. I have enough bread for her and for myself. The truth is, I care a great deal for that child. You understand, you grow fond of a person. I'm a good-hearted brute, that's what I am. I don't reason it out; I love that little girl. My wife is quick-tempered, but she loves her too. You see, she's just like our own child. I want to keep her here, chattering around the house."

The stranger kept his eyes fixed on Thénardier. Thénardier went on:

"Excuse me, sir, but you do not hand your child over to a passerby just like that. I'm right, aren't I? Still, I'm not saying no—you are rich, and you seem like a very good man—if it would make her happy. But that is something one has to find out. You understand: if I were to let her go and make that sacrifice, I would want to know what becomes of her. I would not want to lose sight of her completely. I would want to know who she is living with, so that I could come see her from time to time, and so that she may know her good foster-father is alive and watching over her. In short, there are some things that simply cannot be done. I do not even know your name. If you took her away, I would say, 'Well then, what has become of the Lark?' At the very least, one must see some little scrap of paper, some sort of passport, you know!"

The stranger, still looking at him with that gaze which, as the saying goes, reaches into the deepest corners of a man's conscience, replied in a grave, steady voice:

“Monsieur Thénardier, no passport is needed to travel five leagues from Paris. If I take Cosette away, I will take her away, and that will be the end of it. You will not know my name. You will not know where I live. You will not know where she is. And I intend that she shall never lay eyes on you again for as long as she lives. I am cutting the thread tied to her foot, and she is leaving. Does that suit you? Yes or no?”

Just as demons, like geniuses, can recognize a higher power by certain signs, Thénardier understood that he was dealing with a very formidable man. He sensed it at once, almost by instinct, with his quick and shrewd intelligence. The night before, while drinking with the carters, smoking, and singing vulgar songs, he had spent the whole time studying the stranger. He watched him like a cat and analyzed him like a mathematician. He observed him partly for his own amusement and partly out of instinct, spying on him as if he had been hired to do it. Not a single movement or gesture from the man in the yellow greatcoat had escaped him. Even before the stranger had so plainly shown an interest in Cosette, Thénardier had guessed his intention. He had noticed the old man’s deep looks constantly returning to the child. Who was this man? Why this interest? Why this ugly clothing when he carried so much money? These were questions he kept asking himself, without finding any answer, and they irritated him. He had turned it over in his mind all night. The man could not be Cosette’s father. Was he her grandfather? If so, why not say so at once? When a person has a right, he claims it. This man clearly had no right over Cosette. So what was it? Thénardier lost himself in guesses. He caught hints of everything, but saw nothing clearly.

Still, when he began talking with the man, convinced there was some secret here and that the stranger had some reason for staying in the shadows, he felt strong. But when the stranger answered him plainly and firmly, showing that his mystery was of the simplest kind, Thénardier suddenly realized he was the weaker one. He had expected nothing like this. All his theories collapsed. He pulled his thoughts together. In a second, he weighed everything. Thénardier was one of those men who grasp a situation at a glance. He decided that the time had come to act directly, and quickly. He did what great leaders do at the decisive moment, the moment they alone recognize: he suddenly revealed his guns.

“Sir,” he said, “I need fifteen hundred francs.”

The stranger took an old black leather pocketbook from his side pocket, opened it, and drew out three banknotes, which he placed on the table. Then he set his large thumb on the notes and said to the innkeeper:

“Go and bring Cosette.”

While all this was happening, what was Cosette doing?

When Cosette woke up, she ran to get her shoe. Inside, she found the gold coin. It was not a Napoleon, but one of those brand-new twenty-franc pieces from the Restoration, with the little Prussian pigtail on the portrait instead of the laurel wreath. Cosette was dazzled. Her good fortune was beginning to go to her head. She did not know what a gold coin was; she had never seen one before. She quickly hid it in her pocket, as if she had stolen it. And yet she felt that it really belonged to her. She

guessed where the gift had come from, but her joy was mixed with fear. She was happy, but above all she was stunned. Things so splendid and beautiful did not seem real to her. The doll frightened her. The gold coin frightened her. She trembled vaguely in the presence of such magnificence. Only the stranger did not frighten her. On the contrary, he comforted her. Since the night before, through all her astonishment, even in her sleep, her little childish mind had kept returning to that man who seemed so poor and so sad, yet was so rich and so kind. Everything had changed for her since she met that good man in the forest. Cosette, less happy than the humblest swallow in the sky, had never known what it was to take shelter beneath a mother's shadow, beneath a protecting wing. For the last five years—that is, for as long as she could remember—the poor child had shivered and trembled. She had always stood completely exposed to the bitter wind of misfortune. Now it seemed to her that she was clothed. Before, her soul had felt cold; now it was warm. Cosette was no longer afraid of the Thénardiers. She was no longer alone. Someone was there.

She quickly began her usual morning chores. The louis she carried on her, in the very apron pocket from which the fifteen-sou piece had fallen the night before, kept distracting her. She did not dare touch it, but, truth be told, she spent five minutes staring at it with her tongue hanging out. As she swept the staircase, she stopped and stood there motionless, forgetting her broom and the whole world, absorbed in gazing at that star blazing at the bottom of her pocket.

During one of these moments of reflection, Madame Thénardier came over to her. She had gone to fetch Cosette on her husband's orders. Most surprisingly, she neither hit her nor spoke a single insulting word.

"Cosette," she said, almost kindly, "come at once."

A moment later, Cosette came into the public room.

The stranger picked up the bundle he had brought and untied it. Inside was a small woolen dress, an apron, a fustian bodice, a kerchief, a petticoat, woolen stockings, and shoes—a full outfit for a seven-year-old girl. Everything was black.

"My child," said the man, "take these and go dress yourself quickly."

Day was just breaking when the people of Montfermeil who had begun opening their doors saw a poorly dressed old man walking along the road to Paris with a little girl in mourning, carrying a pink doll in her arms. They were headed toward Livry.

It was our man and Cosette.

No one knew who the man was, and because Cosette was no longer in rags, many people did not recognize her. Cosette was leaving. With whom? She did not know. Where to? She did not know that either. All she understood was that she was leaving the Thénardier inn behind. No one had thought to say goodbye to her, and she had not thought of saying goodbye to anyone. She was leaving that house, which hated her and which she hated.

Poor gentle creature, whose heart had been crushed until that moment!

Cosette walked on seriously, her large eyes wide and fixed on the sky. She had put her louis in the pocket of her new apron. From time to time, she bent down to look at it; then she looked at the kind man. She felt as if she were beside the good Lord himself.

CHAPTER X—HE WHO TRIES TO IMPROVE HIS LOT MAY MAKE IT WORSE

Madame Thénardier had let her husband do as he pleased, as she usually did. She had been expecting great things. After the man and Cosette left, Thénardier waited a full quarter of an hour, then took her aside and showed her the fifteen hundred francs.

“Is that all?” she said.

It was the first time since they had started their household together that she had dared to criticize one of the master's actions.

The blow hit home.

“You are right, indeed,” he said. “I am a fool. Give me my hat.”

He folded the three banknotes, shoved them into his pocket, and rushed out at once. But he made a mistake and turned right first. Some neighbors he questioned set him back on the trail; the Lark and the man had been seen heading toward Livry. He followed these clues, striding along and talking to himself as he went:

“That man is plainly a million wrapped in yellow, and I am a brute. First he gave twenty sous, then five francs, then fifty francs, then fifteen hundred francs, all with the same ease. He would have given fifteen thousand francs. But I shall catch up

with him."

And then there was that bundle of clothes prepared beforehand for the child; that too was strange. Many mysteries were hidden in it. Once you have hold of mysteries, you do not let them slip away. The secrets of the rich are sponges soaked with gold; one must know how to squeeze them. All these thoughts spun through his mind. "I am a brute," he said.

When you leave Montfermeil and come to the bend in the road that leads to Livry, you can see it stretching far ahead across the plateau. When he reached that point, he reckoned he ought to be able to see the old man and the child. He looked as far as he could and saw nothing. He asked again, but he had lost time. Some passersby told him that the man and child he was looking for had gone toward the forest in the direction of Gagny. He hurried that way.

They were far ahead of him; but a child walks slowly, and he walked quickly, and besides, he knew the country well.

All at once he stopped and struck his forehead, like a man who has forgotten something essential and is ready to turn back.

"I should have taken my gun," he said to himself.

Thénardier was one of those people with a double nature who sometimes move among us unnoticed, then vanish before we ever truly understand them, because fate has shown us only one side. Many men live like that, half hidden beneath the surface. In ordinary, settled circumstances, Thénardier had everything needed to make—if not truly be—what people call an

honest tradesman, a respectable bourgeois. But if the right conditions arose, if some shock brought his darker self to the surface, he also had everything needed to become a scoundrel. He was a shopkeeper with something of the monster in him. At times, Satan himself might have crouched in some corner of the wretched place where Thénardier lived, dreaming before this hideous masterpiece.

After a brief hesitation:

“Bah!” he thought. “They’ll have time to get away.”

And he went on, moving quickly straight ahead, with an almost confident air, like a fox following the scent of a covey of partridges.

In fact, after he had passed the ponds and crossed diagonally over the large clearing to the right of the Avenue de Bellevue, he reached the grassy path that almost circles the hill and runs above the arch of the old aqueduct of the Abbey of Chelles. There, above the top of the brushwood, he caught sight of the hat that had already given rise to so many guesses in his mind. It was the man’s hat. The brushwood was not very high. Thénardier realized that the man and Cosette were sitting there. The child herself could not be seen because she was so small, but the head of her doll was visible.

Thénardier had not been mistaken. The man was sitting there, letting Cosette rest for a while. The innkeeper went around the brushwood and suddenly appeared before the very people he had been looking for.

“Pardon me, sir, excuse me,” he said, quite out of breath. “Here are your fifteen hundred francs.”

As he spoke, he handed the stranger the three banknotes.

The man looked up.

“What does this mean?”

Thénardier answered respectfully:

“It means, sir, that I am taking Cosette back.”

Cosette shuddered and pressed herself against the old man.

Still looking straight into the depths of Thénardier’s eyes, he answered, pronouncing each syllable clearly:

“You are go-ing to take back Co-sette?”

“Yes, sir, I am. I’ll explain. I’ve thought it over. The truth is, I have no right to give her to you. I’m an honest man, you see, and this child does not belong to me; she belongs to her mother. Her mother entrusted her to me, and I can hand her over only to her mother. You will say to me, ‘But her mother is dead.’ Very well; in that case, I can give the child only to the person who brings me a paper signed by her mother, stating that I am to hand the child over to the person named in it. That is perfectly clear.”

Without replying, the man felt in his pocket, and Thénardier saw the wallet full of banknotes appear once again.

The innkeeper trembled with delight.

“Good!” he thought. “Let’s stand firm; he’s going to bribe me!”

Before opening the wallet, the traveler glanced around him. The place was completely deserted; there was not a soul in the woods or in the valley. He opened the wallet again and drew out, not the handful of bills Thénardier expected, but a small piece of paper. He unfolded it and held it open before the innkeeper, 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 recognize that signature?” the man went on.

It was indeed Fantine’s signature, and Thénardier recognized it.

There was nothing he could say. He felt two sharp disappointments at once: the disappointment of losing the bribe he had hoped for, and the disappointment of being outmatched. The man added:

“You may keep this paper as your receipt.”

Thénardier withdrew in reasonably good order.

“This signature is imitated fairly well,” he muttered through clenched teeth. “Still, never mind!”

Then he made one last desperate attempt.

“Very well, sir,” he said. “Since you are the man, I must still be paid for all those little expenses. A great deal is still owed to me.”

The man stood up and flicked the dust from his threadbare sleeve:

“Monsieur Thénardier, last January the mother calculated that she owed you one hundred and twenty francs. In February, you sent her a bill for five hundred francs. You received three hundred francs at the end of February and another three

hundred at the beginning of March. Since then, nine months have passed at fifteen francs a month, the agreed price, which comes to one hundred and thirty-five francs. You had already received one hundred francs too much, which leaves thirty-five francs still due to you. I have just given you fifteen hundred francs."

Thénardier felt like a wolf the instant it realizes the steel jaws of a trap have snapped shut on it.

"Who is this devil of a man?" he thought.

He did what a wolf does: he gave himself a shake. Boldness had worked for him once before.

"Monsieur-I-don't-know-your-name," he said firmly, this time dropping all respectful formality, "I will take Cosette back unless you give me a thousand crowns."

The stranger replied calmly:

"Come, Cosette."

He took Cosette's left hand in his own, and with his right he picked up the cudgel lying on the ground.

Thénardier noticed how enormous the cudgel was, and how isolated the place was.

The man disappeared into the forest with the child, leaving the innkeeper standing there, motionless and speechless.

As they walked away, Thénardier studied the man's broad shoulders, slightly rounded, and his huge fists.

Then he looked back at himself and saw his weak arms and thin hands. “I really was a fool not to think of bringing my gun,” he said to himself, “since I was going hunting!”

Even so, the innkeeper did not give up.

“I want to know where he’s going,” he said, and set off to follow them from a distance. He was left with two things: a bitter irony in the form of the paper signed Fantine–, and one consolation, the fifteen hundred francs.

The man led Cosette away toward Livry and Bondy. He walked slowly, his head bowed, looking thoughtful and sad. Winter had thinned the forest, so Thénardier did not lose sight of them, though he stayed well back. From time to time, the man turned to see whether anyone was following him. Suddenly he spotted Thénardier. At once he slipped into the brushwood with Cosette, where the two of them could hide. “The devil!” said Thénardier, and he quickened his pace.

The thick undergrowth forced him to come closer. When the man reached the densest part of the thicket, he turned sharply around. Thénardier tried in vain to hide among the branches; he could not keep the man from seeing him. The man gave him an uneasy look, then lifted his head and went on. The innkeeper started after him again. So they went on like this for two or three hundred paces. Then the man turned around once more and saw the innkeeper. This time he looked at him so darkly that Thénardier decided it was useless to go any farther. Thénardier turned back.

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 in irons, as we have seen. He swam underwater until he reached a ship at anchor with a boat tied to it. He managed to hide in that boat until nightfall. Then he swam off again and reached the shore a short distance from Cape Brun. Since he had money, he was able to get clothes. At that time, a small country house near Balaguier served as a kind of dressing room for escaped convicts—a profitable line of work. Then Jean Valjean, like all miserable fugitives trying to escape the watchfulness of the law and the harshness of society, followed a hidden, winding path. He found his first refuge at Pradeaux, near Beausset. From there he made his way toward Grand-Villard, near Briançon, in the Hautes-Alpes. It was a clumsy, anxious flight, like the trail of a mole, with turns too tangled to trace. Later, signs of his passage were found in Ain, in the district of Civrieux; in the Pyrenees, at Accons; at the place called Grange-de-Doumec, near the market of Chavailles; and near Périgueux, at Brunies, in the canton of La Chapelle-Gonaguet. He eventually reached Paris. We have just seen him at Montfermeil.

His first concern on arriving in Paris was to buy mourning clothes for a little girl of seven or eight, and then to find a place

to stay. Once that was done, he went to Montfermeil. You may remember that during his earlier escape he had already made a mysterious trip there, or somewhere nearby, a fact the authorities had vaguely picked up on.

Still, people believed him dead, and that made the mystery surrounding him even deeper. In Paris, one of the newspapers that reported the event came into his hands. He felt reassured, almost calm, as if he truly had died.

On the evening of the day when Jean Valjean rescued Cosette from the Thénardiers' clutches, he returned to Paris. He entered the city at dusk with the child by way of the Barrier Monceaux. There he hired a cabriolet, which took him to the esplanade of the Observatoire. He got out, paid the driver, took Cosette by the hand, and the two of them walked on through the darkness, along the deserted streets near the Ourcine and the Glacière, toward the Boulevard de l'Hôpital.

The day had been strange and emotionally overwhelming for Cosette. They had eaten bread and cheese bought at lonely taverns, behind hedges. They had changed carriages often and walked short stretches on foot. She did not complain, but she was tired, and Jean Valjean could tell from the way she leaned more and more heavily on his hand as they walked. He lifted her onto his back. Still holding on to Catherine, Cosette rested her head on Jean Valjean's shoulder and fell asleep there.

BOOK FOUR—THE GORBEAU HOVEL

[Illustration: The Gorbeau Hovel]

CHAPTER I—MASTER GORBEAU

Forty years ago, a wanderer who ventured into that little-known region of the Salpêtrière and came up to the Barrière d'Italie by way of the boulevard reached a place where Paris seemed to vanish. It was no longer solitude, because people passed through; it was not the countryside, because there were houses and streets; it was not the city, because the streets were rutted like country roads, with grass growing in them; it was not a village, because the houses were too tall. What was it, then? It was an inhabited place where no one seemed to be. It was a deserted place where someone was always there. It was a boulevard of the great city, a street of Paris, yet wilder at night than a forest and more dismal by day than a cemetery.

It was the old quarter of the Marché-aux-Chevaux.

If a wanderer dared to go beyond the four crumbling walls of this Marché-aux-Chevaux, and even agreed to pass the Rue du Petit-Banquier, he would first leave on his right a garden shut in by high walls; then a field where tan-bark mills stood up like enormous beaver lodges; then a yard cluttered with timber, stumps, sawdust, and shavings, with a large barking dog perched on top; then a long, low wall in complete ruin, with a little black door that looked as if it were in mourning, thick with moss that turned to flowers in spring; and then, in the loneliest spot of all, a dreadful, decaying building bearing the words in large letters: POST NO BILLS. Any such bold rambler would have reached a little-known corner at the intersection of the

Rue des Vignes-Saint-Marcel. There, near a factory and between two garden walls, one could see at that time a shabby building that at first glance looked no bigger than a thatched hut, though in reality it was as large as a cathedral. It showed only its side wall and gable to the road, which made it seem small. Almost the whole house was hidden. Only the door and a single window were visible.

This hut had only one story.

The first thing that struck the eye was that the door could only ever have belonged to a hut, while the window, if it had been cut in dressed stone instead of rough masonry, might have suited the residence of a great lord.

The door was nothing more than a set of worm-eaten planks, crudely fastened together with crosspieces that looked like roughly chopped logs. It opened straight onto a steep staircase with tall steps—muddy, chalky, stained with plaster, and covered in dust. The stairs were as wide as the doorway itself. From the street, you could see them rising straight upward like a ladder and vanishing into darkness between two walls. The top of the misshapen doorway was covered by a narrow board with a triangular hole cut in the middle, which served as both a wicket and an air hole when the door was shut. On the inside of the door, someone had painted the number 52 with two quick strokes of an ink-dipped brush, while above the board the same hand had daubed the number 50, leaving you uncertain. Where exactly were you? Above the door it said, “Number 50”; inside, it answered, “No, Number 52.” No one knows what dust-colored shapes hung like drapery from the triangular

opening.

The window was large and set fairly high. It had Venetian blinds and a frame divided into big square panes. But those panes were cracked in several places, their damage both hidden and revealed by a clever paper patch. The blinds, broken loose and coming unglued, looked more likely to threaten people passing by than to shield the people inside. Here and there the horizontal slats were missing, and someone had innocently replaced them with boards nailed on vertically, so that what started as a blind ended up as a shutter. This dirty door and this window, honest-looking though worn-out, side by side on the same house, gave the impression of two half-ruined beggars walking together in the same rags, each with a different expression: one who had always been a beggar, and the other who had once been a gentleman.

Now, according to local tradition, this Maître Gorbeau had owned the building numbered 50-52 on the Boulevard de l'Hôpital. He was even responsible for the monumental window.

The whole place was dark, unpleasant, pale, melancholy, and tomb-like. Depending on whether the gaps were in the roof or in the door, it was crossed either by cold shafts of light or by icy drafts. One striking and picturesque feature of this kind of dwelling is the enormous size of the spiders.

To the left of the entrance door, on the boulevard side, about as high as a man above the ground, a small bricked-up window formed a square recess filled with stones that children had tossed into it as they passed.

Part of this building has recently been torn down. What still remains is enough to give an idea of what it used to be. Taken as a whole, it was not more than a hundred years old. A hundred years is youth for a church and old age for a house. It is as though man's dwelling shares his brief life, while God's house shares His eternity.

The postmen called the house Number 50-52, but in the neighborhood it was known as the Gorbeau house.

Let us explain where that name came from.

People who collect trivial facts, turn anecdotes into a kind of botany, and pin down elusive dates in their memories know that in Paris, in the last century, around 1770, there were two attorneys at the Châtelet: one named Corbeau (Raven), the other Renard (Fox). La Fontaine had already made those two names famous. The coincidence was too good for the legal crowd to resist, and they took full advantage of it. A parody quickly began circulating through the courthouse galleries, in verses that were a little clumsy:

Maître Corbeau, perched upon a case file, Held in his beak a writ of execution; Maître Renard, tempted by the smell, Addressed him more or less as follows: "Why, good day." Etc.13

The two worthy lawyers, embarrassed by the jokes and unable to hold their heads up under the bursts of laughter that followed them everywhere, decided to get rid of their names. They came up with the idea of appealing to the king.

Their petition reached Louis XV on the very day when the Papal Nuncio on one side and Cardinal de la Roche-Aymon on the other, both devoutly kneeling, were each occupied in putting a slipper onto the bare foot of Madame du Barry, who had just risen from bed, in his Majesty's presence. The king was laughing already, and he kept laughing. He turned cheerfully from the two bishops to the two lawyers and granted these servants of the law back their old names, or something close to them. By the king's order, Maître Corbeau was allowed to add a tail to his first letter and call himself Gorbeau. Maître Renard was less fortunate. He received permission only to put a P before his R and call himself Prenard, so that his new name was almost as similar as the first.

According to local tradition, this Maître Gorbeau once owned the building at 50–52 Boulevard de l'Hôpital. He was even said to have created the massive window.

That is why the building was known as the Gorbeau house.

Across from this house, among the boulevard trees, stood a large elm that was three-quarters dead. Almost directly opposite, the Rue de la Barrière des Gobelins opened out—a street that at the time had no houses, was unpaved, and lined with sickly trees. Depending on the season, it was either green or muddy, and it ended abruptly at the outer wall of Paris. From the roofs of the nearby factory, gusts of copperas-smelling air drifted out.

The barrier was nearby. In 1823, the city wall still stood.

The barrier itself stirred dark thoughts. It was the road to Bicêtre. Through it, during the Empire and the Restoration, prisoners sentenced to death were brought back into Paris on the day of their execution. It was also there that, around 1829, the mysterious murder known as “the assassination of the Fontainebleau barrier” took place, a crime whose perpetrators justice never managed to identify. It remains a sorrowful mystery, a terrible riddle that has never been solved. Walk a little farther, and you reach the fatal Rue Croulebarbe, where Ulbach stabbed the goat-girl of Ivry in a thunderstorm, as if in a melodrama. Go a few steps more, and you come to the hideously pollarded elms of the Barrière Saint-Jacques, that device invented by humanitarians to hide the scaffold, that wretched and shameful Place de Grève of a shopkeeping, bourgeois society that shrank from the death penalty, not brave enough to abolish it nobly, yet not firm enough to maintain it openly.

Even setting aside the Place Saint-Jacques, which seemed marked out for horror and had always been dreadful, the bleakest place on that bleak boulevard thirty-seven years ago was probably the very spot that still looks so forbidding today, where the building numbered 50-52 stood.

Middle-class houses did not begin to appear there until twenty-five years later. The area was bleak. Along with the dark thoughts it stirred up, you also felt that you were standing between the Salpêtrière, whose dome you could just make out, and Bicêtre, whose edge you were almost touching—in other words, between the madness of women and the madness of

men. As far as the eye could reach, there was nothing but slaughterhouses, the city wall, and the fronts of a few factories that looked like barracks or monasteries. Everywhere stood shacks, heaps of rubbish, old walls black as funeral cloth, and new white walls like burial shrouds. Everywhere there were straight rows of trees, buildings set in rigid lines, flat structures, long cold stretches, and the dreary sadness of right angles. There was not a bump in the ground, not a whim in the architecture, not a single curve. The whole scene was icy, orderly, and ugly. Nothing weighs on the heart like symmetry. Symmetry is boredom, and boredom lies at the root of grief. Despair opens its mouth and yawns. One can imagine something even more terrible than a hell of suffering: a hell of boredom. If such a hell existed, this stretch of the Boulevard de l'Hôpital might have been its entrance.

And yet, at nightfall, just as the daylight fades—especially in winter, at the hour when the evening wind strips the last reddish leaves from the elms—when the sky is dark and starless, or when the moon and the wind break holes in the clouds and then vanish again into shadow, this boulevard suddenly turns terrifying. The black lines seem to sink inward and disappear into the darkness, like fragments of infinity. Anyone passing by cannot help remembering the many old stories tied to the place and its gallows. The loneliness of this spot, where so many crimes had been committed, was deeply frightening. In that darkness, you almost expected to run into hidden dangers. Every vague shape seemed suspicious, and the long hollow square glimpsed between the trees looked like a row of graves. By day it was ugly; in the evening, melancholy; by night,

sinister.

In summer, at twilight, you could see a few old women here and there, sitting at the foot of the elms on benches made moldy by the rain. These kindly old women were fond of begging.

Yet this neighborhood, which felt more worn-out than truly old, was already beginning to change. Even then, anyone who wanted to see it had to hurry. Every day, some part of its overall character was disappearing. For the past twenty years, the Orléans railway station has stood beside the old faubourg and unsettled it, just as it still does today. Wherever a railway station appears on the edge of a capital, it means the death of a suburb and the birth of a city. It is as if, around these great centers of a people's movement, the earth itself, full of hidden seeds, trembles and opens up, swallowing the old homes of men so that new ones may rise at the clatter of these powerful machines, at the breath of these monstrous horses of civilization that eat coal and spit fire. The old houses fall apart, and new ones go up.

Since the Orléans railway pushed into the Salpêtrière district, the old narrow streets near the Saint-Victor moats and the Jardin des Plantes have seemed to tremble, shaken three or four times a day by streams of hackney carriages and omnibuses rushing through them. In time, they force the houses back on either side. It sounds strange to say, but it is exactly true. Just as it is true that in large cities the sun makes the south-facing fronts of houses sprout and grow, it is also certain that the constant passage of vehicles widens streets. The signs of new life were plain. In this old, provincial quarter, even in the

most neglected corners, paving stones began to appear. Sidewalks started creeping forward and stretching longer, even where there were still no pedestrians. Then one morning—a memorable morning in July 1845—people saw black pots of bitumen smoking there. On that day, it could be said that civilization had reached the Rue de l'Ourcine, and that Paris had entered the suburb of Saint-Marceau.

CHAPTER II—A NEST FOR AN OWL AND A WARBLER

Jean Valjean stopped in front of this Gorbeau house. Like a wild bird, he had chosen this deserted place in which to build his nest.

He felt in his waistcoat pocket, pulled out a kind of master key, opened the door, went in, carefully shut it again, and climbed the staircase, still carrying Cosette.

At the top of the stairs, he took another key from his pocket and unlocked another door. The room he entered, which he immediately shut behind him, was a fairly large attic. It held a mattress on the floor, a table, and several chairs. In one corner stood a stove with a fire still burning, its embers visible. A street lantern from the boulevard cast a faint light into the poor little room. At the far end was a dressing room with a folding bed. Jean Valjean carried the child to it and laid her down without waking her.

He struck a match and lit a candle. Everything had been prepared in advance on the table, and, just as he had the night before, he began to study Cosette’s face with a look of rapture, so full of kindness and tenderness that it almost seemed like madness. The little girl, with the calm trust that belongs only to the very strong and the very weak, had fallen asleep without knowing who he was, and she went on sleeping without knowing where she was.

Jean Valjean bent over and kissed the child's hand.

Nine months earlier, he had kissed her mother's hand as she too had just fallen asleep.

The same sad, piercing, almost religious feeling filled his heart.

He knelt beside Cosette's bed.

It was full daylight, and the child was still asleep. A pale December sunbeam came through the attic window and stretched across the ceiling in long bands of light and shadow. Suddenly, a heavily loaded cart rumbling along the boulevard shook the flimsy bed like a thunderclap and made it tremble from end to end.

"Yes, madame!" Cosette cried, waking with a start. "I'm here! I'm here!"

She jumped out of bed, her eyes still half closed with sleep, and reached her arms toward the corner of the wall.

"Ah! My God, my broom!" she said.

Then she opened her eyes wide and saw Jean Valjean's smiling face.

"Ah! So it was true!" said the child. "Good morning, Monsieur."

Children welcome joy and happiness at once, as if they already know them well, because by nature they are joy and happiness themselves.

Cosette spotted Catherine at the foot of her bed and immediately claimed her. As she played, she fired off a hundred

questions at Jean Valjean. Where was she? Was Paris very big? Was Madame Thénardier very far away? Would she have to go back? And so on, and so on. Then all at once she cried, “How pretty it is here!”

It was a dreadful hole, but she felt free.

“Do I have to sweep?” she asked at last.

“Play!” said Jean Valjean.

That was how the day passed. Cosette, without trying to understand anything, was unspeakably happy with that doll and that kind man.

CHAPTER III—TWO MISFORTUNES MAKE ONE PIECE OF GOOD FORTUNE

The next morning, at daybreak, Jean Valjean was still sitting by Cosette's bedside. He remained there without moving, waiting for her to wake.

Something new had entered his soul.

Jean Valjean had never loved anything. For twenty-five years he had been alone in the world. He had never been a father, a lover, a husband, or a friend. In prison he had become bitter, gloomy, chaste, ignorant, and timid. The heart of that ex-convict still held a kind of untouched innocence. His sister and her children had faded into a distant, uncertain memory that had almost disappeared in the end. He had done everything he could to find them, and when he could not, he forgot them. Human nature is like that. The other tender feelings of his youth, if he had ever known any, had fallen into an abyss.

When he saw Cosette, when he took her, carried her away, and rescued her, he felt his heart stir within him.

All the passion and tenderness in him woke up and rushed toward that child. He went to the bed where she lay sleeping and trembled with joy. He felt all the pains of a mother, without understanding what they were; for that great and strange movement of a heart beginning to love is both deeply mysterious and deeply sweet.

Poor old man, with a heart made entirely new!

But because he was fifty-five and Cosette was eight, everything in his life that might have become love came together and poured itself into a kind of indescribable light.

This was the second white apparition he had encountered. The Bishop had brought the dawn of virtue to his horizon; Cosette brought the dawn of love.

Those first days passed in a state of wonder.

Cosette, for her part, had also become someone new without realizing it, poor little thing. She was so young when her mother left her that she no longer remembered her. Like all children—like young vine shoots that cling to whatever they can—she had tried to love, but she had failed. Everyone had pushed her away: the Thénardiers, their children, other children. She had loved the dog, and it died; after that, nothing and no one wanted anything to do with her. It is painful to say, and we have already suggested it, that by the age of eight her heart had grown cold. It was not her fault. It was not that she lacked the ability to love; sadly, she had never been given the chance. So from the very first day, every feeling and thought in her loved this kind man. She felt something she had never felt before: a sense of opening and growth.

The man no longer seemed old or poor to her; she thought Jean Valjean handsome, just as she thought the hovel beautiful.

These are the effects of dawn, of childhood, of joy. The newness of the earth and of life matters here. Nothing is more

charming than the glow that happiness casts over an attic room. All of us have, somewhere in our past, a delightful garret.

Nature, with its difference of fifty years, had placed a deep gulf between Jean Valjean and Cosette; destiny bridged it. With sudden, irresistible force, destiny joined these two uprooted lives—so different in age, so alike in sorrow. Each, in fact, completed the other. Cosette's instinct searched for a father, just as Jean Valjean's instinct searched for a child. To meet was to find one another. In the mysterious moment when their hands touched, they were bound together. When these two souls became aware of each other, they recognized that they were necessary to one another, and they held each other close.

Taking the words in their fullest and most absolute sense, we may say that Jean Valjean, cut off from everyone as if by the walls of a tomb, was a widower, and Cosette was an orphan. That condition made Jean Valjean Cosette's father in an almost heavenly way.

And the strange feeling Cosette had in the depths of the forest of Chelles, when Jean Valjean took her hand in the dark, was not an illusion. It was real. That man's arrival in that child's life was like the coming of God.

Jean Valjean, moreover, had chosen his hiding place well. There, he seemed completely safe.

The room he shared with Cosette, along with a small dressing room, was the one whose window looked out onto the boulevard. Since it was the only window in the house, there was no danger of neighbors watching from across the street or from

either side.

The ground floor of Number 50-52, a kind of ruined shed under the roof, was used by market gardeners as a place to store wagons, and it had no connection to the floor above. The two levels were divided by a floor with neither trapdoors nor stairs, which acted, so to speak, like the building's diaphragm. The first floor contained, as we have said, many rooms and several garrets. Only one was occupied: the old woman who managed Jean Valjean's housekeeping lived there. All the others stood empty.

It was this old woman—given the grand title of "principal lodger," though she was really acting as the porter—who had rented him the rooms on Christmas Eve. He had presented himself to her as a man of means who had been ruined by Spanish bonds and had come there to live with his little daughter. He paid six months' rent in advance and asked the old woman to furnish the room and dressing room, as we have seen. It was this good woman who lit the stove and got everything ready on the evening they arrived.

Week after week passed, and the two of them lived happily in that hovel.

Cosette laughed, chattered, and sang from dawn on. Children have their morning song just as birds do.

Sometimes Jean Valjean would take her tiny red hand, rough and cracked from chilblains, and kiss it. The poor child, used to being beaten, did not understand what this meant and would run away, embarrassed.

At times she grew serious and looked at her little black dress. Cosette was no longer in rags; she was in mourning. She had come out of misery and was entering life.

Jean Valjean had taken it upon himself to teach her to read. Sometimes, while he helped the child sound out words, he remembered that he had learned to read in prison with evil intentions. Yet that had led, in the end, to teaching a child to read. Then the former convict would smile, with the thoughtful smile of an angel.

He sensed in it a purpose planned from above, the will of someone who was not human, and he sank into deep reflection. Good thoughts have their depths, just as evil ones do.

Teaching Cosette to read and letting her play made up almost the whole of Jean Valjean's life. And he spoke to her about her mother, and taught her to pray.

She called him _father_ and knew him by no other name.

He spent hours watching her dress and undress her doll, and listening to her chatter. From then on, life seemed full of interest to him. People seemed good and fair. In his thoughts, he no longer blamed anyone. He saw no reason he should not live to a very old age, now that this child loved him. He saw a whole future opening before him, lit by Cosette like a lovely light. Even

the best of us are not free from selfish thoughts. At times, he reflected with a kind of joy that she would be ugly.

This is only a personal opinion, but to say exactly what we think: by the time Jean Valjean began to love Cosette, it is far from certain that he could have gone on doing good without that support. He had just seen human cruelty and social misery in a new light—though only partially, and unfortunately from only one side of the truth: the fate of women, embodied in Fantine, and public authority, embodied in Javert. He had gone back to prison, this time for doing what was right. He had tasted fresh bitterness. Weariness and disgust were overwhelming him. Even the memory of the Bishop had probably dimmed for a time, though it was sure to return later, radiant and victorious. Still, that sacred memory had grown faint. Who can say whether Jean Valjean was not on the verge of losing heart and falling again? He loved, and he became strong once more. Alas, he moved forward no less uncertainly than Cosette did. He protected her, and she gave him strength. Because of him, she could make her way through life; because of her, he could remain virtuous. He was that child's support, and she was his. Oh, the unfathomable and divine mystery of the balances of destiny!

CHAPTER IV—THE COMMENTS OF THE MAIN TENANT

Jean Valjean was careful enough never to go out during the day. Every evening at twilight, he walked for an hour or two, sometimes alone and often with Cosette. He looked for the emptiest side streets along the boulevard, and at dusk he would go into churches. He liked Saint-Médard best, since it was the nearest church. When he did not take Cosette with him, she stayed with the old woman; but the child's greatest pleasure was going out with the good man. She preferred an hour with him to all her delighted tête-à-têtes with Catherine. As they walked, he held her hand and spoke to her tenderly.

As it happened, Cosette was a very cheerful little girl.

The old woman took care of the housework and cooking, and she went to the market.

They lived simply, always keeping a small fire, like people of very modest means. Jean Valjean had made no changes to the furniture from the way it had been on the first day; he had only replaced the glass door leading to Cosette's dressing room with a solid one.

He still wore his yellow coat, black breeches, and old hat. On the street, people took him for a poor man. Sometimes kind-hearted women would turn back and give him a sou. Jean Valjean accepted it with a deep bow. At other times, he came across some miserable person begging for alms. Then he would glance around to make sure no one was watching, quietly go up

to the man, slip money into his hand—often a silver coin—and walk away quickly. This had its drawbacks. In the neighborhood, people began to know him as the beggar who gives alms.

The old principal lodger was an ill-tempered woman. When it came to her neighbors, she was full of the prying curiosity that goes with envy, and she watched Jean Valjean closely without his ever suspecting it. She was a little deaf, which made her talkative. From her past, she had only two teeth left—one above and one below—and she was always clicking them together. She had questioned Cosette, but Cosette could tell her nothing, since she herself knew nothing except that she had come from Montfermeil. One morning, this spy saw Jean Valjean go into one of the empty rooms of the hovel, with a manner that struck the old gossip as suspicious. She followed him with the stealth of an old cat and, through a crack in the door directly opposite him, managed to watch without being seen. Jean Valjean had turned his back to the door, no doubt to be safer. The old woman saw him reach into his pocket and take out a case, scissors, and thread. Then he began ripping open the lining of one skirt of his coat. From the opening he pulled out a piece of yellowish paper and unfolded it. To her horror, the old woman recognized it as a thousand-franc banknote. It was only the second or third she had ever seen in her life. She ran off in alarm.

A moment later, Jean Valjean stopped her and asked her to go change this thousand-franc bill for him. He added that it was his quarterly income, which he had received the day before.

“Where?” the old woman thought. “He did not go out until six in the evening, and the government bank certainly would not have been open at that hour.” The old woman went to have the bill changed and shared her suspicions. That thousand-franc note, discussed and exaggerated from one person to the next, set off a great wave of alarmed gossip in the Rue des Vignes-Saint-Marcel.

A few days later, Jean Valjean happened to be sawing wood in the corridor in his shirt-sleeves. The old woman was in the room, tidying up. She was alone. Cosette was busy watching the wood being sawed with admiration. The old woman noticed the coat hanging from a nail and took a look at it. The lining had been sewn up again. She felt it carefully and thought she detected the thickness of papers in the tails and lapels. More thousand-franc banknotes, no doubt!

She also noticed that the pockets held all sorts of things. There were not only the needles, thread, and scissors she had already seen, but also a large pocketbook, a very large knife, and—more suspicious still—several wigs in different colors. Every pocket in that coat seemed to be stocked for unexpected emergencies.

So the people in the house came to the last days of winter.

CHAPTER V—A FIVE-FRANC PIECE FALLS TO THE GROUND AND CAUSES AN UPROAR

Near the church of Saint-Médard, there was a poor man who used to crouch on the edge of a public well that had been closed, and Jean Valjean liked to give him alms. He never passed the man without giving him a few sous. Sometimes he spoke to him. People who envied this beggar said that he was connected with the police. He was a seventy-five-year-old former beadle who was always muttering his prayers.

One evening, as Jean Valjean was passing by without Cosette, he saw the beggar in his usual spot beneath the lantern that had just been lit. The man seemed to be praying, as he usually did, and was bent far over. Jean Valjean went up to him and placed his usual alms in his hand. The beggar suddenly lifted his eyes and looked hard at Jean Valjean, then quickly lowered his head again. The movement was as swift as lightning. Jean Valjean shuddered. In the light of the streetlamp, it seemed to him that he had seen not the calm, kindly face of the old beadle, but a familiar and terrifying one. He felt as a person might feel if, in the dark, he suddenly found himself face to face with a tiger. He drew back, terrified and frozen, not daring to breathe, speak, stay, or run. He kept staring at the beggar, who had lowered his head again, wrapped in rags, and seemed no longer aware of his presence. In that strange moment, some instinct—perhaps the mysterious instinct of self-preservation—kept Jean Valjean from saying a word. The beggar had the same build, the same

rags, the same appearance as always. "Bah!" said Jean Valjean. "I am mad. I am dreaming. Impossible!" And he went away deeply troubled.

He could hardly bring himself to admit, even in his own mind, that the face he thought he had seen was Javert's.

That night, as he thought it over, he regretted not questioning the man and forcing him to lift his head a second time.

The next day, at nightfall, he went back. The beggar was in his usual place. "Good evening, my good man," said Jean Valjean firmly, handing him a sou. The beggar raised his head and answered in a whining voice, "Thank you, my good sir." It was unmistakably the former beadle.

Jean Valjean felt completely reassured. He began to laugh. "How on earth could I have thought I saw Javert there?" he said to himself. "Am I starting to lose my sight?" And he thought no more about it.

A few days later—it may have been around eight in the evening—he was in his room, having Cosette spell words out loud, when he heard the front door open and then close again. That seemed strange to him. The old woman, the only other person living in the house, always went to bed at nightfall so she would not use up her candles. Jean Valjean motioned for Cosette to be quiet. Then he heard someone coming up the stairs. It could have been the old woman, perhaps taken ill and gone out to the apothecary's. Jean Valjean listened.

The footsteps were heavy and sounded like a man's. But the old woman wore thick shoes, and nothing sounds more like a man's step than an old woman's. Even so, Jean Valjean blew out his candle.

He had sent Cosette to bed, whispering, "Get into bed very softly"; and as he kissed her on the forehead, the footsteps stopped.

Jean Valjean stayed silent and perfectly still, his back to the door, sitting in the same chair without moving, holding his breath in the dark.

After a fairly long time, hearing nothing more, he turned around. As he lifted his eyes toward his chamber door, he saw a light through the keyhole. In the darkness of the door and wall, it looked like a sinister star. Someone was clearly there, holding a candle and listening.

Several minutes passed like this, and then the light moved away. But he heard no footsteps, which seemed to mean that the person listening at the door had taken off his shoes.

Jean Valjean threw himself onto his bed, still fully dressed, and could not close his eyes all night.

At daybreak, just as exhaustion was pulling him into sleep, he was startled awake by the creak of a door opening into some attic room at the end of the corridor. Then he heard the same heavy male footsteps that had come up the stairs the night before. The steps were coming closer. He jumped out of bed and put his eye to the keyhole, which was fairly large. He hoped

to catch sight of the person who had entered the house during the night and, as he passed, had listened at his door. It was indeed a man, and this time he walked past Jean Valjean's room without stopping. The corridor was too dark for Jean Valjean to make out his face. But when the man reached the staircase, a ray of light from outside outlined him in silhouette, and Jean Valjean saw his back clearly. The man was tall, wearing a long frock coat, with a cudgel tucked under his arm. That powerful neck and those broad shoulders were Javert's.

Jean Valjean might have tried to get another look at him from the window that faced the boulevard, but he would have had to open it, and he did not dare.

It was clear that this man, like Jean Valjean himself, had come in with a key. Who had given him that key? What did it mean?

When the old woman came at seven in the morning to do the cleaning, Jean Valjean studied her closely, but he asked no questions. The good woman seemed exactly as usual.

As she swept the room, she said to him:

"Perhaps Monsieur heard someone come in last night?"

At that time of life, and on that boulevard, eight o'clock in the evening counted as the middle of the night.

"As a matter of fact, yes," he replied in as natural a tone as he could manage. "Who was it?"

"A new lodger who has just moved into the house," said the old woman.

“And what is his name?”

“I don’t know exactly. Dumont, or Daumont, or something like that.”

“And who is this Monsieur Dumont?”

The old woman looked at him with her little polecat eyes and answered:

“A man of property, like yourself.”

Perhaps she meant nothing by it. Jean Valjean thought he sensed something behind the remark.

After the old woman left, he took the hundred francs he had in a cupboard, rolled them up, and put them in his pocket. Though he handled them as carefully as he could so the silver would not clink, a hundred-sou piece slipped from his fingers and rolled loudly across the floor.

When it grew dark, he went downstairs and carefully examined both sides of the boulevard. He saw no one. The boulevard seemed completely deserted. Still, someone could have been hiding behind the trees.

He went back upstairs.

“Come,” he said to Cosette.

He took her hand, and they went out together.

CHAPTER I—THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF STRATEGY

A brief explanation is needed here, in light of the pages the reader is about to read, and others that will appear later on.

The author of this book, though reluctant to speak about himself, has been away from Paris for many years. Paris has changed since he left it. A new city has risen in its place, and in a sense it is unfamiliar to him. He need not say that he loves Paris: it is the birthplace of his inner life. Because of all the demolitions and rebuilding, the Paris of his youth—the Paris he has kept with reverent care in his memory—now belongs to the past. He asks leave to speak of that Paris as if it still existed. So when he leads his readers to a certain place and says, "In such-and-such a street there stands such-and-such a house," that street or that house may no longer be there. Readers may check for themselves, if they wish. As for him, he does not know the new Paris, and he writes with the old Paris before his eyes, sustained by an illusion that is precious to him. It gives him comfort to imagine that somewhere behind him there is still something of what he once saw in his own country, and that not everything has disappeared. As long as you live and move about in your native land, you think those streets mean nothing to you. You think those windows, roofs, and doors are of no importance. You think those walls are strangers, those trees are just the first ones you happened to pass, those houses you never entered are of no use to you, and the paving stones under your feet are only stones. Later, when you are no longer there,

you realize that those streets were dear to you. You miss those roofs and doors. You discover that those walls mattered to you, that those trees were beloved, that you entered those houses you never entered every day in spirit, and that you left part of your heart, your blood, your soul, on those pavements. All those places you no longer see, and may perhaps never see again, yet whose memory you have kept, take on a sorrowful charm. They return to your mind with the sadness of apparitions. They make the holy land visible to you. They become, so to speak, the very shape of France, and you love them. You summon them back as they are, as they were, and you refuse to let them change. For you are attached to the image of your fatherland as you are to your mother's face.

May we, then, be allowed to speak of the past in the present tense? With that understood, we ask the reader to keep it in mind, and we go on.

Jean Valjean immediately left the boulevard and plunged into the side streets, choosing the most complicated route he could think of. From time to time, he doubled back to make sure no one was following him.

[Illustration: The Black Hunt]

This maneuver is typical of a hunted stag. On ground where tracks can be left, it has the added advantage of misleading the hunters and the dogs by sending them after the wrong scent. In hunting, this is called _false re-imbushment_.

The moon was full that night, and Jean Valjean was glad of it. Still low on the horizon, it threw broad patches of light and

shadow across the streets. He could slip along beside the houses on the dark side while keeping an eye on the bright side. He may not have considered enough that the dark side was hidden from him as well. Even so, in the deserted lanes near the Rue Poliveau, he felt almost certain that no one was following him.

Cosette kept walking without asking any questions. The suffering of the first six years of her life had given her a passive nature. Besides—and this is something we will often have reason to mention—she had grown used, without realizing it, to this good man's peculiar ways and to the strange turns of fate. And, after all, she was with him, and she felt safe.

Jean Valjean no more knew where he was going than Cosette did. He trusted in God, just as she trusted in him. It was as if he too were holding on to the hand of someone greater than himself; he thought he could feel an unseen presence guiding him. Yet he had no fixed idea, no plan, no purpose. He was not even completely sure it was Javert. And even if it was Javert, Javert might not know that he was Jean Valjean. Was he not in disguise? Was he not believed to be dead? Still, strange things had been happening for several days, and he wanted no more of them. He was determined not to go back to the Gorbeau house. Like a wild animal driven from its den, he was looking for some hole where he could hide until he found a place where he could live.

Jean Valjean wound his way through the many twisting streets of the Mouffetard quarter, which was already asleep, as if the strict order of the Middle Ages and the old curfew were still in

force. With careful, crafty strategy, he doubled back and crossed between Rue Censier and Rue Copeau, then Rue du Battoir-Saint-Victor and Rue du Puits l'Ermite in every possible combination. There were lodging houses in that neighborhood, but he did not enter a single one, because none of them suited him. He felt sure that if anyone had been following him, they would have lost his trail.

As Saint-Étienne-du-Mont struck eleven, he was walking along Rue de Pontoise, in front of the police commissary's office at No. 14. A moment later, the instinct we mentioned earlier made him turn around. Then, clearly lit by the commissary's lantern, which gave them away, he saw three men following close behind him. One after another, they passed beneath the lantern on the dark side of the street. One of the three turned into the alley leading to the commissary's house. The man in front struck him as especially suspicious.

"Come, child," he said to Cosette, and quickly left Rue Pontoise.

He made a detour, turned into the Passage des Patriarches, which was closed at that hour, hurried along Rue de l'Épée-de-Bois and Rue de l'Arbalète, and plunged into Rue des Postes.

At that time, there was an open square formed by the crossing of streets where the Collège Rollin stands today, at the point where Rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève branches off.

Of course, Rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève is an old street, and a posting-chaise passed through Rue des Postes perhaps once in ten years. In the thirteenth century, Rue des Postes was

inhabited by potters, and its true name was Rue des Pots.

The moon spread a pale, deathly light across the open space. Jean Valjean hid in a doorway, thinking that if the men were still following him, he would be sure to see them clearly as they crossed the lit square.

In fact, less than three minutes had passed when the men appeared. There were four of them now. They were all tall, wearing long brown coats and round hats, with heavy clubs in their hands. Their height and huge fists were as frightening as the dark, menacing way they moved through the night. You might have taken them for four specters dressed as respectable townsmen.

They stopped in the middle of the open space and gathered together, like men conferring. They seemed unsure what to do. The one who looked like their leader turned and quickly pointed with his right hand in the direction Jean Valjean had gone; another stubbornly seemed to insist on the opposite direction. At the moment the first man turned, the moon shone full on his face. Jean Valjean recognized Javert at once.

CHAPTER II—IT IS A GOOD THING THAT THE PONT D'AUSTERLITZ CARRIES VEHICLES

For Jean Valjean, all uncertainty was over; fortunately, the men were still uncertain. He used their hesitation to his advantage. What they lost in time, he gained. He slipped out from under the gateway where he had been hiding and went down the Rue des Postes, toward the area of the Jardin des Plantes. Cosette was beginning to grow tired. He picked her up and carried her. No one was in the streets, and the lamps had not been lit because the moon was bright.

He quickened his pace.

In a few long strides he reached the Goblet pottery works, where the moonlight made the old inscription on the front clearly readable:

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 passed the Rue de la Clef, then the Saint-Victor Fountain, followed the lower streets along the Jardin des Plantes, and reached the quay. There he turned around. The quay was empty. The streets were empty. No one was behind him. He let out a long breath.

He crossed onto the Pont d'Austerlitz.

In those days, a toll was still charged there.

He went up to the toll booth and paid a sou.

"It's two sous," said the old soldier guarding the bridge. "You're carrying a child who can walk. Pay for two."

He paid, annoyed that crossing the bridge had drawn attention to him. Any escape should pass unnoticed, like quietly slipping away.

At the same time, a heavy cart was crossing the Seine toward the right bank, just as he was. That helped him. He could cross the bridge hidden in the cart's shadow.

Near the middle of the bridge, Cosette, whose feet had gone numb, wanted to walk. He set her down and took her hand again.

Once he had crossed the bridge, he noticed some timber yards on his right and headed that way. To reach them, he had to cross a fairly large open, brightly lit space. He did not hesitate. The men pursuing him had clearly lost the trail, and Jean Valjean believed he was no longer in danger. Hunted, yes; followed, no.

A small street, the Rue du Chemin-Vert-Saint-Antoine, opened between two walled timber yards. It was dark and narrow and seemed made especially for him. Before going into it, he looked back.

From where he stood, he could see the full length of the Pont d'Austerlitz.

Four shadows were just stepping onto the bridge.

They had their backs to the Jardin des Plantes and were heading toward the right bank.

Those four shadows were the four men.

Jean Valjean shuddered like a wild animal that has been caught again.

One hope still remained: perhaps the men had not yet come onto the bridge and had not seen him crossing the wide, brightly lit space with Cosette by the hand.

If that was so, then by disappearing into the little street ahead of him, he might still escape—if he could reach the timber yards, the marshes, the market gardens, and the empty, undeveloped ground beyond.

It seemed to him that he could safely venture into that silent little street. He went in.

CHAPTER III—THAT IS TO SAY, THE PLAN OF PARIS IN 1727

Three hundred paces farther on, he reached a place where the street split in two. It branched off diagonally, one street going to the right and the other to the left.

Before Jean Valjean, the road spread like the two arms of a Y. Which way should he go? He did not hesitate. He took the street on the right.

Why?

Because the street to the left led toward a suburb—that is, toward inhabited areas—while the one to the right led toward the open country, that is, toward deserted ground.

But they were no longer moving very quickly. Cosette's pace slowed Jean Valjean down.

He picked her up and carried her again. Cosette rested her head on the good man's shoulder and said nothing.

From time to time, he turned and looked behind him. He was careful to stay on the dark side of the street. Behind him, the road stretched straight back. The first two or three times he looked, he saw nothing. The silence was complete, and he went on, somewhat reassured. Then suddenly, when he turned again, he thought he saw something moving far off in the darkness of the street he had just come through.

He hurried forward, almost running rather than walking, hoping to find a side street and escape through it, and so throw his pursuers off his trail once more.

He came to a wall.

This wall, however, did not completely block his way. It bordered a cross street, where the one he had taken came to an end.

Once again, he had to decide: should he go right or left?

He looked to the right. The narrow lane continued between buildings that seemed to be sheds or barns, then ended in a dead end. The end of the cul-de-sac was clearly visible: a high white wall.

He looked to the left. On that side, the lane remained open, and about two hundred paces farther on, it joined a street into which it flowed. Safety lay in that direction.

Just as Jean Valjean was thinking of turning left to reach the street he could see at the end of the lane, he noticed what looked like a black, motionless statue standing at the corner where the lane met the street he was about to take.

It was someone—a man—who had clearly just been stationed there, blocking the way and waiting.

Jean Valjean drew back.

The part of Paris where Jean Valjean now found himself, between the Faubourg Saint-Antoine and la Râpée, is one of those areas that recent changes have completely

transformed—spoiled, some would say, and glorified, according to others. The market gardens, timber yards, and old buildings have disappeared. Today, the place has broad new streets, arenas, circuses, hippodromes, railway stations, and a prison, Mazas: progress, as the reader can see, along with its counterweight.

Half a century ago, in that plain, popular speech made up entirely of tradition—the kind that still called the Institut _les Quatre-Nations_ and the Opéra-Comique _Feydeau_—the exact spot Jean Valjean had reached was known as _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 names from old Paris that still survive within the new. The memory of the common people lingers over these remnants of the past.

Le Petit-Picpus, which in truth scarcely ever really existed and was never more than the rough outline of a neighborhood, had something of the monastic look of a Spanish town. The roads were barely paved, and the streets were only thinly built up. Aside from the two or three streets we shall mention shortly, the whole place was walls and emptiness. There were no shops, no vehicles, and hardly a candle burning here and there in the windows; after ten o'clock, every light went out. Gardens, convents, timber yards, marshes, a few humble houses, and great walls as high as the houses themselves.

That was what this neighborhood was like in the last century. The Revolution treated it harshly. The republican government tore parts of it down and cut new roads through it. Dumping chutes were set up there. Thirty years ago, the area was already vanishing under the sweep of new construction. Today, it has disappeared completely. Petit-Picpus, which no surviving map records, is shown clearly enough on the 1727 map published in Paris by Denis Thierry, Rue Saint-Jacques, opposite Rue du Plâtre, and in Lyons by Jean Girin, Rue Mercière, at the sign of Prudence. Petit-Picpus had, as we have just said, a Y-shaped arrangement of streets formed by the Rue du Chemin-Vert-Saint-Antoine, which split into two branches: on the left, Little Picpus Street; on the right, Rue Polonceau. The two arms of the Y were joined near the top by a cross street called Rue Droit-Mur. Rue Polonceau ended there. Rue Petit-Picpus continued on and climbed toward the Lenoir market. Someone coming from the Seine would reach the end of Rue Polonceau and find, on the right, Rue Droit-Mur turning sharply at a right angle; straight ahead, the wall of that street; and also on the right, a cut-off extension of Rue Droit-Mur with no outlet, called the Cul-de-Sac Genrot.

This was where Jean Valjean stood.

As we have just said, when he caught sight of that black figure standing watch at the corner of Rue Droit-Mur and Rue Petit-Picpus, he drew back. There was no mistaking it. That phantom was waiting for him.

What could he do?

The moment for retreat had passed. What he had glimpsed moving in the distant darkness a moment earlier was almost certainly Javert and his men. Javert was probably already at the entrance of the street where Jean Valjean stood. He seemed to know this little maze well and had taken precautions by posting one of his men to guard the exit. These guesses, which felt almost like certainty, spun through Jean Valjean's troubled mind like dust caught in a sudden gust of wind. He looked toward the Cul-de-Sac Genrot: that way was blocked. He looked toward the Rue Petit-Picpus: a guard was standing there. He could see the dark figure outlined against the pale moonlit pavement. To go forward was to fall into that man's hands; to go back was to throw himself into Javert's arms. Jean Valjean felt trapped, as if in a net that was slowly tightening, and in despair he lifted his eyes to heaven.

CHAPTER IV—THE SEARCHINGS OF FLIGHT

To understand what follows, you must have a clear picture of the Droit-Mur lane, and especially of the corner left on the left-hand side when you come out of the Rue Polonceau into that lane. On the right, almost all the way to the Rue Petit-Picpus, Droit-Mur lane was lined with shabby-looking houses. On the left stood a single stern-looking building made up of several sections, each rising a story or two higher as it neared the Rue Petit-Picpus. So the building, very tall on the Rue Petit-Picpus side, was fairly low on the side next to the Rue Polonceau. At the corner just mentioned, it dropped so low that it became nothing more than a wall. This wall did not meet the street directly. Instead, it formed a deep recess, hidden by its two corners from anyone standing either in the Rue Polonceau or in the Rue Droit-Mur.

From the corners of this niche, the wall ran along Rue Polonceau as far as house number 49. Along Rue Droit-Mur, where the stretch was much shorter, it went as far as the dark building we have already mentioned, cutting across its gable and creating another recessed angle in the street. The gable had a grim look. Only one window could be seen—or, more accurately, two shutters covered with a sheet of zinc and kept shut all the time.

The condition of the place we are describing here is exactly as stated, and it will no doubt bring back a very clear memory for the older residents of the neighborhood.

The niche was completely blocked by something that looked like a huge, miserable door. It was a vast, shapeless structure made of upright planks, with the upper ones wider than the lower, all fastened together by long horizontal iron bands. On one side was a carriage gate of ordinary size, which had clearly been cut into it no more than fifty years earlier.

The top of a linden tree rose above the niche, and ivy covered the wall on the Rue Polonceau side.

In the immediate danger Jean Valjean was facing, this dark building had a deserted, uninhabited look that drew him to it. He glanced over it quickly and told himself that if he could manage to get inside, he might save himself. First the idea came to him, and then hope.

In the middle of the front of this building, on the Rue Droit-Mur side, old lead cistern pipes ran beneath the windows on every floor. The smaller pipes branching from one main pipe to all these little basins traced a kind of tree across the facade. With their hundred bends, these branching pipes looked like the old leafless vine trunks that twist across the fronts of old farmhouses.

This strange espalier, with branches made of lead and iron, was the first thing Jean Valjean noticed. He sat Cosette down with her back against a stone post, told her to keep quiet, and hurried to the place where the pipe met the pavement. Maybe

there was some way to climb up it and get into the house. But the pipe was broken down and no longer usable, barely clinging to its fastenings. Besides, every window in that silent house was covered with heavy iron bars, even the attic windows in the roof. On top of that, the moon shone full on the front of the building, and the man watching from the corner of the street would have seen Jean Valjean if he tried to climb. And in any case, what was he to do with Cosette? How could he get her up to the top of a three-story house?

He abandoned the idea of climbing the drainpipe and crept along the wall to make his way back toward the Rue Polonceau.

When he reached the angled part of the wall where he had left Cosette, he realized that no one could see him there. As we have just explained, he was hidden from view no matter which direction anyone came from. He was also in shadow. There were two doors, and perhaps one of them could be forced open. The wall above which he could see the linden tree and the ivy clearly bordered a garden where he could at least hide, even though the trees still had no leaves, and spend the rest of the night there.

Time was passing, and he had to act fast.

He felt along the carriage gate and at once realized that it could not be forced, either from the outside or from within.

He went to the other door with more hope. It was terribly decrepit. Its sheer size made it less sturdy. The planks were rotten, and the iron straps—there were only three—were rusted through. It looked as though this worm-eaten barrier might be

broken through.

When he examined it, he realized it was not really a door at all. It had no hinges, no crossbars, no lock, and no crack down the middle. The iron straps ran across it from one side to the other without a break. Through the gaps between the planks, he could see rough stone slabs and blocks, crudely cemented together, which passersby might still have noticed there ten years earlier. To his dismay, he had to admit that this supposed door was nothing more than a wooden facing set against a building. It was easy enough to pull off a plank, but behind it there was only a wall.

CHAPTER V—WHICH WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE WITH GAS LANTERNS

At that moment, a heavy, steady sound became audible in the distance. Jean Valjean dared to glance around the corner of the street. Seven or eight soldiers, formed in a platoon, had just come into the Rue Polonceau. He saw the flash of their bayonets. They were moving toward him. At their head, he recognized Javert's tall figure. They advanced slowly and carefully, stopping often. It was clear that they were searching every recess in the walls and every doorway and alley opening.

It had to be a patrol that Javert had run into—there was no doubt about it—and whose help he had called for.

Javert's two assistants were marching with them in the ranks.

At the pace they were moving, and with all the stops they kept making, they would need about a quarter of an hour to reach the place where Jean Valjean stood. It was a dreadful moment. Only a few minutes separated him from that terrible abyss opening before him for the third time. And now the galleys meant more than the galleys alone: they meant losing Cosette forever—that is, a life like the inside of a tomb.

Only one thing could be done.

Jean Valjean had this peculiar trait: he carried, so to speak, two beggar's bags. In one he kept his saintly thoughts; in the other, the formidable skills of a convict. He reached into one or the

other, depending on the situation.

Among the skills he had picked up from his many escapes from the prison at Toulon was one extraordinary talent. As you may remember, he was a master of the almost unbelievable art of climbing straight up without a ladder or climbing hooks, using nothing but his own strength. He would brace himself with the back of his neck, his shoulders, his hips, and his knees, and use the few slight projections in the stone at the corner where two walls met, climbing as high as the sixth story if necessary. It was this same art that made famous—and terrifying—that corner of the wall of the Conciergerie in Paris where Battemolle, sentenced to death, escaped twenty years earlier.

Jean Valjean studied the wall, above which he could see the linden tree. It was about eighteen feet high. At the point where it met the gable of the large building, the lower corner was blocked by a triangular mass of masonry, no doubt meant to protect that all-too-useful corner from the filth of those dirty creatures known as passers-by. This habit of filling in wall corners was very common in Paris.

This block was about five feet high, so the stretch of wall above it that had to be climbed was no more than fourteen feet.

The top of the wall was capped with a flat stone, without a coping.

Cosette was the problem, because she did not know how to climb a wall. Should he leave her behind? Jean Valjean never even considered it. But he could not carry her. A man needs all his strength for climbs like this. The slightest extra weight would

throw off his balance and drag him down.

He would have needed a rope, and Jean Valjean had none. Where could he find one at midnight in the Rue Polonceau? If Jean Valjean had possessed a kingdom at that moment, he would gladly have given it for a rope.

In the most desperate situations, sudden flashes of insight sometimes come to us—at times blinding us, at times showing us the way.

Jean Valjean's desperate gaze fell on the streetlamp in the Genrot blind alley.

At that time, Paris streets had no gas lamps. At night, lanterns set at regular intervals were lit. They were raised and lowered by a rope stretched from one side of the street to the other and fitted into a groove in the post. The pulley the rope ran over was fixed beneath the lantern inside a small iron box. The lamplighter kept the key, and the rope itself was enclosed in a metal casing.

With the fierce energy of a last desperate effort, Jean Valjean crossed the street in a single leap, entered the blind alley, and broke open the latch of the little box with the tip of his knife. A moment later he was back beside Cosette. He had a rope. Those dark masters of improvisation work quickly when they are struggling against fate.

As we have already explained, the lanterns had not been lit that night. So the lantern in the Cul-de-Sac Genrot was naturally dark, like all the others, and someone could pass directly

beneath it without even noticing that it was no longer there.

Still, the hour, the place, the darkness, Jean Valjean's intense preoccupation, his strange movements, and his coming and going had begun to make Cosette uneasy. Any other child would have burst into loud cries long before. She only tugged at the skirt of Jean Valjean's coat. Meanwhile, they could hear the patrol drawing closer and closer.

"Father," she said in a very low voice, "I'm afraid. Who is coming over there?"

"Hush!" the unhappy man replied. "It is Madame Thénardier."

Cosette shuddered. He added:

"Say nothing. Don't get in my way. If you cry out, if you weep, the Thénardier is waiting for you. She is coming to take you back."

Then, calmly and without a wasted motion, he worked with brisk, steady precision—all the more remarkable because the patrol and Javert could appear at any second. He untied his cravat and slipped it around Cosette's body under her arms, careful not to hurt her. He fastened the cravat to one end of the rope with the knot sailors call a "swallow knot," took the other end of the rope between his teeth, pulled off his shoes and stockings and tossed them over the wall, stepped onto the pile of masonry, and began climbing up the corner where the wall met the gable. He moved with such firmness and confidence that it was as if he had ladder rungs under his feet and elbows. In less than half a minute, he was kneeling on top of the wall.

Cosette stared at him in dull amazement, without saying a word. Jean Valjean's command, and the name of Madame Thénardier, had turned her blood cold.

Suddenly she heard Jean Valjean's voice call to her, though very softly:

"Put your back against the wall."

She obeyed.

"Don't say a word, and don't be frightened," Jean Valjean went on.

Then she felt herself lifted off the ground.

Before she had time to understand what was happening, she was on top of the wall.

Jean Valjean caught hold of her, set her on his back, took her two little hands in his big left hand, lay flat on his stomach, and crawled along the top of the wall as far as the corner. Just as he had guessed, there was a building there whose roof began at the top of the wooden barrier and sloped down to within a short distance of the ground, brushing the linden tree as it descended. It was a lucky thing, because the wall was much higher on this side than on the street side. From where he was, Jean Valjean could see the ground far below him.

He had just reached the slope of the roof and had not yet left the top of the wall when a sudden uproar announced the patrol's arrival. Javert's booming voice could be heard:

“Search the blind alley! Rue Droit-Mur is guarded, and so is Rue Petit-Picpus. I’m certain he’s in the blind alley.”

The soldiers rushed into the Genrot alley.

Jean Valjean let himself slide down the roof, still gripping Cosette, reached the linden tree, and jumped to the ground. Whether from fear or bravery, Cosette had not made a sound, though her hands were slightly scraped.

CHAPTER VI—THE BEGINNING OF A MYSTERY

Jean Valjean found himself in a kind of garden, very large and strangely shaped—one of those melancholy gardens that seem meant to be seen in winter and at night. It was oblong, with a path of tall poplars at the far end and fairly tall forest trees in the corners. In the middle was an open space, where he could make out a single enormous tree, then several fruit trees, twisted and bristling like bushes, vegetable beds, and a melon patch whose glass frames glittered in the moonlight. There was also an old well. Here and there stood stone benches that looked black with moss. The paths were lined with dark, stiff little shrubs. Grass had partly taken them over, and green mold covered what remained.

Beside Jean Valjean stood the building whose roof had helped him down, a pile of faggots, and, behind the faggots and pressed against the wall, a stone statue. Its damaged face was now nothing but a shapeless mask, dimly visible through the darkness.

The building was a kind of ruin. You could make out stripped, broken rooms, one of them so cluttered that it seemed to be used as a shed.

The large building on the Rue Droit-Mur, with a wing on the Rue Petit-Picpus, turned two facades at right angles toward this garden. These inner facades were even more grim than the outer ones. Every window was barred. Not a single glimmer of

light showed anywhere. The top story had trapdoors like a prison. One facade threw its shadow across the other, and that shadow spread over the garden like a vast black shroud.

No other house could be seen. The far end of the garden disappeared into mist and darkness. Even so, he could dimly make out walls crossing one another, as if there were more cultivated ground beyond, and the low roofs of the Rue Polonceau.

Nothing could have seemed wilder or more deserted than this garden. No one was there, which made sense at that hour. But even in full daylight, it did not look like a place meant for anyone to walk in.

Jean Valjean's first concern was to find his shoes and put them back on. Then he stepped under the shed with Cosette. A man on the run never feels hidden enough. The child, still thinking of the Thénardier, shared his instinct to stay as far out of sight as possible.

Cosette trembled and pressed herself against him. They heard the chaotic noise of the patrol searching the blind alley and the streets: the blows of gunstocks against the stones, Javert calling out to the police spies he had stationed there, and his curses mixed with words they could not make out.

After a quarter of an hour, that storm of noise seemed to be moving farther away. Jean Valjean held his breath.

He had placed his hand lightly over Cosette's mouth.

And yet the solitude around him was so strangely calm that this terrible uproar, though so near and so violent, did not trouble him with even the slightest hint of fear. It seemed as if those walls had been built from the deaf stones spoken of in Scripture.

Suddenly, in the middle of that deep stillness, another sound rose up—a sound as heavenly, divine, indescribable, and enchanting as the other had been dreadful. It was a hymn coming out of the darkness, a radiant outpouring of prayer and harmony in the night's shadowy, threatening silence: women's voices, yet voices that carried at once the pure tones of virgins and the innocent tones of children—voices not of this earth, like those a newborn child still hears and a dying man already hears. The song came from the dark building that loomed over the garden. Just as the uproar of demons was fading away, it seemed as though a choir of angels were drawing near through the darkness.

Cosette and Jean Valjean dropped to their knees.

They did not know what it was or where they were. But both of them—the man and the child, the penitent and the innocent—felt that they had to kneel.

These voices had a strange quality: they did not keep the building from seeming deserted. It was like a supernatural song in an empty house.

While the voices were singing, Jean Valjean thought of nothing. He no longer saw the night; he saw a blue sky. It seemed to him that he could feel those wings we all carry within us beginning

to unfold.

The song faded away. It may have gone on for a long time; Jean Valjean could not have said. Moments of ecstasy never last longer than an instant.

Then everything was silent again. There was no one left in the street and nothing in the garden. What had threatened him, and what had reassured him, had all disappeared. The breeze stirred a few dry weeds along the top of the wall, and they made a faint, sweet, melancholy sound.

CHAPTER VII—THE ENIGMA CONTINUES

The night wind had picked up, which meant it must be between one and two o'clock in the morning. Poor Cosette said nothing. Since she had sat down beside him and rested her head against him, Jean Valjean had thought she was asleep. He bent down and looked at her. Cosette's eyes were wide open, and the thoughtful look on her face pained him.

She was still trembling.

"Are you sleepy?" Jean Valjean asked.

"I am very cold," she replied.

A moment later she went on:

"Is she still there?"

"Who?" said Jean Valjean.

"Madame Thénardier."

Jean Valjean had already forgotten the trick he had used to keep Cosette quiet.

"Ah!" he said. "She is gone. You have nothing more to fear."

The child sighed as if a weight had been lifted from her chest.

The ground was damp, the shed was open on every side, and the wind was growing sharper by the moment. The good man took off his coat and wrapped it around Cosette.

“Are you less cold now?” he asked.

“Oh, yes, father.”

“Good. Wait for me a moment. I will be back soon.”

He left the ruin and crept along the side of the large building, looking for better shelter. He found doors, but they were shut. Every ground-floor window was barred.

Just after he turned the inner corner of the building, he noticed that he was coming to a set of arched windows, and he saw a light inside. He stood on tiptoe and peered through one of them. They all looked into a fairly large hall, paved with broad flagstones and broken up by arcades and pillars, where only a faint light and deep shadows could be seen. The light came from a taper burning in one corner. The room was empty, and nothing moved. Still, as he stared more closely, he thought he saw something on the floor covered with what looked like a shroud, shaped like a human body. It lay face down, flat on the pavement, with its arms stretched out like a cross, motionless as death. From something like a serpent winding across the floor, one might have thought that this sinister figure had a rope around its neck.

The whole chamber was filled with the dim haze of a poorly lit place, which only made it more horrifying.

Jean Valjean often said afterward that, although many funeral-like apparitions had crossed his path in life, he had never seen anything more chilling or terrifying than that mysterious figure, caught in some unexplained act in that dark

place at night. It was frightening to think the thing might be dead; even more frightening to think it might be alive.

He had the nerve to press his face against the glass and watch to see whether the thing would move. Though he stayed there for what felt like a long time, the outstretched figure did not stir. Then, all at once, an indescribable terror overcame him, and he ran. He started back toward the shed without daring to look behind him. It seemed to him that if he turned his head, he would see that figure coming after him in great strides, its arms waving.

He reached the ruin out of breath. His knees were buckling under him, and sweat was pouring off him.

Where was he? Who could have imagined a tomb like that in the middle of Paris? What was this strange house? It was a building full of nighttime mystery, calling to souls through the darkness with the voice of angels, and then, when they came, suddenly showing them that terrible sight. It seemed to promise the shining gates of heaven, only to open the dreadful doors of the grave instead. And yet it really was a building, a house, with a street number on it. It was not a dream. He had to touch the stones to convince himself it was real.

The cold, his anxiety, his uneasiness, and all the emotions of the night had brought on a real fever, and all these thoughts were colliding in his mind.

He went over to Cosette. She was asleep.

CHAPTER VIII—THE ENIGMA GROWS TWICE AS MYSTERIOUS

The child had rested her head on a stone and fallen asleep.

He sat down beside her and began to think. Little by little, as he looked at her, he grew calmer and recovered his clear mind.

He understood clearly a truth that would be the foundation of his life from then on: as long as she was there, as long as he had her near him, he would need nothing but her, and fear nothing except for her. He was not even aware of how cold he was, because he had taken off his coat to cover her.

This sound made Valjean turn around.

He looked and saw that someone was in the garden.

A figure like a man was moving among the glass covers over the melon beds, rising, bending down, stopping, all with steady movements, as if he were dragging or spreading something across the ground. The person seemed to limp.

Jean Valjean shuddered with the constant trembling of the wretched. To them, everything seems hostile and suspicious. They distrust the day because it lets people see them, and the night because it makes it easier to catch them by surprise. A little earlier he had shivered because the garden was empty, and now he shivered because someone was there.

He turned from imagined fears to real ones. He told himself that Javert and the spies might not have gone after all. They had probably left someone watching the street. If this man found him in the garden, he would shout for help, call him a thief, and hand him over. He gently lifted the sleeping Cosette in his arms and carried her behind a pile of old, discarded furniture in the farthest corner of the shed. Cosette did not move.

From there, he studied the figure in the melon patch. The strange thing was that the sound of the bell followed every movement the man made. When the man came closer, the sound came closer. When he moved away, the sound moved away. If he made a sudden gesture, the bell trembled with it. When he stopped, the sound stopped. It was clear that the bell was attached to the man. But what did that mean? Who was this man with a bell hanging from him like a ram or an ox?

As he asked himself these questions, he touched Cosette's hands. They were ice-cold.

"Ah! Good God!" he cried.

He spoke to her softly:

"Cosette!"

She did not open her eyes.

He shook her hard.

She did not wake.

"Is she dead?" he said to himself, springing to his feet and trembling all over.

The most terrible thoughts came rushing through his mind. There are moments when dreadful suspicions attack us like a pack of furies and batter their way into our brains. When someone we love is at stake, even our caution imagines every kind of horror. He remembered that sleeping outside on a cold night can be fatal.

Cosette was pale and lay stretched out on the ground at his feet, completely still.

He listened for her breathing. She was still breathing, but it seemed so faint that he thought it was about to stop.

How could he warm her back to life? How could he wake her? Everything else vanished from his mind. He rushed wildly out of the ruin.

Cosette had to be in bed by the fire within fifteen minutes.

CHAPTER IX—THE MAN WITH THE BELL

He went straight toward the man he had seen in the garden. In his hand, he held the roll of silver from his waistcoat pocket.

The man had his head bowed and did not notice him coming. In a few steps, Jean Valjean was at his side.

Jean Valjean called out:

“One hundred francs!”

The man started and looked up.

“You can earn a hundred francs,” Jean Valjean went on, “if you give me shelter for the night.”

The full moon lit up Jean Valjean’s terrified face.

“What! Is it you, Father Madeleine?” the man said.

Hearing that name spoken there, at that dark hour, in that unknown place, by that strange man, made Jean Valjean recoil.

He had expected anything but that. The man speaking to him was a bent, lame old fellow, dressed almost like a peasant. On his left knee he wore a leather kneecap, from which a fairly large bell hung. His face was in shadow and impossible to make out.

But the old man had taken off his cap and cried out, trembling all over:

“Ah, good God! How did you get here, Father Madeleine? Where did you come in? Dear Jesus! Did you fall from heaven? Though that would be no surprise—if you ever did fall, it would be from there. And look at the state you’re in! No cravat, no hat, no coat! You know, you’d have scared anyone who didn’t know you. No coat! Lord God! Have the saints gone mad these days? But how did you get in here?”

His words came tumbling out one after another. The old man spoke with the rapid ease of a countryman, and there was nothing threatening in it. He spoke with a mix of astonishment and simple kindness.

“Who are you, and what house is this?” Jean Valjean demanded.

“Ah, pardieu, this is too much!” the old man cried. “I’m the man you got this position for, and this is the house where you had me placed. What! Don’t you recognize me?”

“No,” said Jean Valjean. “And how do you know me?”

“You saved my life,” said the man.

He turned. A beam of moonlight traced his profile, and Jean Valjean recognized old Fauchelevent.

“Ah!” said Jean Valjean. “So it’s you? Yes, I remember you.”

“That’s very fortunate,” said the old man reproachfully.

“And what are you doing here?” Jean Valjean went on.

“Why, I’m covering my melons, of course!”

In fact, when Jean Valjean spoke to him, old Fauchelevent was holding the end of a straw mat in his hand and spreading it over the melon bed. In the hour or so he had been in the garden, he had already laid out several of them. That was the task that had made him move in the odd way Jean Valjean had noticed from the shed.

He went on:

“I said to myself, ‘The moon is bright; it’s going to freeze. What if I put my melons in their overcoats?’ And,” he added with a broad smile as he looked at Jean Valjean, “pardieu! you should have done the same! But how did you get here?”

Since this man knew him, at least by the name Madeleine, Jean Valjean became even more cautious. He kept asking questions. Strangely enough, their roles seemed reversed. He was the intruder, yet he was the one doing the questioning.

“And what is that bell you’re wearing on your knee?”

“This,” Fauchelevent replied, “is so people can keep out of my way.”

“What? So people can avoid you?”

Old Fauchelevent winked with an indescribable expression.

“Ah, good heavens! There are only women in this house—lots of young girls. It seems I’m considered dangerous to run into. The bell warns them. When I come, they go.”

“What house is this?”

“Come now, you know perfectly well.”

“But I don’t.”

“You don’t, when you got me this job here as gardener?”

“Answer me as if I knew nothing.”

“Well then, this is the Petit-Picpus convent.”

Memories came back to Jean Valjean. Chance—or rather Providence—had brought him to that very convent in the Saint-Antoine quarter where old Fauchelevent, crippled by the fall from his cart, had been admitted two years earlier on Valjean’s recommendation. He repeated, as if speaking to himself:

“The Petit-Picpus convent.”

“Exactly,” old Fauchelevent replied. “But to get to the point, how on earth did you manage to get in here, Father Madeleine? Never mind if you’re a saint—you’re still a man, and no man comes in here.”

“And yet you’re here.”

“There’s no one here but me.”

“Even so,” said Jean Valjean, “I have to stay here.”

“Ah, good God!” cried Fauchelevent.

Jean Valjean stepped closer to the old man and said in a grave voice:

“Father Fauchelevent, I saved your life.”

“I was the first to remember that,” Fauchelevent replied.

“Then today you can do for me what I once did for you.”

With his old, shaking, wrinkled hands, Fauchelevent took Jean Valjean’s two strong hands in his own and stood there for several minutes, as if he could not speak. At last he cried out:

“Oh! It would be a blessing from the good God if I could do something, however small, to repay that! Save your life! Monsieur le Maire, command the old man!”

A wonderful joy transformed the old man. His face seemed to shine.

“What do you want me to do?” he went on.

“I’ll explain that. Do you have a room?”

“I’ve got a little hut over there, behind the ruins of the old convent, in a corner no one ever looks into. It has three rooms.”

The hut really was so well hidden behind the ruins, and so cleverly arranged to stay out of sight, that Jean Valjean had not noticed it.

“Good,” said Jean Valjean. “Now I’m going to ask two things of you.”

“What are they, Mr. Mayor?”

“First, you must not tell anyone what you know about me. Second, you must not try to learn anything more.”

“As you wish. I know you can do nothing dishonest, and that you have always been a man after the good Lord’s own heart.

Besides, you were the one who put me here. That makes it your concern. I am at your service."

"Then it is settled. Now come with me. We are going to fetch the child."

"Ah!" said Fauchelevent. "So there is a child?"

He said nothing more and followed Jean Valjean like a dog following its master.

Less than half an hour later, Cosette—her cheeks rosy again in the warmth of a good fire—lay asleep in the old gardener's bed. Jean Valjean had put his cravat and coat back on. His hat, which he had thrown over the wall, had been found and brought back. While Jean Valjean was putting on his coat, Fauchelevent had taken off the bell and the kneecap, which now hung from a nail beside a wicker basket on the wall. The two men stood warming themselves, their elbows on a table where Fauchelevent had set out a piece of cheese, some dark bread, a bottle of wine, and two glasses. As he rested his hand on Jean Valjean's knee, the old man said, "Ah, Father Madeleine! You did not recognize me at once. You save people's lives and then forget them! That is bad! But they remember you! You are ungrateful!"

CHAPTER X—HOW JAVERT PICKED UP THE TRAIL

The events whose hidden side we have just seen, so to speak, had happened in the simplest way possible.

On the very evening when Javert arrested Jean Valjean beside Fantine's deathbed, Valjean escaped from the town jail at M. sur M. The police assumed he had gone to Paris. Paris is a whirlpool where anything can be swallowed up and vanish, like something lost in the sea. No forest can hide a man the way a crowd can. Every kind of fugitive knows this. They go to Paris as if into an abyss; some depths protect those who fall into them. The police know this too, and in Paris they look for what has disappeared elsewhere. So they searched there for the former mayor of M. sur M. Javert was called to Paris to help with the investigation. In fact, he had already played a major part in Jean Valjean's recapture. His zeal and intelligence on that occasion had been noticed by M. Chabouillet, secretary of the Prefecture under Comte Anglès. M. Chabouillet, who had already been Javert's patron, had the inspector from M. sur M. assigned to the Paris police force. There Javert proved useful in many ways, and, strange as the word may seem for such work, in honorable ones.

He had stopped thinking about Jean Valjean—the wolf of today makes these hounds, always on the hunt, forget the wolf of yesterday—when, in December 1823, he happened to read a newspaper, though he never read newspapers. But Javert, being a monarchist, wanted to know the details of the triumphal

entry of the “Prince Generalissimo” into Bayonne. As he finished the article, which had interested him, a name caught his eye at the bottom of the page: Jean Valjean. The paper reported that the convict Jean Valjean was dead, and stated it so formally that Javert had no doubt it was true. He merely remarked, “That’s a good entry.” Then he tossed the paper aside and gave the matter no more thought.

Some time later, a police report was sent from the prefecture of the Seine-et-Oise to the prefecture of police in Paris. It concerned the abduction of a child that had taken place, it was said, under unusual circumstances in the commune of Montfermeil. According to the report, a little girl of seven or eight had been entrusted by her mother to an innkeeper in that area and had been carried off by a stranger. The child answered to the name of Cosette and was the daughter of a woman named Fantine, who had died in a hospital, though no one knew where or when.

This report caught Javert’s attention and set him thinking.

Fantine’s name was well known to him. He remembered how Jean Valjean had made him, Javert, burst out laughing by asking for a three-day delay so he could go and fetch that woman’s child. He also recalled that Jean Valjean had been arrested in Paris at the very moment he was getting into the coach for Montfermeil. At the time, several signs had led him to suspect that this was the second time Valjean had boarded that coach, and that he had already made a trip the day before to the area around that village, though he had not been seen in the village itself. What had he meant to do in the Montfermeil area?

No one could even guess. Now Javert understood. Fantine's daughter was there. Jean Valjean had been going to look for her. And now the child had been carried off by a stranger. Who could that stranger be? Could it be Jean Valjean? But Jean Valjean was dead. Without saying a word to anyone, Javert took the coach from the _Pewter Platter_, Cul-de-Sac de la Planchette, and went to Montfermeil.

He expected to find a great deal that would clarify the matter there; instead, he found it more puzzling than ever.

For the first few days, the Thénardiers raged and talked nonstop. The Lark's disappearance caused a stir in the village. Thénardier quickly heard several versions of the story, all ending with a child being abducted. That was why the police report was made. But once his first burst of anger had faded, Thénardier, with his remarkable instinct, very quickly understood that it was never wise to attract the attention of the public prosecutor. If he complained about Cosette's "abduction," the first result would be to draw the sharp eye of justice onto himself and onto the many shady matters he had in progress. The last thing owls want is for someone to bring them a candle. And to begin with, how could he explain the fifteen hundred francs he had received? He immediately changed course, silenced his wife, and pretended to be surprised whenever anyone mentioned the "stolen child." He knew nothing about it. No doubt he had grumbled for a while about having that dear little creature "taken from him" so suddenly. Out of affection, he would have liked to keep her two or three days longer. But her "grandfather" had come for her in the most

natural way in the world. He added the detail about the "grandfather," and it had a good effect. This was the story Javert came upon when he arrived at Montfermeil. The grandfather made Jean Valjean disappear.

Even so, Javert dropped a few questions into Thénardier's story like sounding weights. "Who was that grandfather? What was his name?" Thénardier answered simply: "He is a rich farmer. I saw his passport. I think his name was Monsieur Guillaume Lambert."

Lambert is a respectable name, and a very reassuring one. So Javert returned to Paris.

"Jean Valjean is certainly dead," he said, "and I am a fool."

He had started to put this whole story out of his mind again when, sometime in March 1824, he heard about a strange man living in the parish of Saint-Médard, known as "the beggar who gives alms." According to the story, this man had money, though no one knew his real name, and he lived alone with a little girl of eight who knew nothing about herself except that she had come from Montfermeil. Montfermeil! That name kept turning up, and it immediately caught Javert's attention. An old beggar who worked as a police informer, a former church beadle, and who had received alms from this man, supplied a few more details. This wealthy gentleman was extremely reserved. He never went out except in the evening, spoke to no one except, now and then, to the poor, and never let anyone come near him. He wore a dreadful old yellow frock-coat that was said to be worth millions because it was padded with

banknotes. That thoroughly aroused Javert's curiosity. To get a good look at this odd gentleman without frightening him, he borrowed the beadle's clothes for a day and took the old spy's usual place, where the man crouched every evening, mumbling nasal prayers and spying under the cover of devotion.

The "suspected individual" did in fact come up to Javert in this disguise and give him alms. At that moment, Javert lifted his head, and the shock Jean Valjean felt on recognizing Javert was matched by the shock Javert felt when he thought he recognized Jean Valjean.

Still, the darkness may have deceived him. Jean Valjean's death was officially recorded. Javert had serious doubts, and when he was uncertain, Javert, scrupulous as always, never laid a hand on a man's collar.

He followed the man to the Gorbeau house and got "the old woman" talking, which was not hard to do. She confirmed the story about the coat lined with millions and told him about the thousand-franc note. She had seen it. She had held it in her hands. Javert rented a room, and that evening he settled into it. He went and listened at the mysterious lodger's door, hoping to hear his voice, but Jean Valjean saw his candle through the keyhole and outwitted the spy by remaining silent.

The next day, Jean Valjean moved out. But the old woman had noticed the sound of the five-franc coin falling. Hearing the clink of money, she guessed that he might be planning to leave and hurried to warn Javert. That night, when Jean Valjean came out, Javert was waiting for him behind the boulevard trees with

two men.

Javert had asked the Prefecture for assistance, but he had not given the name of the man he hoped to arrest. He kept that to himself for three reasons. First, the slightest carelessness might warn Jean Valjean. Second, capturing an escaped ex-convict who was believed to be dead—a criminal whom the law had once classified forever as _among malefactors of the most dangerous sort_—would be a splendid triumph, and the older officers of the Paris police would certainly not leave such a prize to a newcomer like Javert; he was afraid they would take his convict from him. Finally, Javert, being an artist in his way, liked the unexpected. He hated those loudly announced successes that are talked about long beforehand and lose their freshness. He preferred to shape his masterpieces in secret and reveal them all at once at the end.

Javert had followed Jean Valjean from tree to tree, then from street corner to street corner, without losing sight of him for a single moment. Even when Jean Valjean thought he was safest, Javert's eyes were still on him. Why had Javert not arrested him? Because he was still unsure.

Let us add that Javert also had scruples of his own; the demands of his conscience joined the orders of the prefect. He truly was uncertain.

Jean Valjean turned away from him and walked on into the darkness.

Sadness, unease, anxiety, depression, and this new disaster of having to flee in the night to find some chance refuge in Paris

for himself and Cosette—all of it, along with the need to match his pace to the child's—had changed Jean Valjean's walk without his realizing it. It had given him such an air of old age that even the police, in the person of Javert, could be mistaken, and in fact were. The difficulty of getting close to him, his disguise as an émigré tutor, Thénardier's statement that made him out to be a grandfather, and finally the belief that he had died in prison all added to the uncertainty clouding Javert's mind.

For a moment, Javert thought of suddenly demanding his papers. But if the man was not Jean Valjean, and if he was not in fact some decent old gentleman living on his income, then he was probably one of those cheerful-looking rogues deeply and cleverly entangled in the dark network of Parisian crime—perhaps even the leader of a dangerous gang, a man who gave alms to hide his other skills, which was an old trick. He would have reliable men, hideouts for his accomplices in case of trouble, places where he would no doubt take shelter. All the turns he kept making through the streets seemed to show that he was not a simple, honest man. To arrest him too quickly would be like killing the hen that laid the golden eggs. What was the harm in waiting? Javert felt sure he would not escape.

So he went on, thoroughly puzzled, asking himself a hundred questions about this mysterious man.

It was only much later, in the Rue de Pontoise, that he finally recognized Jean Valjean, thanks to the bright light spilling out from a dram-shop.

In this world, two beings feel a shock to the core: a mother who gets her child back, and a tiger that gets its prey back. Javert felt that shock.

As soon as he was certain that the man was Jean Valjean, the formidable convict, he saw that there were only three of them, and he called for reinforcements at the police station in the Rue de Pontoise. One puts on gloves before taking hold of a thorny cudgel.

This delay, and the stop at the Carrefour Rollin to consult his agents, nearly made him lose the trail. But he quickly realized that Jean Valjean would want the river between himself and anyone chasing him. He lowered his head and thought it through, like a bloodhound putting its nose to the ground to make sure it has the right scent. Guided by his unerring instinct, Javert went straight to the Austerlitz bridge. A word with the toll-keeper gave him the information he needed. “Have you seen a man with a little girl?” “I charged him two sous,” the toll-keeper replied. Javert reached the bridge just in time to see Jean Valjean cross the small pool of light on the far side of the water, leading Cosette by the hand. He saw him go into the Rue du Chemin-Vert-Saint-Antoine. He remembered that the Cul-de-Sac Genrot lay there like a trap, and that the Rue Droit-Mur had only one outlet, into the Rue Petit-Picpus. He secured his rear exits, as hunters say, and quickly sent one of his agents by a roundabout route to guard that opening. A patrol

returning to the Arsenal post happened to pass him; he commandeered it and had it come with him. In this kind of hunt, soldiers are trump cards. Besides, the rule is that if you want to bring down a wild boar, you use all the skill of the chase and plenty of dogs. Once these arrangements were in place, and convinced that Jean Valjean was trapped between the blind alley Genrot on the right, his agent on the left, and himself, Javert, behind him, he took a pinch of snuff.

Then he began the game. He felt one ecstatic, infernal thrill. He let his man go on ahead, knowing he had him secure, but wanting to put off the arrest for as long as possible. He took pleasure in knowing him captured while still watching him move freely. He feasted on the sight with his eyes, with the same cruel delight as a spider letting a fly struggle, or a cat letting a mouse run. Claws and talons have a monstrous sensual pleasure in the faint movements of the creature trapped in their grip. What a savage joy there is in strangling.

Javert was enjoying himself. The net was tightly woven. He was certain of success; now all he had to do was close his hand.

With the force that was with him, the very idea of resistance was out of the question, no matter how strong, determined, or desperate Jean Valjean might be.

[Illustration: Javert on the Hunt]

Javert moved forward slowly, probing as he went and searching every corner of the street as if they were thieves' hiding places.

When he reached the center of the web, the fly was gone.

One can imagine how furious he was.

He questioned the officer stationed at the corner of the Rues Droit-Mur and Petit-Picpus. That agent, who had stayed calmly at his post, had not seen the man go by.

It sometimes happens that a stag is lost completely, head and horns; that is to say, it escapes even with the pack close on its heels, and then even the oldest huntsmen do not know what to say. Duvivier, Ligniville, and Desprez stop short. In that kind of defeat, Artonge cries, “It was not a stag, but a sorcerer.” Javert would have liked to cry out the same thing.

For a moment, his disappointment came close to despair and rage.

Napoleon certainly made mistakes in the war with Russia. Alexander made blunders in the war in India. Caesar made mistakes in the war in Africa. Cyrus was at fault in the war in Scythia. And Javert blundered in this campaign against Jean Valjean. He may have been wrong to hesitate when he first recognized the ex-convict. That first glance should have been enough. He was wrong not to arrest him at once in the old building. He was wrong not to arrest him when he clearly recognized him in the Rue de Pontoise. He was wrong to consult his assistants in the bright moonlight at the Carrefour Rollin. Advice is certainly useful. It is good to know which of the dogs can be trusted and to question them. But a hunter cannot be too careful when he is tracking restless creatures like the wolf and the convict. By thinking too much about how to set the pack of bloodhounds on the trail, Javert warned the beast, let it

catch the scent of danger, and made it flee. Above all, he was wrong, after picking up the trail again on the bridge of Austerlitz, to play that dangerous and childish game of keeping such a man dangling at the end of a thread. He thought himself stronger than he was and imagined he could play the game of the mouse and the lion. At the same time, he also thought himself weaker than he was when he decided he needed reinforcements. A fatal precaution, and a waste of precious time. Javert made all these mistakes, and yet he was still one of the shrewdest and most exact detectives who ever lived. In the fullest sense of the term, he was what hunting language calls a _knowing dog_. But what is ever perfect?

Even great strategists have their moments of eclipse.

The greatest follies are often made, like the thickest ropes, from many separate strands. Take the cable apart thread by thread. Take each small motive on its own, and you can snap them one after another and say, “Is that all?” But braid them together, twist them into one, and the result is immense: Attila hesitating between Marcian in the east and Valentinian in the west; Hannibal lingering at Capua; Danton falling asleep at Arcis-sur-Aube.

Be that as it may, even when he realized Jean Valjean had escaped, Javert did not panic. Convinced that the convict who had broken the terms of his release could not be far away, he posted guards, set traps and ambushes, and searched the neighborhood all night. The first thing he noticed was the confusion around the street lantern whose rope had been cut. It was a valuable clue, but it misled him, because it made him

focus all his efforts on the Cul-de-Sac Genrot. This dead-end lane had fairly low walls that opened onto gardens, and beyond them stretched vast tracts of wasteland. Jean Valjean clearly seemed to have fled in that direction. In fact, if Javert had gone a little farther into the Cul-de-Sac Genrot, he probably would have found the trail and succeeded. Instead, he searched those gardens and empty stretches of land as if he were looking for a needle.

At daybreak, he left two sharp men on watch and returned to Police Headquarters, as ashamed as a police agent caught by a thief.

CHAPTER I—NUMBER 62 RUE PETIT-PICPUS

Half a century ago, nothing looked more like every other carriage gate than the one at Number 62 Rue Petit-Picpus. This entrance, usually left invitingly half open, allowed a glimpse of two things, neither of them especially mournful: a courtyard enclosed by walls draped with vines, and the face of an idle porter. Above the wall at the far end of the court, tall trees could be seen. When a shaft of sunlight brightened the courtyard, and a glass of wine had put the porter in good spirits, it was hard to pass Number 62 Little Picpus Street without coming away with a pleasant impression. And yet it was a gloomy place, despite that first glimpse.

The doorway smiled; the house inside prayed and wept.

If you managed to get past the porter—which was no easy matter, and for most people nearly impossible, since there was a kind of _open sesame_ you had to know—you entered a small vestibule on the right. From there, a staircase opened, enclosed between two walls and so narrow that only one person could go up at a time. If you were not put off by the canary-yellow paint and the chocolate-colored dado covering the stairs, and if you dared to climb them, you passed one landing, then a second, and reached the first floor, where a corridor continued the same yellow wash and chocolate-colored baseboard with quiet persistence. The staircase and corridor were lit by two handsome windows. Then the corridor turned and became dark. If you went around that corner, a few steps farther on you came

to a door that seemed all the more mysterious because it was not locked. If you opened it, you found yourself in a small room about six feet square, tiled, well scrubbed, clean, cold, and papered with nankeen wallpaper patterned with green flowers, at fifteen sous a roll. A dull white light fell from a large window with tiny panes on the left, which took up the whole width of the room. You looked around, but saw no one; you listened, but heard neither footsteps nor a human voice. The walls were bare, the room was unfurnished, and there was not even a chair.

Looking again, you noticed in the wall opposite the door a square opening, about a foot across, covered by a grating of interlaced iron bars—black, knotted, and solid—forming squares, I almost said meshes, less than an inch and a half across on the diagonal. The little green flowers of the nankeen wallpaper ran calmly and neatly right up to those iron bars, as if not at all disturbed by their funeral gloom. Even if some living creature had been miraculously thin enough to try to enter or leave through that square opening, the grating would have stopped it. It did not allow a body to pass, but it did allow eyes to pass—that is to say, the mind. That idea seems to have occurred to them, for they had reinforced it with a sheet of tin set a little farther back in the wall and pierced with a thousand holes even smaller than those of a strainer. At the bottom of this plate was an opening exactly like the slot of a letter box. To the right of the grated opening hung a piece of tape attached to a bell-wire.

If you pulled the cord, a bell rang, and a voice sounded very close by, startling you.

“Who is there?” the voice asked.

It was a woman’s voice, gentle and so soft that it carried a note of sadness.

Here again, there was a magic word you had to know. If you did not know it, the voice fell silent, and the wall became mute once more, as if the frightened darkness of a tomb lay on the other side.

If you knew the password, the voice spoke again: “Enter on the right.”

Then you noticed, on the right and facing the window, a glass door topped by a gray-painted glazed frame. When you lifted the latch and stepped across the threshold, you felt exactly as though you were entering one of those grated theatre boxes before the screen was lowered and the chandelier lit. You were, in fact, in a kind of narrow theatre box, furnished with two old chairs and a badly worn straw mat, dimly lit by the hazy light coming through the glass door. It was a true box, with a front rail just high enough to lean on, bearing a black wooden panel. This box was barred, but its grating was not gilded wood like at the opera. It was a monstrous lattice of iron bars, hideously crossed and riveted to the wall with huge fastenings that looked like clenched fists.

The first few minutes passed. As your eyes slowly adjusted to the cellar-like half-light, you tried to look past the grating, but

could see no more than six inches beyond it. There you met a barrier of black shutters, strengthened and braced with crossbeams painted a gingerbread yellow. The shutters were divided into long, narrow slats, and they covered the whole length of the grating. They were always closed. After a few moments, a voice came from behind them and said:

“I am here. What do you want with me?”

It was a beloved voice, sometimes an adored one. No one could be seen. Barely even the sound of breathing could be heard. It seemed as though a spirit had been summoned and was speaking to you through the walls of a tomb.

If you happened to meet certain strict and very rare conditions, the slat of a shutter facing you would open, and the summoned spirit would appear. Behind the grating, behind the shutter, you could make out, as far as the bars allowed, a head of which only the mouth and chin were visible; the rest was hidden by a black veil. You caught sight of a black guimpe and a figure barely outlined beneath a black shroud. That head spoke to you, but did not look at you and never smiled.

The light behind you was arranged so that you saw her in brightness, while she saw you in shadow. The light had a symbolic meaning.

And yet your eyes strained eagerly through that opening into a place closed to every gaze. A deep indistinctness surrounded the mourning figure. Your eyes searched that dimness, trying to make out the setting around the apparition. Very soon you realized that you could see nothing. What lay before you was

night, emptiness, shadows, a winter fog mixed with the vapor of the tomb, a kind of terrible peace, a silence from which you could gather nothing, not even sighs, a darkness in which you could distinguish nothing, not even phantoms.

What you were looking at was the inside of a cloister.

It was the interior of that stern, gloomy building known as the Convent of the Bernardines of the Perpetual Adoration. The booth where you stood was the parlor. The first voice that had spoken to you was the portress's, for she always sat motionless and silent on the other side of the wall, near the square opening, hidden behind the iron grating and the metal plate pierced with a thousand holes, like a double visor. The darkness filling the grated booth came from the fact that the parlor had a window on the side facing the world, but none on the side facing the convent. Profane eyes were meant to see nothing of that sacred place.

Still, there was something beyond that shadow; there was light; there was life in the middle of that death. Although this was the most strictly enclosed of all convents, we will try to find our way inside, to lead the reader in with us, and to say, without overstepping proper limits, things that storytellers have never seen and therefore have never described.

CHAPTER II—MARTIN VERGA'S RULE OF OBEDIENCE

This convent, which had already stood for many years in the Rue Petit-Picpus by 1824, belonged to a community of Bernardine nuns under the rule of Martin Verga.

These Bernardines were therefore connected not with Clairvaux, like the Bernardine monks, but with Cîteaux, like the Benedictines. In other words, they were under Saint Benoît rather than Saint Bernard.

Anyone who has spent much time with old folios knows that in 1425 Martin Verga founded a congregation of Bernardine-Benedictines, with Salamanca as the head of the order and Alcala as its secondary house.

This congregation established branches throughout the Catholic countries of Europe.

In the Latin Church, this kind of grafting of one order onto another is nothing unusual. To take only the order of Saint-Benoît, which is the one in question here: besides the obedience of Martin Verga, four congregations are attached to it—two in Italy, Mont-Cassin and Sainte-Justine of Padua, and two in France, Cluny and Saint-Maur—as well as nine orders: Vallombrosa, Granmont, the Célestins, the Camaldules, the Carthusians, the Humiliés, the Olivateurs, the Silvestrins, and finally Cîteaux. For Cîteaux itself, though it became the parent stock of other orders, is only an offshoot of Saint-Benoît. Cîteaux dates back to Saint Robert, Abbé de Molesme, in the

diocese of Langres, in 1098. And it was in 529 that Saint-Benoît, then seventeen years old, drove the devil from the ancient temple of Apollo at Subiaco, where the devil had withdrawn into the desert—he was old; had he become a hermit?

After the Carmelites, who go barefoot, wear a bit of willow at their throats, and never sit down, the harshest rule is that of the Bernardine-Benedictines of Martin Verga. They dress in black and wear a guimpe that rises to the chin, in keeping with the explicit command of Saint-Benoît. Their habit consists of a serge robe with wide sleeves, a large woollen veil, a guimpe rising to the chin and cut square across the breast, and a band that comes down over the forehead to the eyes. Everything is black except the band, which is white. The novices wear the same habit, but entirely in white. The professed nuns also wear a rosary at their side.

The Bernardine-Benedictines of Martin Verga practiced Perpetual Adoration, as did the Benedictines known as the Ladies of the Holy Sacrament, who at the beginning of this century had two convents in Paris: one at the Temple and the other in the Rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève. But the Bernardine-Benedictines of Petit-Picpus, whom we are discussing here, were an entirely different order from the Ladies of the Holy Sacrament enclosed in the Rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève and at the Temple. Their rules differed in many ways, and their dress differed as well. The Bernardine-Benedictines of Petit-Picpus wore a black guimpe. The Benedictines of the Holy Sacrament in the Rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève wore a white one and also had on

their breasts a representation of the Holy Sacrament, about three inches long, made of silver-gilt or gilded copper. The nuns of Petit-Picpus did not wear this emblem. Perpetual Adoration, though practiced both at Petit-Picpus and at the Temple, did not make the two orders the same. It kept them completely distinct. Their only likeness was this shared practice between the Ladies of the Holy Sacrament and the Bernardines of Martin Verga, just as there was also a similarity between two other orders in their study and veneration of all the mysteries connected with the infancy, life, and death of Jesus Christ and the Virgin, though those orders were still far apart and at times even hostile: the Oratory of Italy, founded at Florence by Philip de Neri, and the Oratory of France, founded by Pierre de Bérulle. The Oratory of France claimed precedence, since Philip de Neri was only a saint, while Bérulle was a cardinal.

Let us return to the severe Spanish rule of Martin Verga.

The Bernardine-Benedictines of this order fast throughout the year and do not eat meat. They also keep the Lenten fast and many other fast days specific to their community. After their first sleep, they rise between one and three in the morning to read the breviary and sing matins. In every season, they sleep on straw between rough serge sheets. They do not use baths, never light a fire, and whip themselves every Friday. They keep a rule of silence and speak to one another only during very short recreation periods. For six months of the year, from September 14, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, until Easter, they wear chemises made of drugget. Those six months are already a concession. The rule originally required it all year

long, but the drugget chemise, unbearable in the summer heat, caused fevers and nervous spasms. Its use had to be limited. Even with that mitigation, when the nuns put on the chemise on September 14, they suffer from fever for three or four days. Their vows are obedience, poverty, chastity, and lifelong perseverance in seclusion, and the rule makes these obligations even harsher.

The prioress is elected for three years by the mothers, called _mères vocales_ because they have a vote in the chapter. A prioress may be re-elected only twice, so the longest possible term is nine years.

They never see the priest who conducts the service, because a serge curtain nine feet high always hides him from them. During the sermon, when the preacher is in the chapel, they lower their veils over their faces. They must always speak softly, walk with their eyes lowered, and keep their heads bowed. Only one man is allowed to enter the convent: the archbishop of the diocese.

There is, in fact, one other man: the gardener. But he is always an old man, and to make sure he is always alone in the garden, and to warn the nuns to keep away from him, a bell is fastened to his knee.

Their submission to the prioress is complete and passive. It is the full, canonical form of obedience, carried to the utmost point of self-denial. At the voice of Christ, _ut voci Christi_; at a gesture, at the first sign, _ad nutum, ad primum signum_; at once, cheerfully, steadfastly, and with a kind of blind obedience, _prompte, hilariter, perseveranter et cæca quadam obedientia_;

like a file in a workman's hand, _quasi limam in manibus fabri_; they may not learn to read or write without the superior's express permission, _legere vel scribere non addiscerit sine expressa superioris licentia_.

Each of them, in turn, performs what they call _reparation_. Reparation is a prayer offered for all the sins, all the faults, all the quarrels, all the violations, all the injustices, and all the crimes committed on earth. For twelve hours without interruption—from four in the afternoon until four in the morning, or from four in the morning until four in the afternoon—the sister making _reparation_ stays on her knees on the stone before the Holy Sacrament, her hands clasped and a rope around her neck. When the strain becomes unbearable, she lies flat on her face on the ground, her arms stretched out in the shape of a cross; that is her only relief. In this position she prays for all the guilty in the world. It is sublime in its greatness.

Because this act is performed in front of a post where a candle burns, it is called either _making reparation_ or _being at the post_. Out of humility, the nuns even prefer this second expression, since it carries an idea of torture and abasement.

Making reparation is a duty that absorbs the whole soul. The sister at the post would not turn around even if a thunderbolt struck directly behind her.

Besides this, there is always a sister kneeling before the Holy Sacrament. Each turn lasts an hour. They relieve one another like soldiers standing guard. This is the Perpetual Adoration.

The prioresses and the mothers almost always bear names marked by a special solemnity. These names recall, not saints and martyrs, but moments in the life of Jesus Christ: Mother Nativity, Mother Conception, Mother Presentation, Mother Passion. Still, the names of saints are not forbidden.

When you see them, the only part of them you ever see is their mouths.

All their teeth are yellow. No toothbrush has ever made its way into that convent. To them, brushing your teeth stands at the top of a ladder whose bottom rung is the loss of your soul.

They never say _my_. They own nothing personally, and they are not allowed to become attached to anything. They call everything _our_: our veil, our chaplet; if they were talking about a chemise, they would say _our chemise_. Sometimes, though, they do grow fond of some small object—a book of hours, a relic, a blessed medal. The moment they realize they are becoming attached to it, they must give it up. They remember the words of Saint Thérèse, when a great lady, just as she was about to enter her order, said to her, “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!”

No one is allowed to shut herself away or 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 answers, “Forever.” They follow the same ritual when one knocks at another’s door. Barely has she touched the door before a soft voice on the

other side quickly says, “Forever!” Like all repeated practices, this becomes mechanical through habit, and sometimes one says forever– before the other has even had time to recite the rather long phrase, “Praised and adored be the most Holy Sacrament of the altar.”

Among the Visitandines, the one who enters says, “Ave Maria,” and the one in the cell replies, “Gratia plena.” It is their way of saying good day, and it is, in fact, full of grace.

At every hour of the day, the convent church bell gives three extra strokes. At that signal, the prioress, the vocal mothers, the professed nuns, the lay-sisters, the novices, and the postulants stop whatever they are saying, doing, or thinking, and all speak together. If it is five o’clock, for example, they say, “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, they say, “At eight o’clock and at all hours!” and so on, according to the hour.

This practice, meant to interrupt the flow of thought and turn it back again and again toward God, exists in many religious communities; only the wording changes. At The Infant Jesus, for example, they say, “At this hour and at every hour may the love of Jesus kindle my heart!” The Bernardine-Benedictines of Martin Verga, who were enclosed at Petit-Picpus fifty years ago, sing the offices in solemn psalm tones, in pure Gregorian chant, and always at full voice throughout the entire service. Everywhere an asterisk appears in the missal, they pause and say softly, “Jesus-Marie-Joseph.” For the office of the dead, they use a tone so low that women’s voices can scarcely descend that far. The effect is powerful and tragic.

The nuns of Petit-Picpus had built a vault beneath their high altar for the burial of their community. But, as they put it, _the Government_ does not allow coffins to be placed there, so when they die they must leave the convent. This grieves them deeply and fills them with distress, since they see it as a violation of their rule.

They had been granted only a limited consolation: permission to be buried at a particular hour and in a particular corner of the old Vaugirard cemetery, on land that had once belonged to their community.

On Fridays, the nuns hear high mass, vespers, and all the offices, just as they do on Sundays. They also strictly observe all the minor feast days unknown to people in the world, feast days that the Church of France once multiplied so freely, and still does in Spain and Italy. Their stations in the chapel seem endless. As for the number and length of their prayers, nothing

gives a better sense of them than the innocent remark of one of the sisters: “The prayers of the postulants are frightful, the prayers of the novices are worse still, and the prayers of the professed nuns are worse still.”

Once a week, the chapter meets. The prioress presides, and the vocal mothers are present. One by one, each sister kneels on the stone floor and confesses aloud, before everyone, the faults and sins she has committed during the week. After each confession, the vocal mothers confer and pronounce the penance aloud.

In addition to this spoken confession, delivered aloud and reserved for faults that are at least somewhat serious, they have another practice for lesser offenses, which they call the _coulpe_. To _make_ one’s coulpe_ means lying flat on one’s face during the service, in front of the prioress, until she—who is never called anything but _our_ mother_—signals with a light tap of her foot against the wood of her stall that the offender may rise. The _coulpe_, or _peccavi_, is imposed for the smallest matters: a broken glass, a torn veil, arriving a few seconds late to an office without meaning to, singing a wrong note in church, and so on. That is enough; the _coulpe_ is made. The _coulpe_ is entirely voluntary. The guilty person herself—here the word is etymologically exact—judges herself and imposes it on herself. On feast days and Sundays, four mother precentors chant the offices before a large reading desk with four places. One day, one of the mother precentors began a psalm that opened with _Ecce_, and instead of saying _Ecce_, she sang aloud the three notes _do_ si sol_. For this moment of absent-mindedness, she underwent a _coulpe_ that

lasted through the entire service. What made the fault seem so grave was that the chapter had laughed.

When a nun is called to the parlor, even if she is the prioress herself, she lowers her veil, as has already been noted, so that only her mouth can be seen.

Only the prioress may communicate with outsiders. The others may see only their closest family, and even that happens very rarely. If, by chance, someone from outside asks to see a nun—someone she knew and loved in the world before entering the convent—a whole formal process of negotiation is required. If the visitor is a woman, permission is sometimes granted. The nun comes, and they speak through the shutters, which are opened only for a mother or a sister. Needless to say, men are always refused permission.

Such is the Rule of Saint Benedict, made even harsher by Martin Verga.

These nuns are not cheerful, rosy, and blooming, as the women of other orders often are. They are pale and solemn. Between 1825 and 1830, three of them went mad.

CHAPTER III—AUSTERITIES

A woman remains a postulant for at least two years, and often for four; then she spends four years as a novice. It is unusual for the final vows to be taken before the age of twenty-three or twenty-four. The Bernardine-Benedictines of Martin Verga do not accept widows into their order.

In their cells, they submit themselves to many forms of mortification that are unknown to others and that they must never speak of.

On the day a novice takes her vows, she is dressed in her finest clothes. A crown of white roses is placed on her head. Her hair is brushed until it gleams and then curled. Then she lies prostrate while a great black veil is cast over her and the office for the dead is sung. After that, the nuns divide into two lines. One line passes close by her, saying in mournful voices, “Our sister is dead”; the other answers in tones of rapture, “Our sister is alive in Jesus Christ!”

At the time when this story takes place, a boarding school was attached to the convent—a school for young girls from noble and mostly wealthy families. Among them were Mademoiselle de Saint-Aulaire and de Bélissen, and an English girl who bore the illustrious Catholic name of Talbot. Raised by these nuns within four walls, the girls grew up with a horror of the world and of their own age. One of them said to us one day, “The sight of the street pavement made me shudder from head to foot.” They wore blue, with a white cap and a Holy Spirit in silver-gilt or copper on their breast. On certain great feast days, especially

Saint Martha's day, they were allowed, as a special favor and the height of happiness, to dress as nuns and carry out the offices and practices of Saint Benedict for a whole day. In the early years, the nuns used to lend them their black garments. This came to seem profane, and the prioress forbade it. Only the novices were allowed to lend theirs. It is striking that these performances, tolerated and no doubt encouraged in the convent out of a hidden spirit of proselytism and to give the children a first taste of the holy habit, were for the pupils a true delight and a real form of recreation. They were simply having fun with it. It was something new; it broke the routine. Such are the innocent reasons of childhood, though they still do not help us worldly people understand the happiness of holding a holy-water sprinkler in one's hand and standing for hours, singing with the force of four people in front of a reading desk.

The pupils followed all the convent's rules and customs, except for the acts of austerity. One young woman later returned to ordinary life, and even after many years of marriage she still had the habit of calling out "forever!" in great haste whenever someone knocked at her door. Like the nuns, the pupils could see their relatives only in the parlor. Even their own mothers were not allowed permission to embrace them. The following example shows how far this strictness was carried. One day, a young girl received a visit from her mother, who had brought along a little sister three years old. The girl burst into tears, because she longed to embrace her sister. It was impossible. She begged that the child at least be allowed to pass her little hand through the bars so that she could kiss it. This request was refused, almost with indignation.

CHAPTER IV—JOYFUL MOMENTS

Even so, these young girls filled this solemn house with charming memories.

At certain hours, childhood lit up that cloister. Recreation time arrived. A door swung open. The birds seemed to say, “Good, here come the children!” A rush of youth flooded that garden, crossed by a path like a shroud. Bright faces, smooth white foreheads, innocent eyes shining with laughter—little dawns of every kind—appeared everywhere among those shadows. After the chanting of psalms, the bells, the ringing and tolling and offices, the voices of the little girls suddenly broke out, sweeter than the hum of bees. The hive of joy had opened, and each child brought her own honey. They played, called to one another, formed groups, and ran about. Pretty little white teeth flashed and chattered in the corners. From a distance, the veils watched over the laughter; shadows kept guard over the sunbeams—but what did it matter? The children still shone and laughed. Those four mournful walls had their moment of dazzling brightness. They seemed to watch, faintly whitened by the reflection of so much joy, as this sweet swarm filled the place. It was like a shower of roses falling across a house of mourning. The girls frolicked under the eyes of the nuns; the gaze of perfect virtue does not trouble innocence. Thanks to these children, amid so many severe hours, there was one hour of pure simplicity. The little ones skipped; the older ones danced. In that cloister, play mixed with heaven. Nothing is so

delightful, or so majestic, as these fresh young souls opening into life. Homer might have come there to laugh with Perrault. And in that dark garden there was enough youth, health, noise, shouting, dizziness, pleasure, and happiness to smooth the wrinkles from all their grandmothers—those of epic as well as fairy tale, those of the throne as well as the thatched cottage, from Hecuba to la Mère-Grand.

In that house, perhaps more than anywhere else, one heard those charming things children say—words that bring a smile touched with thought. It was within those four gloomy walls that a five-year-old child cried out one day: “Mother! One of the big girls has just told me that I have only nine years and ten months left to stay here. What happiness!”

It was here, too, that this memorable exchange took place:

A Vocal Mother_. Why are you crying, my child?

The child_ (aged six). I told Alix that I knew my French history. She says I do not, but I do.

Alix–, the older girl (nine years old): No, she doesn't know it.

The Mother_. How can that be, my child?

Alix–. She told me to open the book at random and ask her any question from it, and she would answer.

"Well?"

"She didn't answer it."

"Let's see about that. What did you ask her?"

"I opened the book at random, just as she suggested, and asked the first question I found."

"And what was the question?"

"It was, 'What happened after that?'"

It was here that this memorable remark was made about a rather greedy parakeet belonging to one of the lady boarders:

"How well-mannered! It eats the top of the slice of bread and butter just like a person!"

It was on one of the flagstones in this cloister that they once found a confession written out beforehand by a seven-year-old sinner, so she would not forget it:

"Father, I accuse myself of being avaricious.

"Father, I accuse myself of being an adulteress.

"Father, I accuse myself of having raised my eyes to the gentlemen."

It was on one of the grass benches in this garden that a rosy six-year-old mouth improvised the following tale, while blue eyes of four and five listened:

"There were three little cocks who owned a country where there were a great many flowers. They picked the flowers and put them in their pockets. Then they picked the leaves and put them in their toys. 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:

"Then came a blow from a stick.

"Punchinello was the one who gave it to the cat.

"It was not good for her; it hurt her.

"Then a lady put Punchinello in prison."

It was there that a small abandoned child—a foundling the convent was raising out of charity—spoke these sweet, heartbreaking words. She heard the others talking about their mothers and whispered in her corner:

“As for me, my mother wasn’t there when I was born!”

There was a stout portress, Sister Agatha, who was always hurrying through the corridors with her ring of keys. The big girls—those over ten years old—called her Agathocles.

The refectory was a large, oblong room that got its only light through a vaulted cloister level with the garden. It was dark and damp and, as the children said, full of creatures. Every nearby place contributed its share of insects.

In the pupils’ language, each of its four corners had its own vivid name: Spider Corner, Caterpillar Corner, Wood-louse Corner, and Cricket Corner.

Cricket Corner was near the kitchen and was much prized. It was less cold there than anywhere else. From the refectory, these names spread to the boarding school, where they served, as at the old College Mazarin, to distinguish four nations. Each pupil belonged to one of these four nations according to the

corner of the refectory where she sat at meals. One day, during his pastoral visit, Monseigneur the Archbishop saw a pretty little rosy-faced girl with beautiful golden hair enter the classroom he was passing through.

He asked another pupil, a charming dark-haired girl with rosy cheeks who was standing near him:

“Who is that?”

“She is a spider, Monseigneur.”

“Indeed! And that one over there?”

“She is a cricket.”

“And that one?”

“She is a caterpillar.”

“Really? And you?”

“I am a wood-louse, Monseigneur.”

Every house of this kind has its own distinctive customs. At the beginning of this century, Écouen was one of those strict yet elegant places where young girls spent their childhood in an atmosphere of almost solemn shadow. At Écouen, when it came time to take one’s place 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 held the cords of the canopy, and the others carried incense before the Holy Sacrament. The flowers belonged, by right, to the florists. Four “virgins” walked in front. On the morning of that great day, it was not unusual to hear someone ask in the dormitory, “Who

is a virgin?”

Madame Campan used to repeat a remark made by a “little one” of seven to a “big girl” of sixteen, who led the procession while the younger child stayed at the back: “You are a virgin, but I am not.”

CHAPTER V—DISTRACTIONS

Above the refectory door, this prayer was written in large black letters. It was called the _white Paternoster_ and was believed to carry people straight to paradise:

“Little white Paternoster, which God made, which God spoke, which God placed in paradise. In the evening, when I went to bed, I found three angels seated on my bed, one at the foot, two at the head, and the good Virgin Mary in the middle, who told me to lie down without fear. 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 covers 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 Monsieur Saint John. ‘Monsieur Saint John, where do you come from?’ ‘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, with a little crown of white thorns on his head.’ Whoever says this three times at evening and three times in the morning will win paradise at the end.”

By 1827, this distinctive prayer had vanished from the wall beneath three coats of rough paint. Today it is disappearing at last from the memories of the few who were young girls then and are old women now.

A large crucifix fixed to the wall completed the furnishings of this refectory. Its only door, as we believe we have already mentioned, opened onto the garden. Two narrow tables, each

with two wooden benches beside it, ran in two long parallel lines from one end of the room to the other. The walls were white and the tables black; in convents, those two colors of mourning were the only variety. The meals were simple, and the children's own food was especially austere. One dish of meat and vegetables together, or salt fish—that was their luxury. Even this scant fare, reserved for the pupils alone, was an exception. The children ate in silence under the watch of whichever mother was on duty. If even a fly happened to buzz in defiance of the rule, she would open and shut a wooden book from time to time. This silence was accompanied by lives of the saints, read aloud from a small pulpit with a desk at the foot of the crucifix. The reader was one of the older girls, taking her turn each week. At regular intervals on the bare tables stood large varnished bowls in which the pupils washed their own silver cups and their knives and forks, and into which they sometimes tossed scraps of tough meat or spoiled fish; that was punished. These bowls were called _ronds d'eau_. A child who broke the silence "made a cross with her tongue." Where? On the floor. She had to lick the pavement. Dust, that final end of all joys, was made the punishment of those poor little rose-leaves who had been guilty of chirping.

There was in the convent a book that has never been printed except as a _unique copy_, and which it is forbidden to read. It was the rule of Saint-Benoît, a secret that no profane eye was allowed to penetrate. _Nemo regulas, seu constitutiones nostras, externis communicabit_.

One day the pupils managed to get hold of this book and began reading it eagerly, though they were often interrupted by the fear of being discovered, which made them snap it shut in haste.

For all the danger they ran, the pleasure they got from it was fairly slight. The most “interesting” thing they found was a few incomprehensible pages about the sins of young boys.

They played in a garden alley lined with a few shabby fruit trees. Despite the constant watch over them and the harsh punishments, they sometimes managed, after the wind had shaken the branches, to sneak a green apple, a bruised apricot, or a worm-eaten pear. I will now hand over the story to a letter lying before me, written twenty-five years ago by a former pupil, now Madame la Duchesse de ——, one of the most elegant women in Paris. I quote her exact words: “You hide your pear or your apple as well as you can. When you go upstairs before supper to put the veil on the bed, you tuck them under your pillow, and at night you eat them in bed; and if you cannot do that, you eat them in the closet.” That was one of their greatest luxuries.

Once, during the archbishop’s visit to the convent, one of the girls, Mademoiselle Bouchard, who was connected to the Montmorency family, bet that she would ask for a day’s leave—an outrageous thing in so austere a community. The bet was accepted, but none of the others really believed she would go through with it. When the moment came, and the archbishop was passing in front of the pupils, Mademoiselle Bouchard, to the indescribable terror of her companions, stepped out of line

and said, “Monseigneur, a day’s leave of absence.” Mademoiselle Bouchard was tall and blooming, with the prettiest little rosy face in the world. M. de Quélen smiled and said, “What, my dear child, a day’s leave! Three days, if you like. I grant you three days.” The prioress could do nothing; the archbishop had spoken. Horror for the convent, but delight for the pupil. The effect can be imagined.

Yet this severe cloister was not so completely shut off that the passions of the outside world—drama, and even romance—could not find their way in. To show this, we will simply record and briefly mention a real and unquestionable incident which, however, has no direct relation to the story we are telling and is connected to it by no thread at all. We mention it only to complete the reader’s picture of the convent.

Around this time, there was a mysterious woman in the convent who was not a nun. She was treated with great respect and was called Madame Albertine. No one knew anything about her except that she was mad and, in the outside world, was believed to be dead. People said that behind this story were the financial arrangements needed for a great marriage.

This woman was not yet thirty. She was dark-complexioned and fairly pretty, with a vague expression in her large black eyes. Could she see? No one was quite sure. She seemed to glide rather than walk. She never spoke, and it was almost impossible to tell whether she even breathed. Her nostrils were pale and drawn tight, as if after a final breath. Her hand felt like snow to the touch. She had a strange, ghostly grace. Wherever she went, people felt a chill. One day, after seeing her pass, one

sister said to another, “She is supposed to be a dead woman.” “Perhaps she is,” the other replied.

A hundred stories were told about Madame Albertine. The pupils’ endless curiosity gave rise to them. In the chapel there was a gallery called L’Œil de Bœuf. It was there, in that gallery, which had only a round window—an œil de bœuf—that Madame Albertine listened to the services. She was always alone there, because the gallery was level with the first floor, and from it one could see the preacher or the officiating priest, which was forbidden 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 later, in 1830, cardinal and Archbishop of Besançon. It was the first time M. de Rohan had preached at the Petit-Picpus convent. Madame Albertine usually remained perfectly calm and completely still during sermons and services. But that day, the moment she saw M. de Rohan, she half rose and cried out in a loud voice, into the silence of the chapel, “Ah! Auguste!” The whole community turned in astonishment. The preacher lifted his eyes, but Madame Albertine had already fallen back into her stillness. For an instant, a breath from the outside world, a flash of life, passed across that cold, lifeless face. Then it vanished, and the madwoman became a corpse again.

Those two words, however, set everyone in the convent who was allowed to speak chattering at once. How much was contained in that “Ah! Auguste!” What revelations it seemed to hold! M. de Rohan’s name really was Auguste. Clearly, Madame Albertine belonged to the very highest society, since she knew

M. de Rohan. And her own position there must have been extremely high, since she spoke so familiarly of such a great lord. There had to be some connection between them—perhaps a family one—but in any case a very close one, since she knew his “pet name.”

Two very stern duchesses, Mesdames de Choiseul and de Sérent, often visited the community. No doubt they were allowed in by virtue of the privilege _Magnates mulieres_, and they caused great alarm in the boarding-school. Whenever these two old ladies passed by, all the poor young girls trembled and lowered their eyes.

M. de Rohan, without knowing it, was also a figure of great interest to the schoolgirls. At that time he had just been appointed vicar-general to the Archbishop of Paris while awaiting the episcopate. He was in the habit of coming fairly often to conduct services in the chapel of the nuns of Petit-Picpus. None of the young recluses could see him because of the serge curtain, but he had a gentle, rather high-pitched voice, which they had learned to recognize and distinguish. He had once been a mousquetaire, and people said he was very vain. They said his handsome brown hair was carefully arranged in a roll around his head, that he wore a broad sash of magnificent moire, and that his black cassock was cut in the most elegant style in the world. In all those sixteen-year-old imaginations, he occupied an important place.

No sound from outside ever reached the convent. But there was one year when the sound of a flute made its way in. It was an event, and the girls who were at school there then still

remember it.

Someone in the neighborhood played a flute. It always played the same tune, one that is rarely heard now: “My Zétulbé, come reign o’er my soul.” People heard it two or three times a day. The young girls spent hours listening to it. Their talkative mothers were distressed, minds were in turmoil, and punishments rained down. This went on for several months. All the girls were more or less in love with the unknown musician. Each imagined that she was Zétulbé. The flute came from the direction of the Rue Droit-Mur, and they would have given anything, risked everything, tried anything, just to see—even for a second—the “young man” who played it so beautifully and who, no doubt, was playing on all their hearts at once. Some slipped out through a back door and climbed to the third floor on the Rue Droit-Mur side, hoping to catch a glimpse through the cracks. It was impossible. One girl even pushed her arm through the grating and waved her white handkerchief. Two others were bolder still. They managed to climb onto a roof, risked their lives there, and at last succeeded in seeing “the young man.” He was an old émigré gentleman, blind and penniless, playing his flute in his attic to pass the time.

CHAPTER VI—THE LITTLE CONVENT

Within the grounds of the Petit-Picpus, there were three completely separate buildings: the Great Convent, where the nuns lived; the boarding school, where the pupils were housed; and finally what was called the Little Convent. It was a building with a garden, and it housed all sorts of elderly nuns from different orders, the remnants of cloisters destroyed during the Revolution. It was a gathering of black, gray, and white habits from every community and every possible variety—what one might call, if such a phrase may be allowed, a kind of harlequin convent.

When the Empire was established, all these poor, elderly women—scattered and driven into exile—were given permission to come and find shelter under the protection of the Bernardine-Benedictines. The government paid them a small pension, and the ladies of Petit-Picpus welcomed them warmly. It was a strange mix of people. Each woman kept to her own rule. Sometimes the boarding-school pupils were allowed, as a special treat, to visit them. As a result, those young girls carried away many memories, including those of Mother Sainte-Bazile, Mother Sainte-Scolastique, and Mother Jacob.

One of these refugees felt almost at home there. She was a nun of Sainte-Aure, the only survivor of her order. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the old convent of the ladies of Sainte-Aure had occupied this very house at Petit-Picpus, which later belonged to the Benedictines of Martin Verga. This

holy woman was too poor to wear the splendid habit of her order—a white robe with a scarlet scapulary—so she had lovingly dressed a little manikin in it instead. She showed it with quiet pride and left it to the house when she died. In 1824, only one nun of this order was still alive; today, only a doll remains.

Along with these worthy mothers, a few elderly society women had also received the prioress's permission, like Madame Albertine, to retire to the Little Convent. Among them were Madame Beaufort d'Hautpoul and the Marquise Dufresne. Another woman was known in the convent only for the alarming noise she made when she blew her nose. The pupils called her Madame Vacarmini (hubbub).

Around 1820 or 1821, Madame de Genlis, who was then editing a small periodical called _l'Intrépide_, asked to be admitted to the convent of Petit-Picpus as a resident lady. The Duc d'Orléans supported her request. The whole hive was thrown into an uproar; the vocal mothers were all fluttering with agitation. Madame de Genlis had written novels. But she declared that no one hated them more than she did, and besides, she had entered her severe, devout phase. With the help of God—and of the Prince—she got in. She left after six or eight months, giving as her reason that there was no shade in the garden. The nuns were delighted. Though she was very old, she still played the harp, and played it very well.

When she left, she left her mark on her cell. Madame de Genlis was both superstitious and learned in Latin. Those two traits give a fairly accurate picture of her. A few years ago, one could still see, pasted inside a small cupboard in her cell where she

kept her silverware and jewels locked away, these five lines of Latin. She had written them herself in red ink on yellow paper, and believed they had the power to scare off thieves:

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, written in sixth-century Latin, raise the question of whether the two thieves of Calvary were really named, as people commonly believe, Dismas and Gestas, or instead Dismas and Gesmas. This spelling may have complicated the claims made in the last century by the Vicomte de Gestas, who said he was descended from the bad thief. Still, the protective power attributed to these lines is an accepted article of faith in the order of the Hospitallers.

The church of the house was built in a way that separated the Great Convent from the Boarding-school like a real fortification. It was naturally shared by the Boarding-school, the Great Convent, and the Little Convent. The public was even allowed in through a kind of lazaretto entrance from the street. But everything was arranged so that no one living in the cloister could see a single face from the outside world. Imagine a church whose choir is enclosed as if by a gigantic hand and folded so that, instead of extending behind the altar as it does in ordinary churches, it forms a sort of hall, or dark cellar, to the right of the officiating priest. Imagine that hall closed off by the seven-foot curtain already mentioned. In the shadow behind that curtain, place the nuns of the choir on wooden stalls to the

left, the schoolgirls to the right, and the lay-sisters and novices at the back, and you will have some idea of how the nuns of the Petit-Picpus attended divine service. That cavern, known as the choir, connected to the cloister by a lobby. The church was lit from the garden. When the nuns attended services during which their rule required silence, the public knew they were there only from the loud sound of the folding seats in the stalls rising and falling.

CHAPTER VII—SOME FIGURES IN THIS DARKNESS

From 1819 to 1825, the prioress of Petit-Picpus was Mademoiselle de Blemeur, whose religious name was Mother Innocente. She came from the family of Marguerite de Blemeur, the author of _Lives of the Saints of the Order of Saint-Benoît_. She had been re-elected. She was about sixty years old, short and stout, and, as the letter we have already quoted says, "sang like a cracked pot." She was, moreover, an excellent woman, the only cheerful person in the whole convent, and for that very reason she was adored. She was learned, scholarly, wise, and capable, with a remarkable knowledge of history. She was filled with Latin, packed with Greek, full of Hebrew, and in many ways more like a Benedictine monk than a Benedictine nun.

The sub-prioress was an elderly Spanish nun, Mother Cineres, who was almost blind.

Among the choir mothers, the most highly regarded were Mother Sainte-Honorine; the treasurer, Mother Sainte-Gertrude, who was the chief mistress of the novices; Mother Saint-Ange, the assistant mistress; Mother Annonciation, the sacristan; and Mother Saint-Augustin, the nurse, the only malicious woman in the convent. Then there were 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 withstand austerities); Mother Compassion (Mademoiselle de la Miltière, admitted at the age of sixty in spite 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, the sister of the sculptor Ceracchi, who went mad, and Mother Sainte-Chantal (Mademoiselle de Suzon), who also went mad.

There was also, among the prettiest of them, a charming young woman of twenty-three from the Isle de Bourbon, a descendant of the Chevalier Roze. Her name had been Mademoiselle Roze, and she was called Mother Assumption.

Mother Sainte-Mechtilde, who was in charge of singing and the choir, liked to use the pupils from this section. She would usually choose a full scale of them—that is, seven girls, from ten to sixteen years old, with different voices and heights. She had them sing standing in a row, side by side, arranged by age from the smallest to the tallest. To the eye, they looked something like a set of reed pipes made of young girls, a kind of living Pan-pipe of angels.

The lay sisters the pupils loved most were Sister Euphrasie, Sister Sainte-Marguérite, Sister Sainte-Marthe, who had grown senile, and Sister Sainte-Michel, whose long nose made them laugh.

All these women were kind to the children. The nuns were strict only with themselves. Fires were lit nowhere except in the

school, and the food was excellent compared with what was eaten in the convent. Besides that, they showered their pupils with a thousand small attentions. There was only one thing: when a child passed near a nun and spoke to her, the nun never answered.

This rule of silence had produced a strange result: throughout the convent, speech had been taken away from human beings and given to inanimate things. At one moment the church bell spoke; at another, the gardener's bell. A very resonant bell, placed beside the portress and heard throughout the house, used its different peals—forming a kind of acoustic telegraph—to signal every action of daily material life that had to be carried out, and, when necessary, to summon this or that inhabitant to the parlor. Every person and every thing had its own peal. The prioress had one-one, the sub-prioress one-two. Six-five announced lessons, so the pupils never said "go to lessons," but "go to six-five." Four-four was Madame de Genlis's signal. It was heard very often. "C'est le diable à quatre"—it's the very deuce, said the uncharitable. Ten-nine strokes announced a great event: the opening of the door of seclusion, a dreadful sheet of iron bristling with bolts that turned on its hinges only in the presence of the archbishop.

As we have already said, no man entered the convent except the archbishop and the gardener. The schoolgirls saw two others. One was the chaplain, the Abbé Banés, an old, ugly man whom they were allowed to look at in the choir through a grating. The other was the drawing master, M. Ansiaux, whom the letter we have read a few lines from calls $_{M}$. Anciot_ and

describes as a frightful old hunchback_.

Clearly, all these men had been chosen with great care.

That was this curious house.

CHAPTER VIII—POST CORDA LAPIDES

Now that we have sketched its moral character, it may be useful to say a few words about its physical layout. The reader already has some sense of it.

The convent of Petit-Picpus-Sainte-Antoine occupied almost the entire large trapezoid formed where Rue Polonceau, Rue Droit-Mur, Rue Petit-Picpus, and the disused lane called Rue Aumarais on old maps met. These four streets enclosed the trapezoid like a moat. The convent consisted of several buildings and a garden. Seen as a whole, the main building was a patchwork of mixed structures that, from above, traced with striking accuracy the shape of a gibbet laid flat on the ground. The main beam of this gibbet ran along the entire stretch of Rue Droit-Mur between Rue Petit-Picpus and Rue Polonceau. The shorter beam was a tall, gray, austere façade with barred windows facing Rue Petit-Picpus, ending at carriage entrance No. 62. Near the middle of this façade was a low arched door, pale with dust and ashes, where spiders spun their webs. It was opened only for an hour or two on Sundays, and on rare occasions when the coffin of a nun was carried out of the convent. This was the church's public entrance. The angle of the gibbet was a square room used as the servants' hall, which the nuns called the buttery. The main beam contained the cells of the mothers, sisters, and novices. The shorter beam held the kitchens and the refectory, with the cloisters and the church behind them. Between door No. 62 and the corner of the closed

Aumarais Lane stood the school, which could not be seen from outside. The rest of the trapezoid was taken up by the garden. It lay much lower than Rue Polonceau, which made the walls seem far higher from inside than from outside. The garden rose in a slight curve, and at its center, on top of a small mound, stood a handsome pointed fir tree. From it spread four broad paths, like lines radiating from the pointed boss of a shield, and between these, arranged in pairs, were eight smaller paths. If the enclosure had been circular, the layout would have looked like a cross laid over a wheel. Because all the paths ended at the garden's very irregular walls, they were of unequal length. Currant bushes lined them. At the bottom, a walk bordered by tall poplars ran from the ruins of the old convent, at the corner of Rue Droit-Mur, to the house of the Little Convent, at the corner of Aumarais Lane. In front of the Little Convent was what they called the little garden. Add to all this a courtyard, every sort of odd angle made by the inner buildings, walls like those of a prison, and, as the only view and only neighboring presence, the long black line of roofs along the far side of Rue Polonceau, and the reader can form a complete picture of the house of the Bernardines of Petit-Picpus as it was forty years ago. This holy house had been built on the exact site of a famous tennis-ground from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, known as the "tennis-ground of the eleven thousand devils."

All these streets, moreover, were older than Paris itself. The names Droit-Mur and Aumarais are very old; the streets that carry them are older still. Aumarais Lane was once called Maugout Lane, and Rue Droit-Mur was once Rue des Églantiers, because God made flowers bloom before man cut stone.

CHAPTER IX—A CENTURY UNDER A GUIMPE

Since we are describing what the convent of the Petit-Picpus used to be, and since we have dared to open a window onto that discreet retreat, the reader may allow us one more brief digression. It has nothing to do with this book, strictly speaking, but it is characteristic and useful, because it shows that the cloister, too, has its own original figures.

In the Little Convent there was a woman over a hundred years old who had come from the Abbey of Fontevrault. She had even lived in society before the Revolution. She often spoke of M. de Miromesnil, Keeper of the Seals under Louis XVI, and of a Presidentess Duplat, with whom she had been very close. She took pleasure in, and was rather proud of, dropping these names at every opportunity. She told marvelous stories about the Abbey of Fontevrault. She said it was like a city, with streets inside the monastery.

She spoke with a Picard accent that amused the pupils. Every year she solemnly renewed her vows, and when she took 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 so I give it to you, father.” Then the schoolgirls would start to laugh—not quietly to themselves, but under their veils—in charming little muffled bursts that made the vocal mothers frown.

On another occasion, the hundred-year-old woman was telling stories. She said that in her youth, the Bernardine monks were every bit as good as the musketeers. A whole century was speaking through her—but it was the eighteenth century. She described the custom of the four wines, which existed in Champagne and Burgundy before the Revolution. When an important person—a marshal of France, a prince, a duke, or a peer—passed through a town in Burgundy or Champagne, the city officials came out to address him and presented him with four silver cups filled with four different kinds of wine. The first cup bore the inscription monkey wine; the second, lion wine; the third, sheep wine; and the fourth, hog wine. These four labels represented the four stages through which a drunkard descends: first, drunkenness that livens him up; second, the kind that makes him aggressive; third, the kind that leaves him dull; and fourth, the kind that turns him brutal.

She kept a mysterious object locked away in a cupboard, and it meant a great deal to her. The rule of Fontevrault did not forbid this. She would show it to no one. When she wanted to look at it, she shut herself in, as her rule allowed, and hid away. If she heard footsteps in the corridor, she hurried to close the cupboard again as quickly as her old hands could manage. The moment anyone mentioned it, she fell silent—she who normally loved to talk. Her silence defeated the curious, and her stubbornness wore out even the most persistent. So the object became a favorite subject of speculation among all the idle or bored people in the convent. What could this treasure of the hundred-year-old woman be, so precious and so secret? A holy book, perhaps? A one-of-a-kind rosary? A genuine relic? They

exhausted themselves with guesses. When the poor old woman died, they hurried to her cupboard—more quickly than was proper, perhaps—and opened it. They found the object wrapped in three layers of linen cloth, like a sacred paten. It was a Faenza platter showing little Cupids darting away while apothecary boys chased them with enormous syringes. The scene is full of grimaces and comic poses. One charming little Cupid has already been neatly skewered. He struggles, flutters his tiny wings, and still tries to escape, while the pursuer laughs with a devilish expression. The moral: Love defeated by colic. This very curious platter, which may possibly have given Molière an idea, still existed in September 1845; it was being offered for sale by a bric-a-brac dealer on the Boulevard Beaumarchais.

This good old woman would not receive any outside visitors because, as she said, "the parlor is too gloomy."

CHAPTER X—ORIGIN OF THE PERPETUAL ADORATION

Still, this almost tomb-like parlor, which we have tried to describe, was a local peculiarity and was not reproduced with the same severity in other convents. At the convent on the Rue du Temple in particular—which in fact belonged to a different order—the black shutters were replaced by brown curtains, and the parlor itself was a sitting room with a polished wooden floor. Its windows were hung with white muslin curtains, and its walls allowed all kinds of framed decorations: a portrait of a Benedictine nun with her face uncovered, painted bouquets, and even the head of a Turk.

In the garden of the Temple convent stood that famous chestnut tree, celebrated as the finest and largest in France. Among the good people of the eighteenth century, it was known as _the father of all the chestnut trees of the realm_.

As we have said, the Temple convent was occupied by Benedictines of the Perpetual Adoration, a branch quite distinct from the Benedictines under Cîteaux. The order of Perpetual Adoration was not very old; it dated back only about two hundred years. In 1649, the holy sacrament was profaned twice within a few days, in two Paris churches, Saint-Sulpice and Saint-Jean en Grève. This rare and terrible sacrilege threw the whole city into turmoil. The Prior and Vicar-General of Saint-Germain des Prés ordered a solemn procession of all his clergy, at which the Pope’s Nuncio officiated. But this act of expiation did not satisfy two devout women, Madame Courtin,

Marquise de Boucs, and the Comtesse de Châteauvieux. This offense against “the most holy sacrament of the altar,” though temporary, would not leave their minds. It seemed to them that it could be atoned for only by a “Perpetual Adoration” in a women’s monastery. Both women, one in 1652 and the other in 1653, gave substantial sums to Mother Catherine de Bar, called of the Holy Sacrament, a Benedictine nun, to found for this pious purpose a monastery of the order of Saint-Benoît. The first permission for this foundation was granted 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 granted letters patent, and in 1654 the Chamber of Accounts and the Parliament confirmed everything else, including the abbatial charter and the royal letters.

Such was the origin of the legal establishment of the Benedictines of the Perpetual Adoration of the Holy Sacrament in Paris. Their first convent was “a new building” in the Rue Cassette, built from the contributions of Mesdames de Boucs and de Châteauvieux.

As will become clear, this order should not be confused with the Benedictine nuns of Cîteaux. It traced its authority back to the Abbé of Saint-Germain des Prés, just as the ladies of the Sacred Heart answer to the general of the Jesuits, and the sisters of charity to the general of the Lazarists.

It was also completely different from the Bernardines of the Petit-Picpus, whose interior we have just described. In 1657, Pope Alexander VII authorized the Bernardines of the Rue Petit-Picpus, by a special brief, to practice Perpetual Adoration like the Benedictine nuns of the Holy Sacrament. Even so, the two orders remained separate.

CHAPTER XI—END OF THE PETIT-PICPUS

At the beginning of the Restoration, the convent of the Petit-Picpus was already declining. This was part of the general dying away of the order, which, like all religious orders, had been fading since the eighteenth century. Contemplation, like prayer, is one of humanity's needs; but like everything touched by the Revolution, it was destined to change, and instead of opposing social progress, it would come to support it.

The house of the Petit-Picpus was rapidly emptying out. By 1840, the Little Convent was gone, and the school was gone as well. There were no old women left, and no young girls either; the former were dead, and the latter had departed. Volaverunt—.

The rule of Perpetual Adoration is so severe that it frightens people away; those who might feel called to it shrink back, and the order gains no new members. In 1845, it still managed to find a few lay sisters here and there. But it had no professed nuns at all. Forty years earlier, the community had nearly a hundred nuns; fifteen years earlier, there were no more than twenty-eight. How many were left now? In 1847, the prioress was young, which showed how limited the choice had become. She was not yet forty. As their numbers fell, the strain on each woman grew heavier, and each one's service became more exhausting. The time was clearly approaching when only a dozen stooped, aching shoulders would be left to carry the heavy rule of Saint Benedict. The burden is relentless, and it weighs just as heavily on a few as on many. It presses down; it

crushes. And so they die. At the time when the author of this book was still living in Paris, two of them died. One was twenty-five, the other twenty-three. The younger could say, like Julia Alpinula: _“Hic jaceo. Vixi annos viginti et tres.”_ It was because of this decline that the convent gave up educating girls.

We could not bring ourselves to pass this extraordinary house without going in, or without introducing the minds that travel with us and listen to our story to, perhaps for some of them, the melancholy history of Jean Valjean. We entered this community, full of ancient practices that seem strangely new today. It is the enclosed garden, _hortus conclusus_. We have described this unusual place in detail, but with respect, as far as detail and respect can go together. We do not understand everything, but we do not mock anything. We stand equally apart from the hosanna of Joseph de Maistre, who ended by blessing the executioner, and from the sneer of Voltaire, who goes so far as to mock the cross.

That, we may note in passing, was an illogical act on Voltaire’s part; for Voltaire would have defended Jesus just as he defended Calas. And even for those who deny divine incarnations, what does the crucifix represent? The murdered sage.

In this nineteenth century, the religious idea is passing through a crisis. People are unlearning certain things, and that is good, provided that while they unlearn them, they also learn this: there is no empty space in the human heart. Some things are being torn down, and that too is good, but only if rebuilding follows.

Meanwhile, let us examine things that no longer exist. We need to understand them, if only so we can avoid them. The imitations of the past take on false names and eagerly call themselves the future. This ghost, this past, is skilled at forging its own papers. Let us recognize the trap. Let us stay alert. The past has a face—superstition—and a mask—hypocrisy. Let us expose the face and tear away the mask.

As for convents, they raise a complicated problem: civilization condemns them, while liberty protects them.

CHAPTER I—THE CONVENT AS AN ABSTRACT IDEA

This book is a drama whose central figure is the Infinite.

Man comes second.

That being so, and since a convent has appeared in our path, we have had a duty to enter it. Why? Because the convent, found in the East as well as the West, in ancient times as well as modern ones, in paganism, Buddhism, Mahometanism, and Christianity alike, is one of the instruments man has used to look toward the Infinite.

This is not the place to dwell too long on certain ideas. Still, while fully keeping our reservations, our limits, and even our indignation, we must say that whenever we encounter man in the presence of the Infinite, whether that Infinite is rightly understood or not, we are overcome with respect. In the synagogue, the mosque, the pagoda, and the wigwam, there is a repellent side that we condemn, and a sublime side that we revere. What a subject for the mind to contemplate, and what endless material for thought, is the reflection of God upon the human wall!

CHAPTER II—THE CONVENT AS AN HISTORICAL FACT

From the standpoint of history, reason, and truth, monasticism stands condemned. When monasteries become widespread in a nation, they obstruct its natural life. They are heavy institutions, centers of idleness where there ought to be centers of work. Monastic communities relate to the larger social body as mistletoe does to an oak, or a wart to the human body. Their prosperity and abundance mean the country's decline. The monastic system was beneficial at the dawn of civilization, when it helped tame brutality through spiritual discipline. But it becomes harmful once peoples reach maturity. And when it grows lax and falls into disorder, it becomes harmful for the very reasons that once made it useful in its purest period: it still sets an example.

The age of seclusion has passed. Cloisters, though useful in the early education of modern civilization, have hindered its growth and now damage its development. As institutions shaping human life, monasteries were good in the tenth century, questionable in the fifteenth, and detestable in the nineteenth. The disease of monasticism has wasted two remarkable nations, Italy and Spain, almost to the bone. For centuries, one was the light of Europe and the other its splendor. Today, these two illustrious peoples are only just beginning to recover, thanks solely to the healthy and vigorous remedy of 1789.

The convent—especially the old-style female convent, as it still appeared at the opening of this century in Italy, Austria, and Spain—is one of the darkest formations of the Middle Ages. That cloister is where horrors meet. The Catholic cloister, properly speaking, is entirely filled with the dark radiance of death.

The Spanish convent is the bleakest of them all. In the dimness, under vaults heavy with darkness and domes blurred by shadow, enormous altars rise like towers of Babel, as tall as cathedrals. Huge white crucifixes hang on chains in the dark. Great ivory Christs lie stretched naked against ebony, not merely bleeding but covered in blood—grotesque and magnificent at once. Their elbows show bone, their knees show through the skin, and their wounds expose flesh. They wear crowns of silver thorns, are fastened with golden nails, and have ruby drops of blood on their brows and diamond tears in their eyes. The diamonds and rubies look wet, and they draw tears from the veiled figures below—women whose sides are bruised by the hair shirt and iron-tipped whips, whose breasts are crushed by wicker hurdles, whose knees are worn raw by prayer; women who imagine themselves brides, specters who imagine themselves seraphim. Do these women think? No. Do they have any will? No. Do they love? No. Do they live? No. Their nerves have become bone; their bones have become stone. Their veil is woven out of night. Their breathing beneath it has the indescribably tragic sound of death itself. The abbess, a specter, both consecrates them and fills them with fear. The immaculate one is there, and she is fierce. Such are the ancient monasteries of Spain: false in their terrible devotion, caverns of

virgins, savage places.

Catholic Spain is more Roman than Rome herself. More than any other, the Spanish convent was the Catholic convent. It carried a trace of the Orient. The archbishop, the kislar-aga of heaven, locked up and guarded this seraglio of souls set apart for God. The nun was the odalisque; the priest was the eunuch. The fervent were chosen in dreams and given to Christ. At night, the beautiful young man, naked on the cross, came down and became the ecstasy of the cloistered woman. High walls protected this mystical sultana, whose sultan was the crucified one, from every living distraction. A glance toward the outer world was an act of infidelity. The _in pace_ took the place of the leather sack. What was thrown into the sea in the East was buried in the earth in the West. In both worlds, women twisted their hands in anguish: in the first, the waves; in the second, the grave; there the drowned, here the buried. A monstrous parallel.

Today, the defenders of the past can no longer deny these things, so they have taken to dismissing them with a smile. A strange, easy habit has come into fashion: brushing aside what history reveals, discounting what philosophy has to say, and skipping over every troubling fact and every dark question. “Just material for rhetoric,” say the clever. “Rhetoric,” echo the foolish. Jean-Jacques, a mere rhetorician; Diderot, a mere rhetorician; Voltaire speaking about Calas, Labarre, and Sirven—just rhetoric again. Someone has even recently discovered that Tacitus was a rhetorician, that Nero was the real victim, and that we ought to feel sincere pity for “that poor Holofernes.”

Facts, however, are hard to brush aside, and they do not give way easily. The author of this book has seen with his own eyes, eight leagues from Brussels—where relics of the Middle Ages are there for anyone to see—at the Abbey of Villers, the opening of the oubliettes in the middle of the field that was once the cloister courtyard, and, on the banks of the Thil, four stone dungeons, half underground and half under water. They were _in pace_. Each of these dungeons still shows the remains of an iron door, a vaulted ceiling, and a grated opening that is, on the outside, two feet above the level of the river and, on the inside, six feet above the ground. Four feet of river water run along the outer wall. The floor is always soaked. The prisoner in the _in pace_ had that wet ground for a bed. In one of these dungeons, there is part of an iron collar riveted to the wall. In another, you can see a square box made of four granite slabs, too short for a person to lie down in and too low for him to stand upright. A human being was shut inside it, with a stone lid placed on top. It exists. It can be seen. It can be touched. These _in pace_, these dungeons, these iron hinges, these collars, that high peephole level with the river's flow, that stone box sealed with a granite lid like a tomb—with this difference, that the dead man here was a living person—that ground that is nothing but mud, that hole in the vault, those seeping walls—what powerful "rhetoricians" they are!

CHAPTER III—UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS THE PAST CAN BE RESPECTED

Monasticism, as it existed in Spain and as it still exists in Tibet, is a kind of wasting disease for civilization. It cuts life short. It simply reduces the population. Claustration is mutilation. It has been one of Europe's scourges. Add to this the violence so often done to conscience, the forced callings, feudalism propped up by the cloister, the right of the first-born driving the family's surplus children into monastic life, the cruelties we have just mentioned, the _in pace_, the silenced mouths, the sealed-off minds, so many unhappy souls shut into the prison of eternal vows, the taking of the habit, the burial of living spirits. Add personal torments to national humiliations, and anyone would shudder before the robe and the veil—those two human-made shrouds. And yet, in certain places and in certain respects, despite philosophy and despite progress, the spirit of the cloister still survives in the nineteenth century, and a strange revival of asceticism is, at this very moment, astonishing the civilized world. The persistence of outdated institutions is like the stale perfume that insists on clinging to our hair, the rotten fish that still demands to be eaten, the child's clothes that insist on dressing the grown man, the affection of corpses returning to embrace the living.

"Ungrateful people!" says the garment. "I protected you in bad weather. Why do you want nothing more to do with me?" "I have just come from the depths of the sea," says the fish. "I was once

a rose," says the perfume. "I loved you," says the corpse. "I civilized you," says the convent.

There is only one answer to all this: "That was in former times."

To dream of endlessly prolonging things that are already dead, and of ruling people by preserving them like mummies; to restore worn-out dogmas, regild shrines, patch up cloisters, bless reliquaries all over again, refit superstitions, restock fanaticism, put new handles on holy-water brushes and on militarism, rebuild monasticism and militarism, and believe society can be saved by multiplying parasites and forcing the past onto the present—this is bizarre. And yet there are theorists who believe exactly that. These theorists, intelligent in other respects, use a very simple method: they coat the past with a varnish they call social order, divine right, morality, family, respect for elders, ancient authority, sacred tradition, legitimacy, and religion; then they go around shouting, "Look! Here it is, honest people." The ancients knew this kind of logic well. It is the method of soothsayers. They rubbed a black heifer with chalk and said, "She is white, _Bos cretatus_."

As for us, we respect the past in certain places, and we spare it—above all when it agrees to remain dead. If it insists on living, we attack it and try to kill it.

Superstitions, bigotry, affected piety, prejudices—these forms, all forms as they exist, cling fiercely to life. Their smoke has teeth and claws. They must be grappled with at close quarters, body to body, and fought without truce; for one of humanity's fates is to be condemned to an endless struggle with phantoms.

It is hard to seize darkness by the throat and throw it to the ground.

A convent in France, in the full daylight of the nineteenth century, is like a college of owls staring at the light. A cloister, caught in the very act of asceticism, in the heart of the city of ’89, 1830, and 1848—with Rome springing up in Paris—is an anachronism. In ordinary times, to dissolve an anachronism and make it disappear, it is enough to make it spell out the date. But these are not ordinary times.

Let us fight.

Let us fight, but let us draw a distinction. Truth has this special quality: it never needs to go too far. Why would it need exaggeration? Some things must be destroyed; others simply need to be clarified and examined. Calm, serious inquiry has great power. Let us not use fire where light alone is needed.

So, in the nineteenth century, we oppose ascetic seclusion as a general principle, among all peoples—in Asia as in Europe, in India as in Turkey. To say cloister is to say swamp. Its decay is plain to see; its stagnation is unhealthy; its fermentation spreads fever and leaves people pale and weakened. When it multiplies, it becomes a plague of Egypt. We cannot think without horror of those lands where fakirs, bonzes, santons, Greek monks, marabouts, talapoins, and dervishes multiply like swarms of vermin.

That said, the religious question still remains. It has certain mysterious, almost alarming aspects; let us be allowed to look at it steadily.

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

People join together and live in communities. By what right? By the right of association.

They shut themselves up in their homes. By what right? By the right every person has to open or close his door.

They do not go out. By what right? By the right to come and go, which also includes the right to stay at home.

What do they do there, at home?

They speak softly, lower their eyes, and work. They give up the world—its cities, sensual pleasures, amusements, vanities, pride, and personal interests. They wear rough wool or coarse linen. Not one of them owns anything at all. When a rich man enters, he makes himself poor. Whatever he has, he gives to everyone. A man who was once called noble, a gentleman, or a lord becomes the equal of one who was a peasant. Every cell is the same. All receive the same tonsure, wear the same robe, eat the same black bread, sleep on the same straw, and die on the same ashes. The same sackcloth is on their backs, the same rope around their waists. If the rule is to go barefoot, then all go barefoot. There may be a prince among them, but that prince is no more than the same shadow as the others. There are no titles. Even family names disappear. They keep only their first names. All are bent beneath the equality of their baptismal

names. They have dissolved the family of the flesh and created, within their community, a spiritual family. They have no relatives except all mankind. They help the poor and care for the sick. They choose the people they obey. They call one another "my brother."

You stop me and cry, “But that is the ideal convent!”

It is enough that such a convent could exist for me to take notice of it.

That is why, in the previous book, I spoke of a convent with respect. Setting aside the Middle Ages, setting aside Asia, and leaving the historical and political question for later, if we look at it only from a philosophical point of view—outside the demands of active politics—and on the condition that the monastery is entirely voluntary and includes only willing members, I will always regard a cloistered community with a certain serious attention and, in some ways, with respect.

Wherever there is a community, there is a commune; wherever there is a commune, there is right. The monastery comes from the formula: Equality, Fraternity. Oh, how great liberty is! What a magnificent transformation it brings about! Liberty alone is enough to turn the monastery into a republic.

Let us go on.

But these men, or these women, behind these four walls—yes, they wear coarse wool, they are equals, they call one another brothers; that is all well and good. But do they do anything else?

Yes.

What is this?

They stare into the darkness, kneel down, and fold their hands.

What does it mean?

CHAPTER V—PRAYER

They are praying.

To whom?

To God.

What does it mean to pray to God?

Is there an infinite reality beyond us? Is that infinite truly there—innate and enduring—necessarily substantial because it is infinite, and because if it lacked substance it would have limits? Is it necessarily intelligent because it is infinite, and because if it lacked intelligence, it would stop there? Does this infinite give us the idea of essence, while we can claim for ourselves only the idea of existence? In other words, is it not the absolute, while we are only the relative?

And while there is an infinite outside us, is there not also an infinite within us? Are these two infinities—what a troubling plural!—laid one over the other? Is not this second infinite, so to speak, beneath the first? Is it not its mirror, its reflection, its echo—an abyss centered within another abyss? Is this second infinity intelligent as well? Does it think? Does it love? Does it will? If these two infinities are intelligent, then each has a principle of will, and there is an I in the higher infinity just as there is an I in the lower one. The I below is the soul; the I above is God.

To bring the infinity below into contact, through thought, with the infinity above—that is what we call prayer.

Let us take nothing away from the human mind; to suppress is wrong. We must reform and transform instead. Certain human faculties are turned toward 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 emanations. Let us respect them. Where do these majestic outpourings of the soul go? Into the shadow—that is to say, into the light.

The greatness of democracy lies in rejecting nothing and denying nothing that belongs to humanity. Alongside the rights of man, and at the very least beside them, there is also the right of the soul.

The law is this: crush fanaticism and honor the infinite. It is not enough to bow before the tree of creation and gaze at its star-filled branches. We also have a duty to work on the human soul: to defend mystery against miracle, to worship what cannot be understood and reject what is absurd, to accept as an unexplained fact only what is necessary, to purify belief, and to strip superstition away from religion—to clear God of caterpillars.

CHAPTER VI—THE UNQUESTIONABLE GOODNESS OF PRAYER

As for the forms prayer may take, all of them are good, so long as they are sincere. Turn your book upside down, if you like, and dwell in the infinite.

As we know, there is a philosophy that denies the infinite. There is also a philosophy—classified, in medical terms, as a disease—that denies the sun. That philosophy is called blindness.

To turn a missing sense into a source of truth is the height of a blind man's self-satisfaction.

What is curious is the proud, superior, and pitying tone this groping philosophy adopts toward the philosophy that sees God. One imagines hearing a mole cry, "I pity those people with their sun!"

As we know, there are powerful and celebrated atheists. Deep down, their very strength leads them back toward the truth, and they are not entirely certain that they are atheists. For them, it is only a matter of definition. In any case, if they do not believe in God, then, being great minds, they nevertheless prove God.

We salute them as philosophers, even while we firmly condemn their philosophy.

Let us continue.

Another striking thing is how easily they satisfy themselves with words. A northern school of metaphysics, somewhat soaked in fog, has imagined that it revolutionized human understanding by replacing the word Force with the word Will.

To say, “the plant wills,” instead of, “the plant grows,” would indeed be fruitful—if we then added, “the universe wills.” Why? Because it would lead to this: the plant wills, therefore it has an I; the universe wills, therefore it has a God.

As for us, unlike this school of thought, we reject nothing in advance. To us, accepting a will in the plant, as this school does, is harder than accepting a will in the universe, which it denies.

To deny the will of the infinite—that is, of God—is impossible unless one also denies the infinite itself. We have shown this.

Denying the infinite leads directly to nihilism. Everything becomes nothing more than “a mental conception.”

Once you arrive at nihilism, discussion becomes impossible. Nihilist logic doubts that the person it is speaking to exists, and is not even fully sure that it exists either.

From its own point of view, it may itself be nothing more than “a mental conception.”

What it fails to see, however, is that the moment it uses the word mind, it admits all at once everything it has denied.

In short, a philosophy that ends everything with the single syllable No leaves thought with nowhere to go.

To No, there is only one answer: Yes.

Nihilism leads nowhere.

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.

It is not enough merely to see and to explain. Philosophy should be a living force. Its purpose and its effect should be to improve the human condition. Socrates should enter Adam and bring forth Marcus Aurelius; in other words, the wise man should emerge from the happy man. Eden should become a Lyceum. Science should be a source of comfort and strength. To enjoy—what a bleak goal, what a petty ambition! Animals enjoy. The true task of philosophy is to offer thought to human thirst, to give people the idea of God like an elixir, to unite conscience and knowledge within them, and through that mysterious meeting to make them just. Morality flowers out of truth. Contemplation leads to action. The absolute must be something that can be lived. The ideal must be something the human mind can breathe, drink, and eat. The ideal has the right to say: Take′ this is my body, this is my blood_. Wisdom is holy communion. Only on that condition does it stop being a barren love of knowledge and become the supreme and sovereign way for humanity to gather together; only then is philosophy itself raised to the level of religion.

Philosophy should not be a balcony built over mystery, where one can comfortably look down on it with no result beyond satisfying curiosity.

For our part, we will leave the full development of our thought for another time. For now, we will simply say that we cannot understand man as a starting point, or progress as an end, without the two forces that drive them both: faith and love.

Progress is the goal; the ideal is the model.

What is this ideal? It is God.

Ideal, absolute, perfection, infinity: these are different words for the same thing.

CHAPTER VII—PRECAUTIONS TO BE OBSERVED IN BLAME

History and philosophy have eternal duties, and at the same time very simple ones: to oppose Caiphas the High Priest, Draco the Lawgiver, Trimalcion the Legislator, Tiberius the Emperor. That is plain, direct, and clear; it leaves no room for confusion.

But the right to live apart, even with its inconveniences and abuses, must still be stated and taken into account. Cenobitism is a human problem.

When people speak of convents—places of error, yet also innocence; of deviation, yet also good intentions; of ignorance, yet also devotion; of suffering, yet also martyrdom—it is always necessary to take a clear position, either yes or no.

A convent is a contradiction. Its aim is salvation; its method is sacrifice. It is the highest form of egoism producing the highest form of self-denial.

To give up power in order to rule seems to be the strategy of monasticism.

In the cloister, people suffer in order to rejoice later. They draw a bill of exchange on death. They trade earthly darkness for heavenly light. In the cloister, hell is accepted in advance as payment due after death for paradise.

Taking the veil or the frock is a kind of suicide, repaid with eternity.

It does not seem to us that mockery is acceptable on such a subject. Everything about it is serious, both the good and the bad.

A just man may frown, but he never smiles with a cruel sneer. We understand anger, but not malice.

CHAPTER VIII—FAITH, LAW

A few more words.

We condemn the church when it is steeped in intrigue, and we despise the spiritual power when it is harsh toward the temporal; but everywhere we honor the man who reflects.

We honor the man who kneels.

Faith is a necessity for man. Pity the one who believes in nothing.

A person is not idle simply because he is absorbed in thought. There is visible labor and invisible labor.

To contemplate is to labor; to think is to act.

Folded arms can still toil, and clasped hands can still work. A gaze fixed on heaven is a form of labor.

Thales remained motionless for four years. He founded philosophy.

In our view, cenobites are not lazy men, and recluses are not idlers.

To meditate on the Shadow is a serious thing.

Without taking back anything we have just said, we believe that the living should keep a constant awareness of the tomb. On this point, the priest and the philosopher agree. _We must die_. The Abbé de la Trappe answers Horace.

To carry some sense of the tomb within one's life—that is the rule of the sage, and it is also the rule of the ascetic. In this, the ascetic and the sage meet. There is material growth; we acknowledge that. There is moral greatness; we stand by that. Careless, lively minds say:

"What good are those motionless figures at the edge of mystery? What purpose do they serve? What do they do?"

Alas! Faced with the darkness that surrounds us and awaits us, and with our ignorance of what that vast scattering will make of us, we answer: "There is probably no work more divine than the work done by these souls." And we add: "There is probably no work more useful."

Surely there must be some people who pray constantly for those who never pray at all.

In our view, the whole question depends on how much thought is joined to prayer.

Leibnitz at prayer is majestic; Voltaire in adoration is noble. Deo erexit Voltaire_.

We stand with religion against religions.

We are among those who believe that rote prayers are poor things, while prayer itself is sublime.

And besides, in this moment we are passing through—a moment that fortunately will leave no mark on the nineteenth century—at this hour, when so many men have low foreheads and souls with little elevation, among so many mortals whose morality consists in pleasure, and who busy themselves with the

brief, misshapen things of matter, anyone who chooses exile seems worthy of reverence to us.

The monastery is a renunciation. A sacrifice that is wrongly directed is still a sacrifice. Mistaking a serious error for a duty has a kind of greatness of its own.

Considered in itself, in the ideal sense, and with the truth examined from every side until every aspect has been impartially explored, the monastery—and the female convent in particular, for in our century it is woman who suffers most, and in the cloister's exile there is something of protest—the female convent undeniably possesses a certain majesty.

This secluded life, so harsh and so bleak, a few of whose features we have just described, is not life, because it is not freedom. It is not the tomb, because it is not fulfillment. It is a strange place from which one looks out, as from the top of a high mountain, on one side at the abyss where we are, and on the other at the abyss to which we are going. It is the narrow, misty border between two worlds, lit and darkened by both at once, where the fading light of life mingles with the dim light of death. It is the twilight of the grave.

We, who do not believe what these women believe, but who, like them, live by faith, have never been able to think of them without a kind of tender, reverent fear, and without a kind of pity touched with envy. They are devoted, trembling, trusting beings, humble yet majestic souls, who dare to live on the very edge of mystery. They wait between the world that has closed behind them and the heaven that has not yet opened before

them. They turn toward a light they cannot see, with the one happiness of believing they know where it is. They reach toward the abyss and the unknown, their eyes fixed and unmoving on the darkness, kneeling, bewildered, stunned, shivering, and at times almost lifted by the deep breath of eternity.

CHAPTER I—HOW TO ENTER A CONVENT

It was into this house that Jean Valjean had, as Fauchelevent put it, “fallen from the sky.”

He had climbed over the garden wall at the corner of Rue Polonceau. The hymn of the angels that he had heard in the middle of the night was the nuns singing matins. The hall he had glimpsed in the darkness was the chapel. The ghostlike figure he had seen stretched on the ground was the sister performing an act of reparation. And the bell whose sound had startled him so strangely was the gardener’s bell fastened to Father Fauchelevent’s knee.

Once Cosette had been put to bed, Jean Valjean and Fauchelevent, as we have already seen, had supper: a glass of wine and a piece of cheese before a bright, crackling fire. Then, since the hut’s only bed was occupied by Cosette, each of them threw himself down on a bundle of straw.

Before he closed his eyes, Jean Valjean said, “I must stay here from now on.” That sentence kept running through Fauchelevent’s mind all night.

In truth, neither of them slept.

Jean Valjean knew he had been found out, and that Javert was tracking him. He understood that if he and Cosette went back to Paris, they were lost. Then this new storm that had just broken over him had driven him into this cloister. From that moment on,

Jean Valjean had only one thought: to stay there. Now, for an unfortunate man in his situation, this convent was both the safest place and the most dangerous. It was the most dangerous because no men were allowed inside, so if he were discovered, the offense would be obvious, and for Jean Valjean there would be only a single step from the convent to prison. It was the safest because, if he could somehow be accepted there and remain there, who would ever think to look for him in such a place? To live in an impossible place was safety.

For his part, Fauchelevent was racking his brain. He began by telling himself that he understood nothing about what was happening. How had M. Madeleine gotten in there, with walls like those? You do not simply climb over convent walls. And how had he managed it with a child? No one scales a sheer wall with a child in his arms. Who was that child? Where had they both come from? Since Fauchelevent had been living in the convent, he had heard nothing about M. sur M., and he knew nothing of what had happened there. Father Madeleine had a manner that discouraged questions; besides, Fauchelevent said to himself, "You do not question a saint." In Fauchelevent's eyes, M. Madeleine had lost none of his stature. Still, from a few remarks Jean Valjean had let slip, the gardener thought he could conclude that M. Madeleine had probably been ruined by hard times and was being pursued by his creditors; or else that he had become entangled in some political matter and was in hiding. That last idea did not displease Fauchelevent, who, like many peasants of the North, had an old streak of Bonapartism in him. While hiding, M. Madeleine had chosen the convent as a refuge, and it seemed perfectly natural that he would want to

stay there. But the baffling point, the one Fauchelevent kept coming back to and exhausting himself over, was that M. Madeleine was there at all, and that he had that little girl with him. Fauchelevent saw them, touched them, spoke to them, and still could not believe it was possible. The impossible had just entered Fauchelevent's hut. He fumbled through one guess after another and saw nothing clearly except this: "M. Madeleine saved my life." That certainty alone was enough, and it settled his course. He said to himself, "Now it is my turn." And in his conscience he added, "M. Madeleine did not stop to think when he threw himself under the cart to pull me out." He resolved to save M. Madeleine.

Even so, he asked himself many questions and gave himself several answers: "After what he did for me, would I save him if he were a thief? All the same. If he were a murderer, would I save him? All the same. Since he is a saint, shall I save him? All the same."

But what a challenge it was to keep him in the convent! Fauchelevent did not shrink from this almost impossible task. This poor peasant from Picardy, with no tools but his devotion, his good will, and a bit of that old country shrewdness now put to work for a generous cause, set out to overcome the obstacles of the cloister and the sheer walls of the Rule of Saint Benedict. Father Fauchelevent was an old man who had been selfish all his life. But now, at the end of his days, lame, frail, and with no remaining stake in the world, he found it deeply satisfying to feel gratitude. When he saw a noble deed to be done, he threw himself into it like a dying man who suddenly

finds at his side a glass of fine wine he has never tasted before and drinks it eagerly. We may add that the air he had breathed for so many years in the convent had worn away his sense of self, and had finally made some kind of good deed an absolute necessity for him.

So he made up his mind: he would devote himself to M. Madeleine.

We have just called him a poor peasant from Picardy. That description is accurate, but it does not tell the whole story. At this point in the narrative, it helps to know a little more about Father Fauchelevent's nature. He was a peasant, but he had once been a notary, and that had added craft to his shrewdness and insight to his simplicity. For various reasons, he had failed in business and fallen to the work of a carter and day laborer. But despite the swearing and whipping that horses seem to demand, something of the notary still remained in him. He had a natural quickness of mind. He spoke correctly. He knew how to carry on a conversation, which is rare in a village, and the other peasants said of him, "He talks almost like a gentleman in a hat." In fact, Fauchelevent belonged to that type which the rude, careless language of the last century called half-bourgeois, half-clodhopper, and which the château, tossing its metaphors down at the thatched cottage, filed away under the label: somewhat rustic, somewhat city-bred; pepper and salt. Fauchelevent, though badly battered and roughly treated by fate, worn down and like a poor old soul in rags, was still an impulsive man, and very spontaneous in what he did. That is a valuable quality, because it keeps a person from ever becoming

truly wicked. His faults and vices—for he had some—were all on the surface. In short, he had the sort of face that rewards close observation. His old face had none of those unpleasant wrinkles high on the forehead that suggest malice or stupidity.

At daybreak, Father Fauchelevent opened his eyes after a long night of intense thought and saw M. Madeleine sitting on his bundle of straw, watching Cosette sleep. Fauchelevent sat up and said:

“Now that you are here, how do you plan to get in?”

That remark summed up the whole situation and pulled Jean Valjean out of his reverie.

The two men discussed what to do.

“First of all,” said Fauchelevent, “you must not set foot outside this room—you or the child. One step into the garden, and we are lost.”

“That’s true.”

“Monsieur Madeleine,” Fauchelevent went on, “you have come at a very fortunate moment—or rather, a very unfortunate one. One of the ladies is gravely ill. That will keep them from paying much attention to us. It seems she is dying. The prayers of the forty hours are being said. The whole community is in confusion. That is what occupies them. The one who is about to depart is a saint. Indeed, we are all saints here; the only difference between them and me is that they say ‘our cell,’ while I say ‘my cabin.’ First they will say the prayers for the dying, and then the prayers for the dead. We shall have peace here today,

but I cannot promise the same for tomorrow."

"Still," Jean Valjean said, "this cottage sits in a recess in the wall. It is hidden by what looks like a ruin, and there are trees around it. It cannot be seen from the convent."

"And besides, the nuns never come near it."

"Well?" said Jean Valjean.

The question in that "well?" meant: "It seems to me that one could stay hidden here." Fauchelevent answered that unspoken question:

"There are the little girls."

"What little girls?" Jean Valjean asked.

Just as Fauchelevent opened his mouth to explain what he meant, the bell rang once.

"The nun is dead," he said. "That is the death knell."

And he motioned to Jean Valjean to listen.

The bell rang a second time.

"It is the death knell, Monsieur Madeleine. The bell will go on striking once a minute for twenty-four hours, until the body is taken from the church. You see, they play here. During recreation, all it takes is for a ball to roll away, and they all come running here, despite the rules, searching and poking around everywhere. Those little angels are devils."

"Who?" Jean Valjean asked.

“The little girls. You would be discovered at once. They would scream, ‘Oh! a man!’ There is no danger today. There will be no recreation hour. The whole day will be given over to prayers. You hear the bell. As I told you, one stroke every minute. It is the death knell.”

“I understand, Father Fauchelevent. There are pupils.”

And Jean Valjean said to himself:

“Cosette’s education is already taken care of here.”

Fauchelevent cried out:

“Good Lord! There certainly are little girls here! And they’d cry all around you! And they’d come running off! For a man to be here is like having the plague. You see how they’ve tied a bell to my leg as if I were a wild beast.”

Jean Valjean sank deeper and deeper into thought. “This convent could save us,” he murmured.

Then he spoke louder:

“Yes, the difficulty is staying here.”

“No,” said Fauchelevent, “the difficulty is getting out.”

Jean Valjean felt the blood rush back to his heart.

“Getting out!”

“Yes, Monsieur Madeleine. Before you can come back here, you first have to get out.”

Then, after waiting for another stroke of the bell, Fauchelevent went on:

“You mustn’t be found here like this. Where have you come from? To me, you’ve fallen from the sky, because I know who you are; but the nuns expect people to come in through the door.”

Suddenly they heard a more complicated ringing from another bell.

“Ah!” said Fauchelevent. “They’re ringing for the vocal mothers. They’re going to chapter. They always hold a chapter when someone dies. She died at daybreak. People usually do die at daybreak. But can’t you get out the way you came in? Come, I’m not asking out of curiosity, but how did you get in?”

Jean Valjean turned pale. The mere thought of going back down into that dreadful street made him shudder. It was like escaping from a forest full of tigers, only to have some friendly adviser tell you to go back in. He imagined the whole police force still swarming through that neighborhood, officers lying in wait, guards everywhere, terrible hands reaching for his collar, perhaps Javert himself at the corner where the streets met.

“Impossible!” he said. “Father Fauchelevent, say I fell from the sky.”

“But I do believe it, I do,” Fauchelevent shot back. “You don’t need to tell me that. The good Lord must have taken you in hand to get a close look at you, then dropped you. Only, he meant to put you in a monastery for men; he made a mistake. There, that

bell is ringing again. It means the porter is to go notify the municipality that the doctor for the dead must come here and examine a corpse. That is all part of the ceremony of dying. These good ladies do not like that visit at all. A doctor is a man who believes in nothing. He lifts the veil. Sometimes he lifts something else as well. How quickly they sent for the doctor this time! What is going on? Your little one is still asleep. What is her name?"

"Cosette."

"She is your daughter? So you are her grandfather?"

"Yes."

"It will be easy enough to get her out of here. I have my work door that opens onto the courtyard. I knock, the porter opens, I have my harvest basket on my back, the child is inside it, and I walk out. Father Fauchelevent leaving with his basket—that is perfectly natural. You will tell the child to stay very quiet. She will be under the cover. I will leave her, for as long as necessary, with a good old friend of mine, a fruit seller in the Rue Chemin-Vert. She is deaf and has a little bed. I will shout in her ear that the child is my niece and that she is to keep her for me until tomorrow. Then the little one will come back in with you, because I will find a way to get you back in. It has to be done. But how are you going to get out?"

Jean Valjean shook his head.

"No one must see me; that is the whole difficulty, Father Fauchelevent. Find some way to get me out in a basket too,

covered up like Cosette."

Fauchelevent scratched his left earlobe with the middle finger of his left hand, a sign that he was deeply troubled.

A third peal interrupted them.

"That's the dead doctor leaving," said Fauchelevent. "He came to look and said, 'She is dead; good.' Once the doctor has signed her passport to paradise, the undertaker sends a coffin. If the dead woman is a mother, the mothers prepare her body; if she is a sister, the sisters do it. After that, I nail the coffin shut. That's part of my work as gardener. A gardener is a bit of a gravedigger too. They place her in a lower room of the church that opens onto the street, and no man is allowed in there except the doctor of the dead. I don't count the undertaker's men or myself as men. It's in that room that I nail the coffin shut. Then the undertaker's men come for it, and off you go—drive on, coachman!—that's how one gets to heaven. They bring a box with nothing in it, and they take it away with something in it. That's what a burial is like. _De profundis_."

A flat beam of sunlight gently touched the face of the sleeping Cosette. She lay with her mouth slightly open and looked like an angel drinking in the light. Jean Valjean had fallen into watching her. He was no longer listening to Fauchelevent.

Not being heard is no reason to stop talking. The good old gardener calmly went on with his rambling:

"The grave is being dug in the Vaugirard cemetery. They say they are going to close that cemetery. It is an old cemetery,

outside the rules, without proper standing, and soon to be retired. It's a shame, because it is convenient. I have a friend there, Father Mestienne, the gravedigger. The nuns here have one privilege: they may be taken there at nightfall. There is a special permit for them from the Prefecture. But so much has happened since yesterday! Mother Crucifixion is dead, and Father Madeleine—"

"Is buried," said Jean Valjean with a sad smile.

Fauchelevent picked up the word.

"Good heavens! If you were here for good, it really would be a burial."

A fourth peal rang out. Fauchelevent quickly took the belled kneecap down from its nail and strapped it back onto his knee.

"This time it's for me. The Mother Prioress wants me. Wonderful—now I'm stabbing my tongue on the tongue of my buckle. Monsieur Madeleine, don't move from here. Wait for me. Something new has come up. If you're hungry, there's wine, bread, and cheese."

And he hurried out of the hut, shouting, "Coming! Coming!"

Jean Valjean watched him hurry across the garden as fast as his crooked leg allowed, casting a sideways glance at his melon patch as he went.

Less than ten minutes later, Father Fauchelevent—whose bell made the nuns scatter out of his way—tapped softly at a door, and a gentle voice answered, _“Forever! Forever!”_ which meant: _“Come in.”_

It was the door to the parlor set aside for meeting the gardener on business. This parlor was next to the chapter hall. The prioress was waiting for Fauchelevent, seated on the parlor’s only chair.

CHAPTER II—FAUCHELEVENT FACES A DIFFICULTY

Certain people and certain callings—notably priests and nuns—have a particular way of looking both solemn and troubled at critical moments. When Fauchelevent entered, that double expression of concern was clearly visible on the face of the prioress, that wise and gracious Mademoiselle de Blémeur, Mother Innocente, who was usually cheerful.

The gardener bowed timidly and stayed by the door of the cell. The prioress, who was telling her beads, lifted her eyes and said:

“Ah! It is you, Father Fauvent.”

The convent had adopted this shortened form of his name.

Fauchelevent bowed again.

“Father Fauvent, I sent for you.”

“Here I am, reverend Mother.”

“I have something to say to you.”

“So do I,” said Fauchelevent, with a boldness that terrified him inwardly. “I have something to say to the very reverend Mother.”

The prioress looked at him in surprise.

“Ah! You have something to tell me.”

“A request.”

“Very well. Speak.”

Goodman Fauchelevent, the former notary, belonged to that type of peasant who carries himself with complete confidence. A certain kind of shrewd ignorance has real power: you do not suspect it, and it takes you in. During the a little more than two years he had spent in the convent, Fauchelevent had done very well there. Always alone and busy with his gardening, he had nothing to occupy him except his curiosity. Kept at a distance from the veiled women who passed back and forth, he saw only a restless movement of shadows. But through patience and sharp observation, he had managed to give those phantoms substance, and for him those living corpses had become real people. He was like a deaf man whose eyesight grows sharper, or a blind man whose hearing becomes more sensitive. He set himself to figuring out the meaning of the different bells, and he succeeded so well that this silent, mysterious cloister had no secrets left for him. The sphinx whispered everything in his ear. Fauchelevent knew everything and said nothing; that was his skill. The whole convent took him for a fool. In religion, that is a great advantage. The speaking mothers were very fond of Fauchelevent. He was an interesting mute. He inspired trust. Besides, he was steady and dependable, and he never went out except when the needs of the orchard and vegetable garden clearly required it. This discreet behavior worked in his favor. Even so, he had managed to get two men talking: the porter at the convent, from whom he learned the oddities of their parlor, and the grave-digger at the cemetery, from whom he learned

the peculiarities of their burials. In this way, he had two sources of light on these nuns, one concerning their life and the other their death. But he did not misuse what he knew. The congregation valued him highly. Old, lame, blind to everything, and probably a little deaf as well—what excellent qualities! They would have found it hard to replace him.

Feeling confident because he knew he was valued, the old gardener launched into a long, rambling, deeply rustic speech to the reverend prioress. He went on at length about his age, his ailments, and how the weight of the years now seemed to count double against him. He spoke of the growing demands of his work, the great size of the garden, and the nights that had to be spent there—like the night before, for example, when he had been forced to cover the melon beds with straw mats because of the moon. He ended by saying that he had a brother"—the prioress stirred—"a brother who was no longer young"—she moved again, though this time with visible relief—"and that, if permission were granted, this brother would come live with him and help him; that he was an excellent gardener; that the community would get good service from him, even better than from himself; that otherwise, if his brother were not allowed in, then since he, the elder man, felt his health was failing and that he could no longer manage the work, he would be forced, much to his regret, to leave; and that his brother had a little daughter whom he would bring with him, a child who could be raised for God in the house and who might, who knows, become a nun one day."

When he had finished, the prioress stopped the rosary from slipping through her fingers and said:

“Could you get a strong iron bar between now and this evening?”

“What for?”

“To use as a lever.”

“Yes, Reverend Mother,” Fauchelevent replied.

Without another word, the prioress rose and went into the adjoining room, which was the chapter hall and where the vocal mothers were probably assembled. Fauchelevent was left alone.

CHAPTER III—MOTHER INNOCENTE

About fifteen minutes passed. The prioress returned and sat down again in her chair.

Both speakers seemed preoccupied. We will give, as nearly as we can, a stenographic report of the conversation that followed.

“Father Fauvent!”

“Reverend Mother!”

“Do you know the chapel?”

“I have a little enclosure there where I hear Mass and the offices.”

“And you’ve been in the choir as part of your duties?”

“Two or three times.”

“A stone has to be lifted.”

“Is it heavy?”

“The paving slab beside the altar.”

“The slab that seals the vault?”

“Yes.”

“It would be better to have two men for that.”

“Mother Ascension is as strong as a man. She will help you.”

“A woman is never a man.”

“We have only a woman here to help you. Each person does what he can. Dom Mabillon includes four hundred and seventeen letters of Saint Bernard, while Merlonus Horstius includes only three hundred and sixty-seven, but I do not look down on Merlonus Horstius.”

“Nor do I.”

“Merit lies in working according to one’s strength. A convent is not a shipyard.”

“And a woman is not a man. But my brother is the strong one, all the same!”

“Can you get a lever?”

“That’s the only kind of key that opens that kind of door.”

“There is a ring in the stone.”

“I’ll put the lever through it.”

“And the stone is made to swing on a pivot.”

“That’s good, reverend Mother. I will open the vault.”

“And the four Mother Precentors will help you.”

“And once the vault is open?”

“It must be closed again.”

“Is that all?”

“No.”

“Give me your orders, very reverend Mother.”

“Fauvent, we trust you.”

“I am here to do whatever you wish.”

“And to keep silent about everything!”

“Yes, reverend Mother.”

“When the vault is open—”

“I will close it again.”

“But before that—”

“What is it, reverend Mother?”

“Something must be lowered into it.”

Silence followed. The prioress, after a slight pout of her lower lip that looked like hesitation, broke it.

“Father Fauvent!”

“Reverend Mother!”

“You know that one of the mothers died this morning?”

“No.”

“Didn’t you hear the bell?”

“You can’t hear anything from the bottom of the garden.”

“Really?”

“I can barely make out my own signal.”

“She died at daybreak.”

“And besides, the wind wasn’t blowing my way this morning.”

“It was Mother Crucifixion. A blessed woman.”

The prioress paused, moved her lips as if praying silently, and went on:

“Three years ago, Madame de Béthune, a Jansenist, returned to orthodoxy simply after seeing Mother Crucifixion at prayer.”

“Ah! Yes, now I hear the death bell, Reverend Mother.”

“The mothers have taken her to the dead-room, which opens onto the church.”

“I know.”

“No man but you can or should enter that room. Make sure of it. What a sight it would be, to see a man go into the dead-room!”

“More often!”

“What?”

“More often!”

“What are you saying?”

“I said, more often.”

“More often than what?”

“Reverend Mother, I didn’t say ‘more often than what’; I said ‘more often.’”

“I don’t understand you. Why are you saying ‘more often’?”

“So that I may speak as you do, Reverend Mother.”

“But I did not say ‘more often.’”

At that moment, the clock struck nine.

“At nine in the morning, and at every hour, praised and adored be the most Holy Sacrament of the altar,” said the prioress.

“Amen,” said Fauchelevent.

The clock struck at just the right moment. It cut off the discussion of “more often.” Most likely, if it had not, the prioress and Fauchelevent would never have sorted out that confusion.

Fauchelevent wiped his forehead.

The prioress murmured to herself again, probably something devotional, then spoke aloud:

“In her lifetime, Mother Crucifixion brought people to the faith; after her death, she will work miracles.”

“She will!” Father Fauchelevent replied, keeping pace with her and trying not to recoil again.

“Father Fauvent, Mother Crucifixion was a blessing to this community. Of course, not everyone is granted the grace of dying like Cardinal de Bérulle, in the middle of saying Mass, and giving up his soul to God while pronouncing the words: _Hanc igitur oblationem_. But even without reaching such a blessed end, Mother Crucifixion’s death was most precious. She remained conscious to the very last moment. She spoke to us, and then she spoke to the angels. She gave us her final instructions. If you had a little more faith, and if you had been in her cell, she would have healed your leg with a touch. She smiled. We felt that she was coming alive again in God. There was something heavenly in that death.”

Fauchelevent thought she was finishing a prayer.

“Amen,” he said.

“Father Fauvent, the wishes of the dead must be carried out.”

The prioress slipped several beads along her rosary. Fauchelevent said nothing.

She went on:

“I have consulted several churchmen devoted to Our Lord, men who give themselves to the duties of clerical life and do remarkable good.”

“Reverend Mother, you can hear the bell much better here than in the garden.”

“Besides, she is more than a dead woman; she is a saint.”

“Like you, Reverend Mother.”

“She slept in her coffin for twenty years, by the express permission of our Holy Father, Pius VII—”

“The one who crowned the Emp—Buonaparte.”

For a shrewd man like Fauchelevent, that remark was unfortunate. Luckily, the prioress, completely lost in her own thoughts, did not hear it. She continued:

“Father Fauvent?”

“Reverend Mother?”

“Saint Didorus, Archbishop of Cappadocia, wished to have this one word inscribed on his tomb: _Acarus_, meaning a worm of the earth. And so it was done. Is that true?”

“Yes, reverend Mother.”

“The blessed Mezzocane, Abbot of Aquila, wanted to be buried beneath the gallows. And so it was done.”

“That is true.”

“Saint Terentius, Bishop of Port, where the mouth of the Tiber flows into the sea, asked that his tomb be marked with the sign placed on the graves of parricides, hoping that passersby would spit on it. This was done. The wishes of the dead must be obeyed.”

“So be it.”

“The body of Bernard Guidonis, born in France near Roche-Abeille, was carried, as he had ordered, and despite the king of Castile, to the church of the Dominicans in Limoges,

even though Bernard Guidonis was Bishop of Tuy in Spain. Can anyone say otherwise?"

"On that point, no, reverend Mother."

"Plantavit de la Fosse records the fact."

Several beads of the rosary were counted in silence. Then the prioress went on:

"Father Fauvent, Mother Crucifixion will be buried in the coffin in which she has slept for the past twenty years."

"That is fitting."

"It is only a continuation of her sleep."

"So I am to nail that coffin shut?"

"Yes."

"And we are not to use the undertaker's coffin?"

"Exactly."

"I am at the service of the most reverend community."

"The four Mother Precentors will help you."

"In nailing up the coffin? I have no need of them."

"No. In lowering the coffin."

"Where to?"

"Into the vault."

"What vault?"

“The one beneath the altar.”

Fauchelevent gave a start.

“The vault beneath the altar?”

“Beneath the altar.”

“But—”

“You will have an iron bar.”

“Yes, but—”

“You’ll lift the stone with the bar, using the ring.”

“But—”

“The dead must be obeyed. Mother Crucifixion’s last wish was to be buried in the vault beneath the chapel altar, not in ordinary ground; to remain in death where she prayed in life. She asked this of us—that is to say, she commanded it.”

“But it’s forbidden.”

“Forbidden by men, commanded by God.”

“What if it becomes known?”

“We trust you.”

“Oh! I’m just a stone in your walls.”

“The chapter has assembled. The vocal mothers, whom I have just consulted again and who are now deliberating, have decided that Mother Crucifixion shall be buried, as she wished, in her own coffin beneath our altar. Just think, Father Fauvent—what if she were to work miracles here! What glory to

God for the community! And miracles come from tombs."

"But, reverend Mother, if the agent of the sanitary commission—"

"Saint Benoît II, in matters of burial, resisted Constantine Pogonatus."

"But the police commissary—"

"Chonodemaire, one of the seven German kings who entered Gaul 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 his order this motto: _Stat crux dum volvitur orbis_."

"Amen," said Fauchelevent, calmly using this as his way out of the dilemma whenever he heard Latin.

Any listener is enough for someone who has been silent too long. On the day the rhetorician Gymnastoras left prison, carrying within him a mass of dilemmas and syllogisms that had built up inside, he stopped before the first tree he saw, delivered a speech to it, and made a great effort to persuade it. The prioress, usually held behind the barrier of silence and now overflowing, rose and cried out with all the pent-up force of a burst dam:—

“On my right I have Benoît, and on my left Bernard. Who was Bernard? The first abbot of Clairvaux. Fontaines in Burgundy is blessed because he was born there. His father was named Técelin, and his mother Alèthe. He began at Cîteaux and ended at Clairvaux. He was ordained abbot by Guillaume de Champeaux, bishop of Châlon-sur-Saône. He had seven hundred novices and founded a hundred and sixty monasteries. He defeated Abeilard at the Council of Sens in 1140, as well as Pierre de Bruys, Henry his disciple, and another kind of wandering spirit called the Apostolics. He put Arnauld de Brescia to shame, hurled thunderbolts at the monk Raoul, the murderer of the Jews, dominated the Council of Reims in 1148, brought about the condemnation of Gilbert de Poréa, Bishop of Poitiers, and the condemnation of Éon de l’Étoile, settled disputes among princes, enlightened King Louis the Young, advised Pope Eugene III, regulated the Temple, preached the crusade, performed two hundred and fifty miracles in his lifetime, and as many as thirty-nine in a single day. Who was Benoît? He was the patriarch of Mont-Cassin. He was the second founder of Sainteté Claustrale, 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, and three thousand six hundred canonized saints, and it has existed for fourteen hundred years. On one side, Saint Bernard; on the other, an agent of the sanitary department! On one side, Saint Benoît; on the other, the inspector of public roads! The state, road commissioners, the public undertaker, regulations, the administration—what do we

know of any of that? Any passer-by would be outraged to see how we are treated. We do not even have the right to give our dust to Jesus Christ! Your sanitary department is a revolutionary invention. God made subordinate to the police commissioner—that is the age we live in. Silence, Fauvent!"

Fauchelevent was thoroughly uncomfortable under this drenching rebuke. The prioress went on:

"No one questions the monastery's right to burial. Only fanatics and the misguided deny it. We live in a time of terrible confusion. We do not know what we need to know, and we know what we ought to ignore. We are ignorant and irreligious. In this age, there are people who cannot tell the difference between the great Saint Bernard and the Saint Bernard known as the saint of the poor Catholics, a certain worthy churchman who lived in the thirteenth century. Others are so blasphemous that they compare the execution of Louis XVI to the cross of Jesus Christ. Louis XVI was only a king. Let us fear God! There is no longer any sense of justice or injustice. People know the name of Voltaire, but not the name of César de Bus. And yet César de Bus is a man of blessed memory, while Voltaire is one of cursed memory. The last archbishop, Cardinal de Périgord, did not even know that Charles de Gondren succeeded Bérulle, that François Bourgoin succeeded Gondren, that Jean-François Senault succeeded Bourgoin, and that Father Sainte-Marthe succeeded Jean-François Senault. People know the name of Father Coton, not because he was one of the three who pressed for the founding of the Oratory, but because he supplied Henri IV, the Huguenot king, with the words for an oath. What worldly

people like about Saint François de Sales is that he cheated at cards. And then they attack religion. Why? Because there have been bad priests, because Sagittaire, Bishop of Gap, was the brother of Salone, Bishop of Embrun, and because both followed Mommol. What does that have to do with the matter? Does it stop Martin of Tours from being a saint and giving half his cloak to a beggar? They persecute the saints. They close their eyes to the truth. Darkness rules. The fiercest beasts are the ones that are blind. No one thinks of hell as something real. Oh, how wicked people are! What used to be said as by order of the king is now said as by order of the revolution. No one any longer knows what is owed to the living or the dead. A holy death is forbidden. Burial has become a civil matter. It is horrible. Saint Leo II wrote two special letters, one to Pierre Notaire and the other to the king of the Visigoths, in order to oppose and reject, in matters concerning the dead, the authority of the exarch and the supremacy of the Emperor. Gauthier, Bishop of Châlons, stood firm on this issue against Otho, Duke of Burgundy. The old magistracy agreed with him. In earlier times, we even had a voice in the chapter on current affairs. The Abbot of Cîteaux, head of the order, was by right a councillor in the parliament of Burgundy. We do as 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 Monte Cassino on Saturday, the twenty-first day of March in the year 543? All this is beyond dispute. I abhor psalm singers, I hate priors, I detest heretics, but I would hate even more anyone who claimed the opposite. One need only read Arnoul Wion, Gabriel Bucelin, Trithemus, Maurolics, and

Dom Luc d'Achery."

The prioress took a breath, then turned to Fauchelevent.

"Is everything arranged, Father Fauvent?"

"Everything is arranged, Reverend Mother."

"Can we rely on you?"

"I will do as I am told."

"Good."

"I am wholly devoted to the convent."

"That is understood. You will close the coffin. The sisters will carry it to the chapel. Then the office for the dead will be said. After that, we will return to the cloister. Between eleven o'clock and midnight, you will come with your iron bar. Everything must be done in the deepest secrecy. Only the four Mother Precentors, Mother Ascension, and you will be in the chapel."

"And the sister at the post?"

"She will not turn around."

"But she will hear."

"She will not listen. Besides, what is known inside the cloister is never learned by the outside world."

There was a pause. Then the prioress went on:

"You will take off your bell. The sister at the post must not notice that you are there."

“Reverend Mother?”

“Yes, Father Fauvent?”

“Has the doctor for the dead made his visit yet?”

“He will come at four o’clock today. The bell that calls for the doctor for the dead has already been rung. But you do not understand any of the bell signals, do you?”

“I pay attention to none of them except my own.”

“Very well, Father Fauvent.”

“Reverend Mother, I will need a lever at least six feet long.”

“Where will you get it?”

“Where there are plenty of gratings, there is no shortage of iron bars. I have my pile of old iron at the bottom of the garden.”

“About three-quarters of an hour before midnight; do not forget.”

“Reverend Mother?”

“What is it?”

“If you ever have any other work of this kind, my brother is the man for it. Strong as a Turk!”

“You must do it as quickly as possible.”

“I can’t work very quickly. I’m infirm; that’s why I need an assistant. I limp.”

“Limping is no sin, and it may even be a blessing. Emperor Henry II., who fought Antipope Gregory and restored Benoît VIII., had two surnames: the Saint and the Lame.”

“Two overcoats are a good thing,” murmured Fauchelevent, who was in fact a little hard of hearing.

“Now that I think of it, Father Fauvent, let us allow a full hour for 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 be finished at least a quarter of an hour before then.”

“I will do anything to show my devotion to the community. Those are my orders. I am to nail up the coffin. At exactly eleven o’clock, I am to be in the chapel. The Mother Precentors will be there. Mother Ascension will be there. Two men would be better, but never mind. I shall have my lever. We will open the vault, lower the coffin, and close the vault again. After that, there will be no trace of anything. The government will suspect nothing. So everything has been arranged, reverend Mother?”

“No!”

“What is still left to do?”

“The empty coffin remains.”

That brought a pause. Fauchelevent thought. The prioress thought as well.

“What are we to do with that coffin, Father Fauvent?”

“It will be put into the earth.”

“Empty?”

Another silence followed. With his left hand, Fauchelevent made the sort of gesture that brushes aside an awkward subject.

“Reverend Mother, I am the one who is to nail up the coffin in the basement of the church, and no one but me can go in there. I will cover the coffin with the pall.”

“Yes, but when the bearers put it in the hearse and lower it into the grave, they will certainly feel that there is nothing inside.”

“Ah! the de—!” cried Fauchelevent.

The prioress began to make the sign of the cross and fixed her eyes on the gardener. The vil– caught in his throat.

He hurried to come up with some expedient that would make her forget the oath.

“I’ll put earth in the coffin, Reverend Mother. It will make it seem as though there’s a body inside.”

“You are right. Earth is the same thing as man. So you will take care of the empty coffin?”

“I’ll make that my particular concern.”

The prioress’s face, which until then had been troubled and overcast, became calm again. She made the gesture of a superior dismissing a subordinate. Fauchelevent moved toward the door. Just as he was about to go out, the prioress gently raised her voice:

“I am pleased with you, Father Fauvent. Bring your brother to me tomorrow, after the burial, and tell him to bring his daughter.”

CHAPTER IV—IN WHICH JEAN VALJEAN LOOKS VERY MUCH AS THOUGH HE HAD READ AUSTIN CASTILLEJO

A lame man's steps are like the sidelong looks of a one-eyed man: they do not reach their destination quickly. Besides, Fauchelevent was in a difficult position. It took him nearly a quarter of an hour to get back to his cottage in the garden. Cosette was awake. Jean Valjean had placed her near the fire. When Fauchelevent came in, Jean Valjean was pointing to the vintner's basket hanging on the wall and saying, "Listen carefully, my little Cosette. We have to leave this house, but we will come back, and we will be very happy here. The good man who lives here is going to carry you away on his back in that. You will wait for me at a lady's house. I will come and get you. Obey, and above all say nothing, unless you want Madame Thénardier to get hold of you again!"

Cosette nodded gravely.

Jean Valjean turned at the sound of Fauchelevent opening the door.

"Well?"

“Everything is settled, and nothing is,” said Fauchelevent. “I have permission to bring you in; but before I can bring you in, I have to get you out. That is where the difficulty is. It is easy enough with the child.”

“You will carry her out?”

“And she will keep quiet?”

“I can answer for that.”

“But you, Father Madeleine?”

Then, after a silence full of anxiety, Fauchelevent cried out:

“Why, get out the way you came in!”

Jean Valjean, just as before, simply said, “Impossible.”

Fauchelevent muttered, more to himself than to Jean Valjean:

“There’s another thing troubling me. I said I would fill it with earth. But now that I think about it, earth instead of a corpse won’t feel real. It won’t work. It will shift around and move. The men will carry it. You understand, Father Madeleine, the authorities will notice.”

Jean Valjean looked him straight in the eye and thought he was out of his mind.

Fauchelevent went on:

“How the deuce are you going to get out? It all has to be done by tomorrow morning. Tomorrow is when I’m supposed to bring you in. The prioress is expecting you.”

Then he explained to Jean Valjean that this was the reward for a service he, Fauchelevent, was to perform for the community. Part of his duties was helping with burials: he nailed up the coffins and assisted the gravedigger at the cemetery. The nun who had died that morning had asked to be buried in the coffin that had served as her bed, and to be laid in the vault beneath the chapel altar. Police regulations forbade it, but she was one of those dead people who are refused nothing. The prioress and the choir mothers meant to carry out the dead woman's wish. So much the worse for the government. Fauchelevent was to nail up the coffin in the cell, lift the stone in the chapel, and lower the body into the vault. And in return, the prioress was to admit his brother to the house as a gardener, and his niece as a pupil. His brother was M. Madeleine, and his niece was Cosette. The prioress had told him to bring his brother the following evening, after the fake burial at the cemetery. But he could not bring M. Madeleine in from outside if M. Madeleine was not outside. That was the first problem. Then there was another one: the empty coffin.

"What empty coffin?" Jean Valjean asked.

Fauchelevent replied:

"The administration's coffin."

"What coffin? What administration?"

"A nun dies. The city doctor comes and says, 'A nun has died.' The government sends a coffin. The next day, it sends a hearse and the undertaker's men to collect the coffin and take it to the cemetery. The undertaker's men will come and lift the coffin,

and there will be nothing inside it."

"Put something in it."

"A corpse? I don't have one."

"No."

"Then what?"

"A living person."

"What person?"

"Me!" said Jean Valjean.

Fauchelevent had been sitting down, but he jumped to his feet as if a bomb had exploded under his chair.

"You!"

"Why not?"

Jean Valjean broke into one of those rare smiles that lit up his face like a flash of heaven in winter.

"You know what you said, Fauchelevent: 'Mother Crucifixion is dead.' And I add: 'and Father Madeleine is buried.'"

"Ah, good, you can laugh. You're not speaking seriously."

"I am speaking very seriously. I have to get out of this place."

"Certainly."

"I told you to find a basket, and a cover for me as well."

"Well?"

“The basket will be made of pine, and the cover will be a black cloth.”

“First of all, it will be a white cloth. Nuns are buried in white.”

“Then let it be a white cloth.”

“You are not like other men, Father Madeleine.”

Seeing such schemes—nothing less than the fierce, reckless inventions of the galleys—emerge from the peaceful world around him and mix with what he called “the little routine of convent life” amazed Fauchelevent as much as a passer-by would be amazed to see a gull fishing in the gutter of the Rue Saint-Denis.

Jean Valjean went on:

“The problem is getting out of here without being seen. This gives us a way to do it. But first, tell me something. How is it done? Where is this coffin?”

“The empty one?”

“Yes.”

“Downstairs, in what they call the dead-room. It’s resting on two trestles under the pall.”

“How long is the coffin?”

“Six feet.”

“What is this dead-room?”

“It’s a room on the ground floor with a barred window facing the garden, closed from the outside with a shutter, and two doors. One opens into the convent, and the other into the church.”

“What church?”

“The church on the street, the one anyone can enter.”

“Do you have the keys to those two doors?”

“No. I have the key to the door that connects with the convent. The porter has the key to the door that opens into the church.”

“When does the porter open that door?”

“Only to let the undertaker’s men in when they come for the coffin. Once the coffin has been taken out, the door is shut again.”

“Who nails the coffin shut?”

“I do.”

“Who spreads the pall over it?”

“I do.”

“Are you alone?”

“No other man except the police doctor is allowed into the dead-room. It’s even written on the wall.”

“Could you hide me in that room tonight, after everyone is asleep?”

“No. But I could hide you in a small dark recess that opens into the dead-room, where I keep the tools I use for burials. I have

the key to it."

"What time will the hearse come for the coffin tomorrow?"

"Around three o'clock in the afternoon. The burial will take place at the Vaugirard cemetery a little before nightfall. It's not very close."

"I'll stay hidden in your tool-closet all night and all morning. But what about food? I'll be hungry."

"I'll bring you something."

"You can come and nail me into the coffin at two o'clock."

Fauchelevent drew back and cracked his knuckles.

"But that's impossible!"

"Bah! Impossible to pick up a hammer and drive a few nails into a plank?"

What seemed unheard-of to Fauchelevent was, as we have said, something quite simple to Jean Valjean. Jean Valjean had been in tighter corners than this. Any man who has been a prisoner knows how to make himself small enough to fit through whatever opening escape allows. A prisoner is driven toward escape the way a sick man is driven toward a crisis that either saves him or kills him. Escape is a kind of cure. What will a man not endure for the sake of a cure? Let himself be nailed into a crate and carried away like a bundle of goods; live for a long time shut inside a box; find air where there seems to be none; ration his breath for hours; know how to smother without dying—this was one of Jean Valjean's grim skills.

Besides, a coffin with a living person inside—that convict's trick—was also an imperial device. If we are to believe the monk Austin Castillejo, Charles the Fifth used this method when, after his abdication, he wished to see the Plombes one last time.

He had himself carried into and out of the monastery of Saint-Yuste in this way.

Fauchelevent, who had regained a little composure, cried out:

"But how will you breathe?"

"I'll breathe."

"In that box! Just thinking about it makes me feel suffocated."

"You must have a gimlet. Make a few holes here and there, near my mouth, and nail the top board on loosely."

"Fine! But what if you happen to cough or sneeze?"

"A man escaping does not cough or sneeze."

And Jean Valjean added:

"Father Fauchelevent, we have to decide: either I am caught here, or I take this way out through the hearse."

Everyone has noticed how cats like to stop and lounge between the two panels of a half-closed door. Who has never said to a cat, "Do come in!" Some people are the same way when a situation opens only halfway before them: they stop, unable to choose between two courses, and risk being crushed when fate suddenly shuts the whole affair. The over-cautious, catlike as they are, and precisely because they are, sometimes run into

more danger than the bold. Fauchelevent had that hesitant kind of nature. But Jean Valjean's calm steadiness won him over in spite of himself. He grumbled:

"Well, since there's no other way."

Jean Valjean went on:

"The only thing worrying me is what will happen at the cemetery."

"That's the one part that doesn't worry me at all," cried Fauchelevent. "If you're sure you can get out of the coffin safely, I'm sure I can get you out of the grave. The gravedigger is a drunkard and a friend of mine. It's Father Mestienne, an old fellow of the old school. The gravedigger puts the corpses into the grave, and I put the gravedigger in my pocket. I'll tell you exactly what will happen. They'll arrive a little before dusk, about three-quarters of an hour before the cemetery gates close. The hearse will drive straight up to the grave. I'll follow, because that's my job. I'll have a hammer, a chisel, and some pincers in my pocket. The hearse stops, the undertaker's men tie a rope around your coffin and lower it down. The priest says the prayers, makes the sign of the cross, sprinkles the holy water, and leaves. Then I'm alone with Father Mestienne. He's my friend, I tell you. One of two things will happen: either he'll be sober or he won't. If he isn't drunk, I'll say to him, 'Come have a drink while the Bon Coing_ [the Good Quince] is still open.' I'll take him there and get him drunk—it doesn't take much to make Father Mestienne drunk; he's always halfway there already. I'll leave him under the table, take his card so I

can get back into the cemetery, and return without him. Then you'll have no one to deal with but me. If he's already drunk, I'll say to him, 'Off with you; I'll do your work for you.' Off he goes, and I pull you out of the hole."

Jean Valjean held out his hand, and Fauchelevent threw himself on it with the heartfelt warmth of a peasant.

"That's settled, Father Fauchelevent. Everything will go well."

"As long as nothing goes wrong," thought Fauchelevent. "If it does, it will be terrible."

CHAPTER V—YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE DRUNK TO BE IMMORTAL

The next day, as the sun was setting, the few people passing along the Boulevard du Maine took off their hats to an old-fashioned hearse decorated with skulls, crossbones, and tears. Inside the hearse was a coffin covered with a white cloth, across which lay a large black cross, like an enormous corpse with drooping arms. A mourning coach followed, carrying a priest in his surplice and a choirboy in his red cap. Two undertaker's men, wearing gray uniforms trimmed with black, walked on either side of the hearse. Behind it came an old man dressed like a laborer, limping as he went. The procession was heading toward the Vaugirard cemetery.

The handle of a hammer, the blade of a cold chisel, and the jaws of a pair of pincers could be seen sticking out of the man's pocket.

Vaugirard Cemetery was an exception among the cemeteries of Paris. It had its own special customs, just as it had both a carriage entrance and a separate door for people on foot, which older residents of the neighborhood, still attached to old terms, continued to call the _porte cavalière_ and the _porte piétonne_. As we have already said, the Bernardine-Benedictine nuns of Rue Petit-Picpus had received permission to be buried there, in a separate corner, and at night, because that piece of land had once belonged to their community. Since the grave-diggers

therefore had to work there in the evening during summer and at night during winter, the cemetery operated under special rules. At that time, the gates of Paris cemeteries were closed at sundown, and because this was a municipal regulation, Vaugirard Cemetery had to follow it like all the others. The carriage gate and the foot entrance were two adjoining iron gates beside a pavilion built by the architect Perronet and occupied by the cemetery gatekeeper. So the gates swung shut, without exception, the moment the sun disappeared behind the dome of the Invalides. If a grave-digger was still inside the cemetery after that hour, there was only one way out: he had to use his grave-digger's card, issued by the department of public funerals. A kind of letter box had been built into the porter's window. The grave-digger dropped his card into it, the porter heard it fall, pulled a cord, and the small door opened. If the man did not have his card, he had to give his name. The porter, who was sometimes already in bed and asleep, got up, came out, confirmed who he was, and unlocked the gate. The grave-digger could then leave, but he had to pay a fine of fifteen francs.

This cemetery, with its unusual arrangements outside the standard regulations, disrupted the neat order of the administration. It was abolished a little after 1830. Mont-Parnasse Cemetery, called the Eastern Cemetery, replaced it and inherited that famous dram-shop beside Vaugirard Cemetery, marked by a painted quince on its signboard. The shop stood at a corner, with one side facing the drinkers' tables and the other the tombs, and bore this sign: _Au Bon Coing_.

The Vaugirard cemetery was what you might call a worn-out cemetery. It was slowly falling out of use. Damp was creeping into it, and the flowers were disappearing. Respectable middle-class people did not much like being buried at Vaugirard; it suggested poverty. Père-Lachaise, if you please! To be buried in Père-Lachaise was the equivalent of owning mahogany furniture. It was considered stylish. The Vaugirard cemetery was an old, dignified enclosure, laid out like an old French garden: straight paths, box hedges, arborvitae, holly, ancient tombs beneath old cypress trees, and very tall grass. In the evening, the place felt tragic. It had a deeply mournful look.

The sun had not yet set when the hearse, draped in a white pall with a black cross, entered the avenue of the Vaugirard cemetery. The lame man walking behind it was none other than Fauchelevent.

The burial of Mother Crucifixion in the vault beneath the altar, Cosette's removal, and Jean Valjean's placement in the dead-room had all been carried out without difficulty. Nothing had gone wrong.

Let us note in passing that, in our view, burying Mother Crucifixion beneath the convent altar was a perfectly pardonable offense. It was one of those faults that closely resemble a duty. The nuns committed it not only without hesitation, but with the full approval of their own consciences. In a cloister, what is called "government" is merely authority meddling where it does not belong, an intrusion that is always open to question. First comes the rule; as for the code, we shall come to that. Make as many laws as you like, men, but keep them for yourselves. What is paid to Caesar is never anything more than what remains after what is owed to God. A prince is nothing in the presence of a principle.

Fauchelevent limped along behind the hearse in a very satisfied mood. His two plans—the one with the nuns, the one for the convent and against it, the one involving M. Madeleine—had apparently succeeded. Jean Valjean's calm was one of those powerful kinds of composure that spread to others. Fauchelevent no longer had any doubts about success.

There was almost nothing left to do. In the past two years, he had gotten Father Mestienne—a round-faced, rosy-cheeked fellow—drunk at least ten times. He toyed with Father Mestienne. He could do whatever he wanted with him. He could make him dance to any tune he pleased. Mestienne's mind fit itself to the shape of Fauchelevent's will. Fauchelevent's

confidence was complete.

Just as the convoy entered the avenue leading to the cemetery, Fauchelevent cast a cheerful glance at the hearse and said half aloud, rubbing his big hands together:

“This is a fine joke!”

Suddenly the hearse stopped; it had reached the gate. The burial permit had to be shown. The undertaker’s man spoke to the cemetery porter. During this exchange, which always caused a delay of a minute or two, someone unfamiliar came and took his place behind the hearse, beside Fauchelevent. He looked like a laborer. He wore a waistcoat with large pockets and carried a mattock under his arm.

Fauchelevent looked the stranger over.

“Who are you?” he asked.

The man replied:

“The gravedigger.”

If a man could survive a cannonball striking him full in the chest, he would look the way Fauchelevent looked then.

“The gravedigger?”

“Yes.”

“You?”

“Me.”

“Father Mestienne is the gravedigger.”

“He was.”

“What! He was?”

“He is dead.”

Fauchelevent had expected anything except this—that a gravedigger might die. And yet gravediggers do die, like everyone else. By digging graves for others, a man slowly digs his own.

Fauchelevent stood there with his mouth hanging open. He barely had the strength to stammer:

“But that’s impossible!”

“But it is.”

“But,” he insisted weakly, “Father Mestienne is the gravedigger.”

“After Napoleon came Louis XVIII. After Mestienne comes Gribier. Peasant—that’s my name—Gribier.”

Fauchelevent, pale as death, stared at this Gribier.

He was tall, thin, and deathly pale, with a completely funeral look about him. He seemed like a failed doctor who had become a gravedigger.

Fauchelevent burst into laughter.

“Ah!” he said. “What strange things happen! Father Mestienne is dead, but long live little Father Lenoir! Do you know who little Father Lenoir is? A jug of red wine. A jug of Surêne, morbigou! real Surêne from Paris! Ah, so old Mestienne is dead! I’m sorry to hear it; he was a merry fellow. But you’re a merry fellow too, aren’t you, comrade? We’ll go have a drink together in a little while.”

The man replied:

“I was a student. I passed my fourth examination. I never drink.”

The hearse had started moving again and was rolling up the main avenue of the cemetery.

Fauchelevent had slowed down. He limped more from anxiety than from any real disability.

The gravedigger walked ahead of him.

Fauchelevent took another look at this unexpected Gribier.

He was one of those men who look old while still very young, and who, though thin, are remarkably strong.

“Comrade!” Fauchelevent called out.

The man turned around.

“I’m the convent gravedigger.”

“My colleague,” said the man.

Fauchelevent, who could not read or write but was very shrewd, understood that he was dealing with a dangerous kind of man: a smooth talker. He muttered:

“So Father Mestienne is dead.”

The man replied:

“Entirely. The good God consulted his notebook, which shows when each person’s time is up. It was Father Mestienne’s turn. Father Mestienne died.”

Fauchelevent repeated mechanically, “The good God—”

“The good God,” the man said with authority. “According to the philosophers, the Eternal Father; according to the Jacobins, the Supreme Being.”

“Shall we introduce ourselves to each other?” Fauchelevent stammered.

“That’s already done. You are a peasant; I am a Parisian.”

“People don’t really know each other until they’ve had a drink together. A man who empties his glass empties his heart. You must come and have a drink with me. You can’t refuse a thing like that.”

“Business first.”

Fauchelevent thought, “I’m done for.”

They were only a few turns of the wheel away from the little alley that led to the nuns’ corner.

The grave-digger went on:

“My good man, I have seven little children to feed. Since they have to eat, I can’t drink.”

And he added, with the pleased air of a solemn man who felt he had turned a phrase neatly:

“Their hunger is the enemy of my thirst.”

The hearse passed along the edge of a cluster of cypress trees, left the main path, turned into a narrow one, crossed a patch of waste ground, and disappeared into a thicket. That showed they were very near the burial place. Fauchelevent slowed his pace, but he could not hold the hearse back. Fortunately, the ground was light and soaked by the winter rains, so the wheels clogged with mud and the hearse moved more slowly.

He went up to the grave-digger.

“They have some very nice little Argenteuil wine,” Fauchelevent murmured.

“Countryman,” the man replied, “I ought not to be a grave-digger. My father was a porter at the Prytaneum [Town-Hall]. He meant me for literature. But he fell on hard times. He lost money on the exchange. I was forced to give up the profession of author. But I am still a public writer.”

“So then you’re not a grave-digger?” Fauchelevent replied, seizing on this slender hope.

“One does not prevent the other. I do both.”

Fauchelevent did not understand that last word.

“Come have a drink,” he said.

A comment is needed here. For all his distress, Fauchelevent offered a drink, but he left one point unexplained: who was

going to pay? Usually, Fauchelevent did the offering and Father Mestienne did the paying. In the unusual situation created by the new grave-digger, offering a drink was clearly expected, so the offer had to be made. But the old gardener carefully avoided mentioning the proverbial quarter of an hour associated with Rabelais, and he did so on purpose. Distressed as he was, Fauchelevent had no wish to pay himself.

The grave-digger went on with a self-satisfied smile:

"A man has to eat. I have taken over Father Mestienne's position. When you have almost finished your schooling, you become something of a philosopher. I add the work of the arm to the work of the hand. I keep a scrivener's stall in the market on the Rue de Sèvres. You know it—the Umbrella Market. All the cooks from the Red Cross come to me. I scribble out their declarations of love to fresh young soldiers. In the morning I write love letters; in the evening I dig graves. That is life, countryman."

The hearse kept moving forward. Fauchelevent, anxious beyond measure, looked around him in every direction. Large drops of sweat ran down his forehead.

"But," the grave-digger went on, "a man cannot serve two mistresses. I have to choose between the pen and the mattock. The mattock is ruining my hand."

The hearse stopped.

The choirboy got down from the mourning coach, and then the priest followed.

One of the hearse’s small front wheels had rolled slightly up onto a mound of earth, and beyond it an open grave could be seen.

"What a nightmare this is!" Fauchelevent repeated in dismay.

CHAPTER VI—BETWEEN FOUR PLANKS

Who was in the coffin? The reader already knows: Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean had arranged matters so that he could survive inside it, and he could breathe, at least a little.

It is remarkable how much peace of conscience can give peace to everything else. Every plan Jean Valjean had worked out had been unfolding, and unfolding well, since the day before. Like Fauchelevent, he was counting on Father Mestienne. He had no doubt about the outcome. Never had the situation been more dangerous, and never had calm been more complete.

The four boards of the coffin gave off a strange, dreadful peace. It was as if some of the dead person's stillness had passed into Jean Valjean and calmed him.

From inside that coffin, he had been able to follow every stage of the terrible drama in which he was confronting death, and he had followed it all.

Soon after Fauchelevent had finished nailing down the top board, Jean Valjean felt himself being carried out and then taken away in a cart. He could tell, from the way the jolting lessened, when they left the paving stones and reached the dirt road. From a dull rumbling sound, he guessed that they were crossing the Austerlitz Bridge. At the first stop, he understood that they were entering the cemetery. At the second, he said to himself:

“This is the grave.”

All at once, he felt hands grab the coffin, then heard a harsh scraping against the boards. He took it to be the rope being fastened around the coffin so it could be lowered into the grave.

Then he felt dizzy.

The undertaker’s assistant and the gravedigger had probably let the coffin tilt and lowered the head end before the foot. He fully regained his senses when he felt himself level and still. He had just reached the bottom.

He felt a certain chill.

A voice rose above him, cold and solemn. He heard Latin words he did not understand passing over him so slowly that he could make out each 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 solemn voice began again:

_“Requiem æternam dona ei, Domine.” _

The child’s voice answered:

_“Et lux perpetua luceat ei.” _

He heard something like the soft patter of a few raindrops on the board above him. It was probably the holy water.

He thought, “This will be over soon. Just a little more patience. The priest will leave. Fauchelevent will take Mestienne off for a drink. I’ll be alone. Then Fauchelevent will come back by himself, and I’ll get out. The whole thing should take about an hour.”

The solemn voice continued:

“Requiescat in pace.”

And the child’s voice replied:

“Amen.”

Jean Valjean listened hard and heard what sounded like footsteps moving away.

“There, they’re leaving now,” he thought. “I’m alone.”

Suddenly, he heard a sound above his head that struck him like a thunderclap.

It was a shovelful of earth hitting the coffin.

A second shovelful fell.

One of the holes he was breathing through had just been blocked.

A third shovelful of earth fell.

Then a fourth.

Some things are too much even for the strongest man. Jean Valjean lost consciousness.

CHAPTER VII—WHERE THE ORIGIN OF THE SAYING “DON’T LOSE THE CARD” WILL BE FOUND

This is what had happened above the coffin where Jean Valjean lay.

After the hearse had driven away, and after the priest and the choirboy had climbed back into their carriage and left, Fauchelevent, who had kept his eyes fixed on the gravedigger, saw him bend down and take hold of the shovel standing upright in the pile of dirt.

Then Fauchelevent made a desperate decision.

He stepped between the grave and the gravedigger, folded his arms, and said:

“I’m the one paying!”

The gravedigger stared at him in astonishment and replied:

“What’s that, peasant?”

Fauchelevent repeated:

“I’m the one paying!”

“What?”

“For the wine.”

“What wine?”

“That Argenteuil wine.”

“Where’s the Argenteuil?”

“At the _Bon Coing_.”

“Go to the devil!” said the gravedigger.

And he threw a shovelful of earth onto the coffin.

The coffin answered with a hollow sound. Fauchelevent reeled, on the verge of pitching headfirst into the grave himself. He cried out in a voice already beginning to take on the choking rattle of death:

“Friend! Before the _Bon Coing_ closes!”

The gravedigger scooped up more earth with his shovel. Fauchelevent went on.

“I’ll pay.”

And he grabbed the man’s arm.

“Listen to me, friend. I’m the convent gravedigger. I came to help you. This is something that can be done at night. So let’s start by going for a drink.”

And as he spoke, clinging to this desperate plea, a bleak thought crossed his mind: “And if he drinks, will he get drunk?”

“Countryman,” said the man, “if you insist so strongly, I agree. We’ll have a drink. After the work, never before.”

And he swung his shovel briskly. Fauchelevent held him back.

“It’s Argenteuil wine, six francs.”

“Oh, come now,” said the gravedigger. “You’re a bell-ringer. Ding dong, ding dong—that’s all you know how to say. Go hang yourself.”

And he tossed in a second shovelful.

Fauchelevent had reached the point where he no longer knew what he was saying.

“Come have a drink,” he cried, “since I’m the one paying.”

“When we’ve put the child to bed,” said the gravedigger.

He threw in a third shovelful.

Then he drove his shovel into the earth and added:

“It’s cold tonight, you see, and the corpse would cry out after us if we planted her there without a blanket over her.”

At that moment, as he loaded his shovel, the gravedigger bent over and his waistcoat pocket fell open. Fauchelevent’s frantic gaze dropped mechanically into that pocket and fixed there.

The sun had not yet sunk below the horizon; there was still enough light for him to make out something white at the bottom of that open pocket.

A flash of insight, as sharp and sudden as lightning in a Picard peasant’s eyes, shot through Fauchelevent. He had just thought of something.

Without the gravedigger noticing—completely absorbed in his shovelful of earth—he slipped his hand into his back pocket and

pulled out the white object lying at the bottom.

The man dumped a fourth shovelful into the grave.

Just as he turned to get the fifth, Fauchelevent looked at him calmly and said:

“By the way, you new fellow, do you have your card?”

The gravedigger stopped.

“What card?”

“The sun is about to set.”

“Good. It’s getting ready for bed.”

“The cemetery gate is about to close.”

“Well, so what?”

“Do you have your card?”

“Ah! My card?” said the gravedigger.

He began feeling through his pocket.

After searching one pocket, he searched the other. Then he moved on to his watch pockets, checked the first, and went back to the second.

“Why, no,” he said. “I don’t have my card. I must have forgotten it.”

“Fifteen francs fine,” said Fauchelevent.

The gravedigger went pale—green, the sickly color of sheer fright.

“Ah! Jésus-mon-Dieu-bancroche-à-bas-la-lune!”17 he cried. “A fifteen-franc fine!”

“Three hundred-sou pieces,” said Fauchelevent.

The gravedigger let his shovel fall.

Now it was Fauchelevent’s moment.

“Come now, conscript,” said Fauchelevent, “none of this despair. There’s no need to kill yourself and do the grave a favor. Fifteen francs is fifteen francs, and besides, you may not even be able to pay it. I’m an old hand; you’re new. I know all the tricks and all the ways around things. Let me give you a bit of friendly advice. One thing is certain: the sun is about to set. It’s touching the dome now. In five minutes, the cemetery will be closed.”

“That’s true,” the man replied.

“Five more minutes and you won’t have time to fill in the grave. It’s hollow as the devil, this grave. And you still have to reach the gate in time to get through before it closes.”

“That’s true.”

“In that case, the fine is fifteen francs.”

“Fifteen francs.”

“But you still have time. Where do you live?”

“Just a couple of steps from the barrier, a quarter of an hour from here. Number 87 Rue de Vaugirard.”

“You have just enough time to make it out if you run as fast as you can.”

“Exactly.”

“Once you’re outside the gate, race home, get your card, and come back. The cemetery porter will let you in. If you have your card, you won’t have to pay anything. Then you can bury your corpse. I’ll keep an eye on it for you in the meantime, so it doesn’t run away.”

“I owe you my life, peasant.”

“Off with you!” said Fauchelevent.

The grave-digger, overflowing with gratitude, shook his hand and ran off.

When the man had disappeared into the thicket, Fauchelevent listened until his footsteps faded in the distance. Then he bent over the grave and said in a low voice:

“Father Madeleine!”

There was no answer.

Fauchelevent shuddered. He dropped into the grave rather than climbed down, threw himself over the head of the coffin, and cried:

“Are you there?”

There was silence inside the coffin.

Fauchelevent, trembling so badly he could hardly breathe, grabbed his cold chisel and hammer and pried up the coffin lid.

Jean Valjean's face appeared in the dim light. It was pale, and his eyes were closed.

Fauchelevent's hair stood on end. He jumped to his feet, then fell back against the side of the grave, on the verge of fainting over the coffin. He stared at Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean lay there, pale and motionless.

Fauchelevent murmured in a voice as faint as a breath:

"He is dead!"

Then he drew himself up and folded his arms so fiercely that his clenched fists struck his shoulders, and he cried:

"So this is how I save his life!"

Then the poor man broke down sobbing. He talked out loud to himself, because it is a mistake to think that talking to oneself is unnatural. Strong emotion often speaks aloud.

"It's Father Mestienne's fault. Why did that fool have to die? Why did he have to give up the ghost at the very moment when no one expected it? He's the one who killed M. Madeleine. Father Madeleine! He's in the coffin. Very convenient. It's all over now. Really, does any of this make sense? Ah, my God, he's dead! Well then, what am I supposed to do with his little girl? What will the fruit-seller say? To think that a man like him could die like this! When I remember how he got himself under that cart! Father Madeleine! Father Madeleine! Pardine! He was suffocating—I said so. He wouldn't believe me. Well, this is a fine mess! He's dead, that good man, the best man among all the good people God ever made! And his little girl! Ah! First of

all, I'm not going back there myself. I'll stay here. After doing a thing like that! What's the use of having two old men if both of them are fools? But first of all, how did he manage to get into the convent? That was where it all began. People ought not to do such things. Father Madeleine! Father Madeleine! Father Madeleine! Madeleine! Monsieur Madeleine! Monsieur le Maire! He can't hear me. Now get out of this mess if you can!"

And he tore at his hair.

In the distance, through the trees, a grating sound could be heard. It was the cemetery gate closing.

Fauchelevent bent over Jean Valjean, and suddenly sprang back, recoiling as far as the narrow space of a grave allowed.

Jean Valjean's eyes were open, fixed on him.

Seeing a corpse is frightening; seeing one come back to life is almost just as frightening. Fauchelevent stood there like stone, pale and shaken, overwhelmed by this rush of emotion, unable to tell whether he was facing a living man or a dead one, and staring at Jean Valjean, who stared back at him.

[Illustration: The Resurrection]

"I fell asleep," said Jean Valjean.

He pushed himself up into a sitting position.

Fauchelevent dropped to his knees.

"Merciful Virgin, how you frightened me!"

Then he jumped to his feet and cried:

“Thank you, Father Madeleine!”

Jean Valjean had only fainted. The fresh air had brought him around.

Joy is what comes when terror recedes. Fauchelevent had almost as much trouble recovering from the shock as Jean Valjean had.

“So you’re not dead! Oh, how clever you are! I called you so much that you came back. When I saw your eyes closed, I said, ‘That’s it, he’s suffocated.’ I would have gone completely mad, mad enough for a straitjacket. They would have shut me up in Bicêtre. What do you think I would have done if you had died? And your little girl? And that fruit-seller—she would never have understood it! The child is put into your arms, and then—the grandfather is dead! What a story! Good saints in heaven, what a tale! Ah, but you’re alive, and that’s what matters most!”

“I’m cold,” said Jean Valjean.

That remark brought Fauchelevent fully back to reality, and it needed to. Even after they had regained their composure, both men were deeply shaken, though they did not quite know it. The place itself filled them with something eerie: the dark confusion it inspired.

“Let’s get out of here quickly,” Fauchelevent exclaimed.

He felt around in his pocket and pulled out a gourd he had brought with him.

“But first, take a drink,” he said.

The flask completed what the fresh air had begun. Jean Valjean swallowed a mouthful of brandy and fully regained his senses.

He climbed out of the coffin and helped Fauchelevent nail the lid back on.

Three minutes later, they were out of the grave.

Besides, Fauchelevent was now perfectly calm. He took his time. The cemetery was closed. There was no danger that the grave-digger Gribier would arrive. That "conscript" was at home, busy looking for his card, and probably having trouble finding it in his room, since it was in Fauchelevent's pocket. Without the card, he could not get back into the cemetery.

Fauchelevent took the shovel, Jean Valjean took the pickaxe, and together they buried the empty coffin.

When the grave was filled in, Fauchelevent said to Jean Valjean:

"Let's go. I'll keep the shovel; you take the mattock."

Night was coming on.

Jean Valjean had some trouble moving and walking. He had lain so stiffly in that coffin that he had become a little like a dead man himself. Between those four planks, the stiffness of death had seemed to take hold of him. He had to thaw out, in a sense, after coming from the tomb.

"You're numb," said Fauchelevent. "It's a pity I have a bad leg, or we could be moving along at a good pace."

“Bah!” Jean Valjean replied. “Four steps will bring life back into my legs.”

They went on through the paths the hearse had taken. When they reached the closed gate and the porter’s lodge, Fauchelevent, holding the gravedigger’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 working out!” said Fauchelevent. “What an excellent idea that was of yours, Father Madeleine!”

They passed through the Vaugirard barrier as easily as could be. Near the cemetery, a shovel and a pickaxe were as good as two passports.

Rue Vaugirard was deserted.

“Father Madeleine,” said Fauchelevent as they walked on, looking up at the houses, “your eyes are better than mine. Show me number 87.”

“Here it is,” said Jean Valjean.

“There’s no one in the street,” said Fauchelevent. “Give me your mattock and wait here a couple of minutes.”

Fauchelevent went into number 87 and climbed all the way to the top, guided by the instinct that always leads a poor man to the garret. In the dark, he knocked on the door of an attic room.

A voice answered, “Come in.”

It was Gribier’s voice.

Fauchelevent opened the door. The gravedigger's room was, like all such miserable places, a bare, cluttered attic. A packing crate—perhaps once a coffin—stood in for a chest of drawers. A butter jar served as a water jug. A straw mattress was the bed. The floor had to do instead of tables and chairs. In one corner, on a torn scrap that had once been part of an old carpet, a thin woman and several children lay huddled together. The whole poverty-stricken room showed signs of having been turned upside down. It looked as though there had been an earthquake meant for that one room alone. The bedding was tossed about, the rags were scattered everywhere, the jug was broken, the mother had clearly been crying, and the children had probably been beaten. Everything showed that someone had searched violently and in a foul temper. It was obvious that the gravedigger had frantically hunted for his card and had blamed everyone in the attic, from the jug to his wife, for losing it. He looked utterly desperate.

But Fauchelevent was too eager to bring this whole affair to an end to pay any attention to the grim side of his success.

He went in and said:

"I've brought back your shovel and pick."

Gribier stared at him in astonishment.

"Is that you, peasant?"

"And tomorrow morning you'll find your card with the cemetery porter."

He set the shovel and mattock down on the floor.

“What does this mean?” Gribier demanded.

“It means you dropped your card out of your pocket. I found it on the ground after you had gone. I buried the corpse. I filled in the grave. I did your work. The porter will give your card back to you, and you won’t have to pay fifteen francs. That’s the whole story, conscript.”

“Thank you, villager!” Gribier cried, beaming. “Next time I’ll pay for the drinks.”

CHAPTER VIII—A SUCCESSFUL QUESTIONING

An hour later, in the darkness of night, two men and a child arrived at No. 62 Rue Petit-Picpus. The older of the two men lifted the knocker and knocked.

They were Fauchelevent, Jean Valjean, and Cosette.

The two old men had gone to pick up Cosette from the fruit seller's shop in the Rue du Chemin-Vert, where Fauchelevent had left her the day before. During those twenty-four hours, Cosette had sat in silent terror, understanding nothing. She shook so badly that she cried. She had neither eaten nor slept. The kind fruit seller had asked her a hundred questions, but all she got in return was the same sad, fixed look. Cosette revealed nothing of what she had seen and heard over the previous two days. She sensed that they were passing through some kind of crisis. She felt deeply that she had to "be good." Who has not felt the absolute force of those two words, spoken in a certain tone into the ear of a frightened child: _Say nothing!_ Fear keeps silent. And besides, no one keeps a secret like a child.

But when, after those grim twenty-four hours, she saw Jean Valjean again, she let out such a cry of joy that anyone thoughtful enough to hear it would have guessed it came from the depths of an abyss.

Fauchelevent belonged to the convent and knew the passwords. Every door opened for him.

So the two frightening problems—how to get out and how to get in—were both solved.

The porter, who had been given his instructions, opened the little servants' door that linked the courtyard to the garden. Twenty years ago, it could still be seen from the street in the wall at the back of the court, opposite the carriage entrance.

The porter let all three of them in through that door, and from there they made their way to the inner private parlor where Fauchelevent had received the prioress's orders the day before.

The prioress was waiting for them, rosary in hand. Beside her stood a vocal mother with her veil lowered.

A single discreet candle lit the parlor—or almost seemed to pretend to light it.

The prioress looked Jean Valjean over. Nothing scrutinizes like lowered eyes.

Then she began to question him:

"You are the brother?"

"Yes, reverend Mother," Fauchelevent replied.

"What is your name?"

Fauchelevent replied:

"Ultime Fauchelevent."

He really had once had a brother named Ultime, and that brother was dead.

“Where are you from?”

Fauchelevent replied:

“From Picquigny, near Amiens.”

“How old are you?”

Fauchelevent replied:

“Fifty.”

“What do you do?”

Fauchelevent replied:

“I’m a gardener.”

“Are you a good Christian?”

Fauchelevent replied:

“Everyone in the family is.”

“Is this your little girl?”

Fauchelevent replied:

“Yes, Reverend Mother.”

“Are you her father?”

Fauchelevent replied:

“Her grandfather.”

The speaking mother said quietly to the prioress,

“He answers well.”

Jean Valjean had not said a single word.

The prioress looked closely at Cosette and said, half under her breath, to the speaking mother:

“She will grow up ugly.”

The two mothers conferred for a few moments in very low voices in the corner of the parlor. Then the prioress turned and said:

“Father Fauvent, you must get another knee-pad with a bell. Two will be needed now.”

So the next day, two bells could be heard in the garden, and the nuns could not resist lifting the corners of their veils. At the far end of the garden, under the trees, two men could be seen digging side by side: Fauvent and another man. It was an enormous event. They broke their silence only enough to say to one another, “He is an assistant gardener.”

The speaking mothers added, “He is Father Fauvent’s brother.”

Jean Valjean was in fact properly installed. He had his knee-pad with a bell; from that point on, he was officially accepted. His name was Ultime Fauchelevent.

The strongest reason for admitting him had been the prioress’s remark about Cosette: “She will grow up ugly.”

The prioress, that expert reader of signs, took an immediate liking to Cosette and admitted her to the school as a charity pupil.

There was nothing illogical about this.

There is a perfectly strict logic to it. It is useless to ban mirrors from a convent; women are still aware of their own faces. And girls who know they are beautiful do not easily become nuns. Since the calling is embraced less willingly in proportion to their good looks, more can be hoped for from the plain than from the pretty. Hence the strong preference for unattractive girls.

This whole adventure greatly increased the importance of good old Fauchelevent. He achieved a threefold success: with Jean Valjean, whom he had saved and sheltered; with the gravedigger Gribier, who said to himself, "He saved me from that fine"; and with the convent, which, thanks to him, was able to keep Mother Crucifixion's coffin beneath the altar, evade Caesar, and satisfy God. There was a coffin with a body in the Petit-Picpus, and a coffin without a body in the Vaugirard cemetery. Public order had no doubt been seriously disturbed by this, but no one knew it.

As for the convent, it was deeply grateful to Fauchelevent. He became its most devoted servant and its most valuable gardener. At the archbishop's next visit, the prioress told his Grace the whole story, half confessing and half taking pride in what she had done. As he left the convent, the archbishop spoke of it approvingly, in a whisper, to M. de Latil, Monsieur's confessor, who later became Archbishop of Reims and a Cardinal. Admiration for Fauchelevent spread widely, and eventually reached Rome. We have seen a note from the reigning Pope at the time, Leo XII, addressed to one of his relatives, a Monsignor attached to the Nuncio's office in Paris,

who, like the Pope himself, bore the name Della Genga. It included these lines: “It appears that there is in a convent in Paris an excellent gardener, who is also a holy man, named Fauvent.” None of this triumph ever reached Fauchelevent in his hut. He went on grafting, weeding, and covering his melon beds, never suspecting his own merits or sanctity. He was no more aware of his fame than a Durham or Surrey bull whose portrait appears in the London Illustrated News with the caption: “Bull which carried off the prize at the Cattle Show.”

CHAPTER IX—SECLUDED

Cosette kept silent in the convent.

It was only natural for Cosette to believe she was Jean Valjean's daughter. Besides, since she knew nothing, she had nothing to tell, and in any case she would not have said anything. As we have already noted, nothing teaches children silence like unhappiness. Cosette had suffered so much that she was afraid of everything, even speaking or breathing. So often, a single word had brought disaster down on her. She had only just begun to recover her confidence since coming to live with Jean Valjean. She soon grew used to the convent. The only thing she missed was Catherine, but she did not dare mention it. Once, however, she said to Jean Valjean, "Father, if I had known, I would have brought her with me."

When Cosette became a pupil at the convent, she had to put on the school uniform. Jean Valjean managed to have the clothes she took off returned to him. They were the same mourning outfit he had made her wear when she left the Thénardiers' inn. Even now, it was not very worn. Jean Valjean locked these clothes away, along with the stockings and shoes, in a small valise, packed with camphor and all the fragrant substances convents are full of. He had somehow managed to get this little case. He placed it on a chair near his bed and always kept the key on him. One day Cosette asked him, "Father, what is in that box that smells so good?"

Father Fauchelevent received other rewards for his good deed besides the glory we have just mentioned, a glory he knew nothing about. First, it made him happy. Next, he had much less work, because it was now shared. Finally, since he was very fond of snuff, he found M. Madeleine's presence especially useful: he used three times as much as before, and in far greater comfort, since M. Madeleine paid for it.

The nuns did not use the name Ultime; they called Jean Valjean _the other Fauvent_.

If these holy women had possessed anything like Javert's sharp eye, they would eventually have noticed that whenever some errand had to be done outside for the sake of the garden, it was always the elder Fauchelevent—the old, infirm, lame man—who went, and never the other one. But perhaps eyes constantly fixed on God do not know how to observe such things, or perhaps they were more occupied with watching one another. In any case, they paid no attention to it.

It was also fortunate for Jean Valjean that he stayed hidden and never went out. Javert kept watch over the neighborhood for more than a month.

For Jean Valjean, this convent was like an island surrounded by abysses. From then on, those four walls were his whole world. There he saw enough of the sky to keep his peace of mind, and enough of Cosette to remain happy.

A very gentle life began for him.

He lived in the old hut at the end of the garden with Fauchelevent. This shack, built from scraps and still standing in 1845, consisted, as the reader already knows, of three rooms, all completely bare, with nothing in them but the walls. The main room had been assigned to M. Madeleine by Father Fauchelevent—despite Jean Valjean's useless objections. The only decorations on its walls, besides the two nails used to hang the kneecap and the basket, were a Royalist banknote from '93 fastened above the chimney-piece, of which the following is an exact facsimile:

[Illustration: Royalist Bank-note]

This piece of Vendean paper money had been nailed to the wall by the previous 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 once been a tree-pruner, and he was glad to find himself a gardener again. As the reader will remember, he knew all sorts of agricultural methods and remedies. He put that knowledge to good use. Nearly all the trees in the orchard were wild and had never been grafted. He budded them and made them bear excellent fruit.

Cosette was allowed to spend an hour with him every day. The sisters were sad, and he was kind, so the child naturally compared them and came to adore him. At the appointed time, she would run to the hut. When she stepped into that humble little cabin, it felt as though she brought paradise with her. Jean Valjean came alive, and his happiness grew as he saw how

happy he made Cosette. The joy we give others has this lovely quality: instead of fading, as reflections do, it comes back to us brighter than before. During recreation, Jean Valjean watched her from a distance as she ran and played, and he could pick out her laugh from all the others.

For Cosette laughed now.

Cosette's face had changed as well, at least to some degree. The sadness had left it. A smile is like sunshine; it drives winter from a human face.

When recreation ended and Cosette went back inside, Jean Valjean would look up at the windows of her classroom, and at night he would get up to look at the windows of her dormitory.

God has his own ways, moreover; the convent, like Cosette, helped sustain and complete the Bishop's work in Jean Valjean. It is certain that virtue stands next to pride on one side. There is a bridge there built by the devil. Jean Valjean had been, perhaps without knowing it, fairly close to that side and that bridge when Providence placed him in the convent of Petit-Picpus. As long as he compared himself only to the Bishop, he saw himself as unworthy and remained humble. But for some time he had been comparing himself to people in general, and pride was beginning to grow. Who knows? He might gradually have fallen back into hatred.

The convent stopped him on that downward road.

This was the second place of captivity he had known. In his youth, at what had been for him the beginning of life, and then

again quite recently, he had seen another—a dreadful place, a terrible place, whose harshness had always seemed to him the injustice of justice and the crime of the law. Now, after the galleys, he saw the cloister. And as he reflected that he had once been part of the galleys and was now, in a sense, only an observer of the cloister, he set the two side by side in his mind with deep unease.

Sometimes he folded his arms, leaned on his hoe, and slowly drifted down the endless spirals of daydreaming.

He remembered his former companions and how miserable they were. They rose at dawn and worked until night. They were barely allowed to sleep. They lay on camp beds with mattresses no thicker than two inches, in rooms heated only during the harshest months of the year. They wore dreadful red blouses. As a great favor, they were given linen trousers in the hottest weather and a woolen carter's blouse when it was bitterly cold. They drank no wine and ate no meat, except when they were sent on "fatigue duty." They lived without names, known only by numbers, and in a sense became numbers themselves, with downcast eyes, lowered voices, shorn heads, under the cudgel and under disgrace.

Then his thoughts turned back to the people before his eyes.

These people also lived with shorn heads, downcast eyes, and lowered voices—not in disgrace, but surrounded by the world's mockery; not with their backs bruised by the cudgel, but with their shoulders torn by their discipline. Their names, too, had disappeared from among men; they existed only under severe

titles. They never ate meat and never drank wine. They often went without food until evening. They were dressed, not in a red blouse, but in a black woolen shroud, heavy in summer and thin in winter, with no power to add anything to it or take anything away; without even, according to the season, the relief of a linen garment or a woolen cloak. For six months of the year they wore serge chemises that gave them fever. They lived, not in rooms heated only in severe cold, but in cells where no fire was ever lit. 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 labor, in the exhaustion of their first sleep, just as they were sinking into deep rest and beginning to grow warm, they had to wake themselves, get up, and go pray in an icy, gloomy chapel, kneeling on the stone floor.

On certain days, each of them in turn had to remain for twelve straight hours either kneeling or lying face down on the pavement, with arms stretched out in the shape of a cross.

The others were men; these were women.

What had those men done? They had stolen, raped, looted, murdered, and assassinated. They were bandits, counterfeiters, poisoners, arsonists, killers, even parricides. What had these women done? Nothing at all.

On one side were highway robbery, fraud, deceit, violence, lust, homicide, every kind of sacrilege, every form of crime; on the other, only one thing: innocence.

Perfect innocence, almost lifted toward heaven in some mysterious assumption, held to the earth by virtue, and already

sharing something of heaven through holiness.

On one side were whispered exchanges about crimes; on the other, faults confessed aloud. And what crimes! And what faults!

On one side, foul corruption; on the other, an indescribable fragrance. On one side, a moral plague, hidden from view, confined under the range of cannon, and literally feeding on its infected victims; on the other, the pure flame of all souls burning on the same hearth. There, darkness; here, shadow—but a shadow lit with gleams, and those gleams full of radiance.

Two strongholds of slavery; but in the first, release was possible, a legal limit was always somewhere in sight, and beyond that, escape. In the second, it was endless. The only hope, far off at the edge of the future, was that faint light of liberty men call death.

In the first, men were bound only by chains; in the second, they were chained by faith.

What came out of the first? A vast curse: gnashing of teeth, hatred, savage despair, a cry of rage against human society, a sneer at heaven.

What came out of the second? Blessing and love.

And in these two places, so alike and yet so different, these two kinds of beings, themselves so profoundly different, were undergoing the same process: expiation.

Jean Valjean fully understood the expiation of the first group—that personal expiation, the expiation a man undergoes for himself. But he could not understand the expiation of the others, of creatures without blame or stain, and he shuddered as he asked himself: expiation for what? What expiation?

A voice in his conscience answered: “The noblest form of human generosity is to atone for others.”

Here, we set aside all personal interpretation. We are only the narrator. We place ourselves at Jean Valjean’s point of view and convey what he feels.

Before him stood the sublime height of self-sacrifice, the greatest degree of virtue possible: innocence forgiving people for their sins and atoning in their place; servitude willingly accepted, torture endured, punishment claimed by souls that had not sinned, in order to spare souls that had fallen; love for humanity absorbed into love for God, yet still keeping its own distinct, mediating nature; gentle, fragile beings bearing the suffering of the punished while wearing the smile of the rewarded.

And he remembered that he had actually dared to complain!

Often, in the middle of the night, he would rise and listen to the grateful song of those innocent creatures, burdened by harsh discipline. His blood ran cold at the thought that those who were justly punished lifted their voices to heaven only in blasphemy, while he, miserable man that he was, had shaken his fist at God.

One striking thing made him think deeply, as if Providence itself were whispering a warning: he had scaled that wall, crossed those barriers, accepted that danger even at the risk of death, made that painful and difficult climb, and gone through all those efforts to escape one place of atonement—only to enter this one. Was it a sign of his destiny? This house was also a prison, and it bore a sad resemblance to the one he had fled, yet he had never imagined anything like it.

Once again he saw grates, bolts, and iron bars—but who were they guarding? Angels.

These high walls, which he had once seen enclosing tigers, he now saw enclosing lambs.

This was a place of atonement, not punishment; and yet it was even harsher, darker, and more merciless than the other.

These virgins bore an even heavier burden than the convicts. A cold, cruel wind—the same wind that had chilled his youth—passed through the barred, locked grating of the vultures; but an even harsher, sharper wind blew through the cage of these doves.

Why?

Whenever he thought about these things, he was completely overcome with wonder at this sublime mystery.

In these reflections, his pride disappeared. He examined his own heart from every angle and felt how small he was, and often he wept. Everything that had come into his life over the past six months had led him back to the Bishop’s holy

teachings: Cosette through love, the convent through humility.

Sometimes in the evening twilight, at an hour when the garden was empty, he could be seen kneeling in the middle of the path that ran beside the chapel, before the window through which he had looked on the night of his arrival. He faced the place where, as he knew, the sister was making reparation, lying prostrate in prayer. So he prayed there, kneeling before the sister.

It was as if he did not dare kneel directly before God.

Everything around him—the peaceful garden, the fragrant flowers, the children with their happy cries, the grave and simple women, the silent cloister—slowly sank into him. Little by little, his soul took on the silence of the cloister, the fragrance of the flowers, the simplicity of the women, and the joy of the children. Then he reflected that two houses of God had received him, one after the other, at two decisive moments in his life: the first when every door was shut and human society had cast him out; the second when human society was once again hunting him down and the galleys seemed ready to swallow him again. Without the first, he would have fallen back into crime; without the second, into despair.

His whole heart softened with gratitude, and his love kept growing.

Many years passed in this way, and Cosette grew up.

Volume III Marius

[Illustration: Frontispiece Volume Three]

[Illustration: Titlepage Volume Three]

CHAPTER I—PARVULUS

Paris has its child, just as the forest has its bird; the bird is called the sparrow, and the child is called the gamin.

Bring together these two ideas—one full of fire, the other full of dawn. Strike these two sparks against each other, Paris and childhood, and a small creature springs out. _Homuncio_, as Plautus would say.

This small creature is cheerful. He does not have food every day, and yet he goes to the theater every evening when he can. He has no shirt on his back, no shoes on his feet, no roof over his head; he is like the flies of heaven, which have none of these things. He is between seven and thirteen years old. He lives in gangs, wanders the streets, sleeps out in the open, wears an old pair of his father's trousers hanging below his heels, an old hat from some other father hanging below his ears, and a single yellow suspender. He runs, lurks, rummages, wastes time, blackens pipes, swears like a convict, hangs around wine-shops, knows thieves, calls loose women _thou_, speaks slang, sings obscene songs, and yet has no evil in his heart. That is because there is a pearl there: innocence; and pearls do not dissolve in mud. As long as a human being is still a child, God wills that he remain innocent.

If you were to ask that enormous city, "What is this?" she would answer, "It is my little one."

CHAPTER II—SOME OF HIS DISTINCTIVE TRAITS

The gamin—the street Arab—of Paris is the dwarf belonging to the giant.

Let’s not overstate it: this street urchin sometimes has a shirt, but in that case he has only one. He sometimes has shoes, but they have no soles. He sometimes has a place to sleep, and he is fond of it because he finds his mother there; but he prefers the street, because there he finds freedom. He has his own games and his own small acts of mischief, all rooted in a hatred of the bourgeois. He has his own expressions: to be dead is "to eat dandelions by the root." He has his own jobs: calling hackney-coaches, lowering carriage steps, setting up ways for people to cross from one side of a street to the other in heavy rain—which he calls "making the bridge of arts"—shouting out speeches delivered by the authorities in favor of the French people, and clearing out the cracks in the pavement. He also has his own currency, made up of all the little scraps of worked copper found in the public streets. This curious money, called loques—rags—has a fixed and carefully regulated circulation in this little Bohemia of children.

Lastly, he has his own fauna, which he studies closely in the corners: the ladybird, the death’s-head plant-louse, the daddy-long-legs, and "the devil," a black insect that threatens by twisting its tail, armed with two horns. He also has his fabulous monster, which has scales under its belly but is not a lizard, pustules on its back but is not a toad, and lives in the

recesses of old lime-kilns and dried-up wells. It is black, hairy, sticky, and crawls sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly. It makes no sound, but it has a look, and it is so terrible that no one has ever seen it. He calls this monster "the deaf thing." Hunting for these "deaf things" among the stones is a fierce kind of delight. Another pleasure is suddenly lifting a paving-stone and looking at the wood-lice underneath. Every part of Paris is known for the interesting treasures to be found there. There are earwigs in the timber-yards of the Ursulines, millepeds in the Pantheon, and tadpoles in the ditches of the Champs-de-Mars.

When it comes to sharp sayings, this child has as many as Talleyrand. He is no less cynical, but he is more honest. He has a certain indescribable, unexpected cheerfulness; with his wild laughter, he unsettles the shopkeeper’s composure. He moves boldly from high comedy to farce.

A funeral goes by. Among the people following the dead is a doctor. “Hey!” some street urchin shouts. “Since when have doctors been expected to carry home their own work?”

In another crowd, a solemn man decked out with spectacles and trinkets turns around indignantly. “You scoundrel, you’ve grabbed my wife by the waist!”—“Me, sir? Go ahead and search me!”

CHAPTER III—HE IS CHARMING

In the evening, thanks to a few sous, which he always manages to get, the homuncio– slips into a theater. The moment he crosses that magical threshold, he is transformed. He was the street Arab; now he becomes the titi.18 Theaters are like ships turned upside down, with the keel in the air. It is in that keel that the titis crowd together. The titi is to the gamin what the moth is to the larva: the same creature, but now with wings, now able to soar. It is enough for him simply to be there—with his shining happiness, his gift for enthusiasm and delight, his applause like the beating of wings—to turn that cramped, dark, foul-smelling, filthy, unhealthy, ugly, wretched keel into a place called Paradise.

Give a person what is unnecessary and deny him what he needs, and you have the gamin.

The gamin is not without a feel for literature. His taste tends in a direction that, we must say with due regret, is not exactly classical. He is not naturally academic. For example, the popularity of Mademoiselle Mars with that little audience of unruly children was mixed with a note of irony. The gamin called her Mademoiselle Muche_—"hide yourself."

This creature shouts, mocks, laughs at everything, and fights. He wears rags like a child and tatters like a philosopher. He fishes in the sewer and hunts in the cesspool. He draws laughter out of filth. With his wit he stirs up the public squares.

He grins and bites, whistles and sings, yells and shrieks. He mixes Alleluia with Matanturlurette. He chants every kind of tune, from the De Profundis to the Jack-pudding. He finds things without looking for them. He knows what he does not know. He is Spartan even to the point of theft, mad in his wisdom, lyrical in his squalor. He would squat on Olympus. He wallows in the dung heap and comes out of it covered with stars. The Paris gamin is Rabelais in boyhood.

He is not satisfied with his trousers unless they have a watch pocket.

He is not easily surprised, and even less easily frightened. He turns superstitions into songs. He punctures exaggeration, mocks mysteries, sticks out his tongue at ghosts, strips the poetry from pompous things, and brings caricature into epic excess. It is not that he is unimaginative—far from it. But he replaces solemn visions with comic spectacle. If Adamastor appeared before him, the street Arab would say, “Hey there! The bogeyman!”

CHAPTER IV—HE MAY BE USEFUL

Paris begins with the idler and ends with the street Arab, two kinds of being that no other city can produce: passive acceptance, content merely to watch, and inexhaustible initiative; Prudhomme and Fouillou. Only Paris contains this in its natural history. The whole monarchy is contained in the lounger; the whole of anarchy in the gamin.

This pale child of the Parisian faubourgs lives and grows, forms connections, and "becomes supple" through suffering, in the midst of social realities and human life, as a thoughtful witness. He thinks he is careless, but he is not. He watches, and he is always on the edge of laughter; he is also on the edge of something else. Whoever you are, if your name is Prejudice, Abuse, Ignorance, Oppression, Iniquity, Despotism, Injustice, Fanaticism, or Tyranny, beware of the staring gamin.

The little fellow will grow up.

What clay is he made of? Whatever mud happens to be at hand first. A handful of dirt, a breath, and there is Adam. All it takes is for a God to pass by. A God has always passed over the street Arab. Fortune works on this tiny being. By "fortune" we mean chance, at least to some extent. That pygmy, kneaded out of common earth—ignorant, uneducated, flighty, vulgar, low—what will he become? An Ionian or a Boeotian? Wait: currit rota_. The Spirit of Paris, that demon that creates children of chance and men of destiny, reverses the process of the Latin

potter and makes an amphora out of a jug.

CHAPTER V—HIS BOUNDARIES

The gamin loves the city, but he also loves solitude, for there is something of the sage in him. _Urbis amator_, like Fuscus; _ruris amator_, like Flaccus.

To wander around and think—to idle, in other words—is, to a philosopher, an excellent way to spend time. This is especially true in that somewhat illegitimate kind of landscape that surrounds certain great cities, Paris above all: not exactly beautiful, but strange, made up of two different worlds. To study the suburbs is to study an amphibious creature. It is where the trees end and the rooftops begin; where grass gives way to pavement; where furrows end and shops begin; where wheel ruts give way to human passions; where the murmur of nature ends and the noise of humanity begins. That is what makes it so fascinating.

And so, in these rather unattractive places, forever marked by the passing stroller with the word _melancholy_, the dreamer takes his walks that seem to have no purpose.

The man writing these lines has long wandered along the outer edges of Paris, and they are filled for him with deep memories. The closely cropped grass, the stony paths, the chalky ground, the pools, the harsh sameness of wasteland and fallow fields, the early market-garden plants suddenly appearing in a hollow, that mixture of the wild and the urban, those vast deserted corners where army drummers practice loudly and create a kind of stammering echo of battle, those places that are hermit-like by day and murderous by night, that awkward windmill turning

in the breeze, the quarry hoists, the tea gardens at the corners of cemeteries, the mysterious charm of great dark walls cutting sharply across huge, hazy stretches of land flooded with sunlight and alive with butterflies—all of it drew him.

Almost everyone knows those strange places: the Glacière, the Cunette, the grim wall of Grenelle pocked with bullet marks, 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 that is now used only for growing mushrooms and is covered at ground level by a trapdoor made of rotten planks. The campagna of Rome suggests one idea; the outskirts of Paris suggest another. If, in a stretch of country, we see only fields, houses, or trees, we are seeing only the surface. Every aspect of things is a thought of God. The place where open country meets a city always carries a sharp, haunting melancholy. There, nature and humanity speak to you at the same time. It is there that local peculiarities reveal themselves.

Anyone who, like us, has wandered through these lonely places beside our faubourgs—these regions that might be called the limbo of Paris—has seen, here and there, in the emptiest spot and at the most unexpected moment, behind a thin hedge or in the corner of some gloomy wall, groups of children in noisy clusters: filthy, muddy, dusty, ragged, dishevelled, playing hide-and-seek, with cornflowers on their heads. They are all little ones who have slipped away from poor families. The outer boulevard is where they breathe; the suburbs belong to them. There they are always playing truant. There they innocently sing

their stock of dirty songs. There they are—or rather, there they live—far from every eye, in the gentle light of May or June, kneeling around a hole in the ground, flicking marbles with their thumbs, arguing over half-farthings, careless, flighty, free, and happy. But the moment they catch sight of you, they remember that they have a trade and must earn their living, and they offer to sell you an old woollen stocking full of cockchafers or a bunch of lilacs. Encounters with these strange children are among the charming and, at the same time, painful graces of the outskirts of Paris.

Sometimes, among the crowd of boys, there are little girls—are they their sisters?—already almost young women: thin, feverish, with sunburned hands covered in freckles, crowned with poppies and heads of rye, cheerful and worn-looking, barefoot. You can see them greedily eating cherries in the wheat fields. In the evening, you can hear them laughing. These groups, brightly lit in the full blaze of noon or dimly visible at twilight, hold a thoughtful man’s attention for a long time, and these images blend into his dreams.

Paris—its center, its outskirts, its outer edge—that is the whole earth to those children. They never go beyond it. They can no more escape the air of Paris than fish can escape the water. To them, nothing exists two leagues past 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. There the universe ends.

CHAPTER VI—A LITTLE HISTORY

At the time when the events of this book take place—a time not so very far removed from our own—there was not, as there is today, a policeman on every street corner, a benefit whose value there is no time to discuss here. Homeless children were everywhere in Paris. Statistics show that, in those years, police patrols picked up an average of two hundred and sixty homeless children each year from vacant lots, half-built houses, and the spaces beneath bridge arches. One of these shelters, which later became famous, produced "the swallows of the bridge of Arcola." This, moreover, is the most disastrous of social signs. The crimes of the man begin in the wandering life of the child.

Still, let us make an exception for Paris. Relatively speaking, and despite the memory we have just recalled, the exception is fair. In any other great city, the wandering child is a ruined man. Almost everywhere, a child left on his own is sacrificed, abandoned to a kind of fatal plunge into public vice that eats away his honesty and conscience. But the street boy of Paris—we insist on this point—however damaged and disfigured on the outside, remains almost untouched within. It is a magnificent fact, and one clearly shown in the splendid integrity of our popular revolutions, that a certain incorruptibility comes from the very idea that fills the air of Paris, as salt fills the water of the sea. To breathe the air of Paris is to preserve the soul.

What we have just said does nothing to lessen the anguish one feels whenever one meets one of these children, around whom one seems to see the drifting threads of a broken family. In the civilization of our own day, incomplete as it still is, it is not at all unusual to see these shattered families spill into the darkness, scarcely knowing what has become of their children, and letting their own flesh and blood fall onto the public road. From this come these obscure destinies. There is even a phrase for this sad reality: “to be cast on the pavements of Paris.”

It should also be said that the old monarchy did nothing to discourage this abandonment of children. A touch of Egypt and Bohemia in the lower depths suited the upper ranks and served the purposes of the powerful. Hatred of education for the children of the people was a doctrine. What use are “half-lights”? That was the password. And the wandering child is the natural result of the ignorant child.

Beyond that, the monarchy sometimes needed children, and when it did, it swept them up from the streets.

As far back as Louis XIV, the king understandably wanted to build a navy. The idea itself was sound. But look at how he went about it. You cannot have a fleet if all you have are sailing ships, those playthings of the wind, and no vessels that can go where they are needed under their own power, by oars or by steam, to tow them when necessary. In those days, galleys served the same purpose for the navy that steamships serve today. So galleys were needed. But a galley moves only with galley slaves; therefore, galley slaves were needed too. Colbert had provincial officials and the parliaments produce as many

convicts as possible. The magistrates were very accommodating. If a man kept his hat on during a procession, that was treated as a Huguenot gesture, and he was sent to the galleys. If a child was found in the street, and he was fifteen years old and did not know where he would sleep, he was sent to the galleys. A great reign; a great century.

Under Louis XV, children vanished in Paris. The police seized them, and no one knew for what dark purpose. In terror, people whispered monstrous suspicions about the king's purple baths. Barbier speaks of these things with startling simplicity. Sometimes, when the guards' exempts were short of children, they took children who had fathers. The fathers, driven to despair, attacked the exempts. Then parliament stepped in and had someone hanged. Whom? The exempts? No—the fathers.

CHAPTER VII—THE GAMIN SHOULD HAVE A PLACE IN THE CLASSIFICATIONS OF INDIA

The street urchins of Paris almost form a caste of their own. One might nearly say: not everyone who wants to belong to it can.

The word _gamin_ first appeared in print in 1834, and from literature it passed into everyday speech. It first showed up in a short work called _Claude Gueux_. The shock was intense. The word entered common use.

The things that make street boys admire one another are wildly varied. We knew one who was highly respected and greatly admired because he had seen a man fall from the top of the tower of Notre-Dame. Another was admired because he had managed to get into the back courtyard where the statues from the dome of the Invalides had been stored for a time, and had "prigged" some lead from them. A third had seen a stagecoach overturn. Yet another was important because he "knew" a soldier who had nearly put out a citizen's eye.

This explains that famous cry of a Paris street boy, a profound outburst that the common crowd laughs at without understanding: _Good God! What rotten luck I have! To think I've never yet seen anybody fall from a fifth-floor window!_ (_I have_ pronounced _I'ave_ and _fifth_ pronounced _fift'_.)

This saying of a peasant is certainly a good one: “Father So-and-So, your wife died of her illness; why didn’t you send for the doctor?” “What would you have, sir? We poor people _die by ourselves_.” But if the peasant’s whole passivity is contained in that remark, then the whole free-thinking anarchy of the brat from the faubourgs is surely contained in this one. A man condemned to death is listening to his confessor in the tumbrel. The child of Paris cries out: “He’s talking to his black cap! Oh, the sneak!”

A certain boldness in matters of religion is part of what marks the gamin. Being free-thinking is an important point.

Being present at executions is, to him, a duty. He turns up at the guillotine and laughs. He gives it all kinds of nicknames: the End of the Soup, the Growler, the Mother in Blue (the sky), the Last Mouthful, and so on. So that he misses nothing, he climbs walls, pulls himself onto balconies, scrambles up trees, hangs from railings, and clings to chimneys. The gamin is born a roofer just as he is born a sailor. A roof frightens him no more than a mast does. No festival can compare with an execution in the Place de Grève. Samson and the Abbé Montès are the truly popular names. They jeer at the condemned man to spur him on. Sometimes they admire him. When Lacenaire was a gamin, he saw the dreadful Dautin die bravely and said words that hinted at his future: “I was jealous of him.” In the brotherhood of gamins, Voltaire is unknown, but Papavoine is not. “Politicians” and murderers are mixed together in the same legend. They have a tradition about everyone’s last piece of clothing. They know that Tolleron wore a fireman’s cap, Avril an otter-skin cap,

Losvel a round hat, that old Delaporte was bald and bareheaded, that Castaing was rosy and very handsome, that Bories had a small romantic beard, that Jean Martin kept on his suspenders, and that Lecouffé and his mother quarreled. “Don’t blame each other for your basket!” a gamin shouted to them. Another boy, trying to catch sight of Debacker as he passed and being too short to see over the crowd, spotted the lantern on the quay and climbed it. A gendarme standing opposite frowned. “Let me climb up, m’sieu le gendarme,” said the gamin. Then, to soften the authorities, he added: “I won’t fall.” “I don’t care if you do,” the gendarme shot back.

Among the brotherhood of gamins, a memorable accident counts for a great deal. You rise very high in their esteem if you happen to cut yourself badly enough to go “right to the bone.”

A strong fist is no small source of respect. One of the things the gamin most likes to say is: “I’m tough and strong, just you see!” Being left-handed makes you an object of envy. A squint is held in high regard.

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

In summer, he turns himself into a frog. In the evening, as night falls, near the bridges of Austerlitz and Jena, he dives headfirst into the Seine from the tops of coal wagons and from the washerwomen's boats, committing every possible offense against modesty and police regulations. Even so, the police keep watch over him, and that creates a highly dramatic situation which once produced a brotherly and memorable cry. Around 1830, that cry was famous: a strategic warning passed from gamin to gamin. It scans like a line of Homer, with an intonation as impossible to describe as the Eleusinian chant of the Panathenaea, and in it one hears 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—can read. Sometimes he can write. He can always scribble. Without hesitation, and by some mysterious kind of mutual instruction that no one can explain, he picks up every talent that may be useful to the public. From 1815 to 1830, he imitated the cry of the turkey; from 1830 to 1848, he drew pears on the walls. One summer evening, when Louis Philippe was walking home, he saw a little fellow no higher than his knee, sweating as he

climbed up to draw a gigantic pear in charcoal on one of the pillars of the gate at Neuilly. The King, with the good nature he had inherited 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 kind of violence delights him. He hates “the curés.” One day, in the Rue de l’Université, one of these young scamps was thumbing his nose at the carriage gate of No. 69. “Why are you doing that at the gate?” a passer-by asked. The boy answered: “There is a curé there.” And indeed, that was where the Papal Nuncio lived.

Still, whatever Voltairian spirit the little gamin may have, if he gets the chance to become a chorister, he may very well accept it, and in that case he serves at mass politely enough. There are two things that forever tantalize him, things he always longs for and never manages to achieve: overthrowing the government, and getting his trousers mended.

The Paris street boy, at his best, knows every policeman in the city and can put a name to any face he happens to see. He can list them all from memory. He studies their habits and keeps mental notes on each one. He reads the police as easily as an open book. He will tell you, smoothly and without hesitation: “This one is a traitor; that one is spiteful; another is great; another is ridiculous.” In his mouth, all those words—traitor, spiteful, great, ridiculous—carry a special meaning. One officer acts as though he owns the Pont-Neuf and stops people from walking along the ledge outside the parapet. Another is obsessed with pulling people’s ears. And so on.

CHAPTER IX—THE OLD SOUL OF GAUL

There was something of that boy in Poquelin, the fish-market man's son; Beaumarchais had some of it too. Street-boy mischief is one shade of the Gallic spirit. Mixed with good sense, it can sometimes sharpen it, the way alcohol strengthens wine. Sometimes, though, it becomes a flaw. Homer repeats himself endlessly, certainly; one might say that Voltaire plays the street boy. Camille Desmoulins came from the faubourgs. Championnet, who treated miracles with blunt contempt, rose from the pavements of Paris. As a little boy, he had flooded the porticos of Saint-Jean de Beauvais and Saint-Étienne du Mont. He had even spoken familiarly to the shrine of Sainte-Geneviève, ordering it to command the phial of Saint Januarius.

The Paris street boy is respectful, ironic, and insolent all at once. His teeth are bad because he is poorly fed and his stomach suffers, but his eyes are beautiful because he is clever. If Jehovah himself appeared, he would hop up the steps of paradise on one foot. He is good with his fists. He is capable of every kind of belief. He plays in the gutter, then rises up in revolt. His boldness lasts even under grapeshot. He was a rascal; now he is a hero. Like the little Theban, he shakes the lion's skin from himself. Barra, the drummer boy, was a Paris street boy. He shouts, "Forward!" as the horse in Scripture says "Vah!" and in an instant he has gone from little brat to giant.

This child of the mud is also a child of the ideal. Measure the span of those wings that stretch from Molière to Barra.

In short, in a single word, the street boy is a creature who makes fun for himself because he is unhappy.

CHAPTER X—BEHOLD PARIS, BEHOLD MAN

To sum it up once again, the Paris street boy of today, like the gr_æculus_ of ancient Rome, is the child of the masses with the old world’s wrinkles already marked on his brow.

The gamin is both a gift to the nation and a sickness within it; a sickness that must be cured. How? With light.

Light makes people whole.

Light sets things aflame.

Every generous social illumination comes from science, literature, art, and education. Form men, form men. Give them light so that they may give you warmth. Sooner or later, the great question of universal education will come forward with the irresistible force of absolute truth. Then those who govern under the guidance of the French idea will have to choose: the children of France or the gamins of Paris; flames in the light or will-o’-the-wisps in the dark.

The gamin is the expression of Paris, and Paris is the expression of the world.

For Paris is a complete world in itself. Paris is the high point of the human race. This immense city compresses both dead customs and living ones into a single view. To see Paris is to feel that you are looking down into the depths of all history, with heaven and the stars shining through the gaps. Paris has its capital, the Town-Hall; its Parthenon, Notre-Dame; its Mount

Aventine, the Faubourg Saint-Antoine; its Asinarium, the Sorbonne; its Pantheon, the Pantheon; its Via Sacra, the Boulevard des Italiens; its temple of the winds, public opinion; and it replaces the Gemoniæ with 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 in Paris. The fishwoman of Dumarsais can answer back to the herb-seller of Euripides. The discobolus 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 feel perfectly at home among the bric-à-brac merchants. Vincennes could seize Socrates in its fist just as the Agora could imprison Diderot. Grimod de la Reynière discovered larded roast beef just as Curtillus invented roast hedgehog. We see the trapeze that appears in Plautus return beneath the vault of the Arc de l'Etoile. The sword-eater of Pœcilus, encountered by Apuleius, becomes a sword-swallower on the Pont-Neuf. The nephew of Rameau and Curculio the parasite belong together. Ergasilus could easily be introduced to Cambacères by d'Aigrefeuille. The four dandies of Rome—Alcesimarchus, Phœdromus, Diabolus, and Argyrippus—come down from Courtille in Labatut's posting-chaise. Aulus Gellius would no more stop in front of Congrio than Charles Nodier would in front of Punchinello. Marto is not a tigress, but Pardalisca was not a dragon. Pantolabus the joker mocks Nomentanus the glutton in the Café Anglais. Hermogenus is a tenor in the Champs-Élysées, and around him Thracius the beggar, dressed like Bobèche, passes

the hat. The bore who catches you by the buttonhole in the Tuileries makes you repeat, after two thousand years, Thesprion's cry: _Quis properantem me prehendit pallio? _ The wine of Surêne is a parody of the wine of Alba. The red border of Desaugiers balances the great slashing style of Balatro. Père-Lachaise, under the night rain, gives off the same glimmers as the Esquiliæ. And the poor man's grave, bought for five years, is surely the equivalent of the slave's hive-like coffin.

Look for something Paris does not have. The vat of Trophonius holds nothing that is not also in Mesmer's tub. Ergaphilas lives again in Cagliostro. The Brahmin Vâsaphantâ is reborn in the Comte de Saint-Germain. The cemetery of Saint-Médard performs miracles every bit as well as the Mosque of Oumoumié at Damascus.

Paris has its own Æsop-Mayeux, and its own Canidia in Mademoiselle Lenormand. It is frightened, like Delphos, by the blazing realities of vision. It makes tables turn, just as Dodona made tripods do so. It puts the grisette on the throne, as Rome once put the courtesan there. And, all things considered, if Louis XV is worse than Claudian, Madame Dubarry is better than Messalina. Paris brings together, in an unprecedented type that has existed and that we ourselves have brushed past, Grecian nudity, the Hebraic ulcer, and the Gascon pun. It mixes Diogenes, Job, and Jack-pudding. It dresses a spectre in old issues of the _Constitutional_ and produces Chodruc Duclos.

Although Plutarch says, _the tyrant never grows old_, Rome, under Sylla as under Domitian, submitted and willingly watered its wine. The Tiber was a Lethe, if we are to believe the

somewhat doctrinaire praise Varus Vibiscus gave it: _Contra Gracchos Tiberim habemus, Bibere Tiberim, id est seditionem oblivisci_. Paris drinks a million litres of water a day, but that does not keep it from sometimes sounding the general alarm and ringing the tocsin.

With that one exception, Paris is good-natured. It welcomes everything with a kind of royal ease. It is not overly choosy about its Venus; its Callipyge is a Hottentot. If something makes it laugh, it forgives it. Ugliness amuses it, deformity makes it laugh, vice entertains it. Be odd, and it will let you be odd. Even hypocrisy, that highest form of cynicism, does not disgust it. Paris is so literary that it does not recoil from Basile, and it is no more shocked by Tartuffe's prayer than Horace was offended by the "hiccup" of Priapus. Every feature of the human face appears somewhere in the face of Paris. The bal Mabile is not the dance of Polymnia on the Janiculum, but the dealer in women's clothing there devours the lorette with his eyes, just as the procuress Staphyla lay in wait for the virgin Planesium. The Barrière du Combat is not the Coliseum, but people are just as savage there as if Cæsar himself were watching. The Syrian hostess has more grace than Mother Saguet; yet if Virgil frequented the Roman wine-shop, David d'Angers, Balzac, and Charlet have sat at the tables of Parisian taverns. Paris rules. Genius blazes there, and red tails thrive there. Adonaï passes in his chariot with its twelve wheels of thunder and lightning; Silenus arrives on his ass. For Silenus, read Ramponneau.

Paris is another name for the whole cosmos. Paris is Athens, Sybaris, Jerusalem, Pantin. Every civilization is there in

miniature, and every form of barbarism as well. Paris would be deeply disappointed if it did not have a guillotine.

A little of the Place de Grève is a useful thing. Without that touch, what would this endless festival be? It needs that seasoning. Our laws have thoughtfully arranged it so that, thanks to them, this blade is dripping on this Shrove Tuesday.

CHAPTER XI—MOCKING AND RULING

Paris has no limits. No other city has exercised that kind of dominance—the kind that sometimes even mocks the people it rules. “To win your favor, O Athenians!” Alexander cried. Paris does more than make the law; it creates fashion. It does more than set fashion; it sets the habits of everyday life. Paris can be foolish when it chooses. At times it indulges itself in that luxury, and then the whole world is foolish along with it. Then Paris wakes up, rubs its eyes, says, “How foolish I am!” and bursts out laughing at the whole human race. What an astonishing city that is. It is a strange thing that such grandeur and such absurdity can live side by side in harmony; that all this majesty is not thrown into confusion by all this parody; and that the same mouth can one day sound the trumpet of Judgment Day and the next play a reed flute. Paris has a sovereign cheerfulness. Its gaiety has the force of thunder, and its farce carries a sceptre.

Its storms can begin with nothing more than a sneer. Its upheavals, its great days, its masterpieces, its wonders, its epics reach to the ends of the earth, and so do its absurd tales. Its laughter is like the mouth of a volcano, showering the whole world. Its jokes are sparks. It forces both its caricatures and its ideals on humanity. The greatest monuments of civilization accept its mockery and give their own permanence to its mischievous pranks. It is magnificent. It has its mighty 14th of July, which sets the world free. It compels all nations to swear

the tennis-court oath. Its night of the 4th of August sweeps away a thousand years of feudalism in three hours. It turns its logic into the strength of a united will. It multiplies itself in every form of the sublime. It shines on Washington, Kosciusko, Bolivar, Bozzaris, Riego, Bem, Manin, Lopez, John Brown, and Garibaldi. It is present wherever the future is being lit: in Boston in 1779, at the Isle de Léon in 1820, at Pesth in 1848, at Palermo in 1860. It whispers the great password, Liberty, into the ear of the American abolitionists gathered around the boat at Harper's Ferry, and into the ear of the patriots of Ancona assembled in the shadows, at the Archi before the Gozzi inn by the seashore. It creates Canaris. It creates Quiroga. It creates Pisacane. It pours its light on the great figures of the earth. Following the path its breath drove them toward, Byron died at Missolonghi and Mazet at Barcelona. It is a tribune beneath the feet of Mirabeau and a crater beneath the feet of Robespierre. Its books, its theatre, its art, its science, its literature, its philosophy are manuals for the human race. It has Pascal, Régnier, Corneille, Descartes, Jean-Jacques; Voltaire for every moment, Molière for every century. It makes its language spoken by the whole world, and that language becomes the word itself. In every mind it builds the idea of progress. The liberating principles it forges become faithful companions to generations. Since 1789, the heroes of every nation have been formed by the spirit of its thinkers and poets. Yet none of this prevents its vagrancy. That vast genius called Paris, even while transforming the world with its light, still sketches Bouginier's nose in charcoal on the wall of the temple of Theseus and writes $_{\text{Credeville}}$ the thief_ on the Pyramids.

Paris is always baring its teeth; when it is not scolding, it is laughing.

That is Paris. The smoke rising from its rooftops shapes the ideas of the world. If you like, it is a mass of mud and stone; but above all, it is a moral force. It is more than great. It is immense. Why? Because it dares.

To dare—that is the price of progress.

All great victories are, in one way or another, the rewards of daring. For the Revolution to happen, it was not enough for Montesquieu to foresee it, for Diderot to preach it, for Beaumarchais to announce it, for Condorcet to calculate it, for Arouet to prepare it, or for Rousseau to plan it. Danton had to dare it.

The cry, _Audacity!_, is a _Fiat lux_. For the human race to keep moving forward, there must always be proud lessons in courage standing high above us. Bold acts light up history and are one of humanity's great sources of illumination. Dawn itself dares when it rises. To attempt, to confront, to persist, to endure, to remain true to oneself, to seize fate with both hands, to astonish disaster by how little fear it awakens in us; at one moment to face unjust power, at another to defy drunken victory; to hold one's place, to stand firm—that is the example nations need, that is the light that electrifies them. The same terrible lightning runs from the torch of Prometheus to Cambronne's short pipe.

CHAPTER XII—THE FUTURE HIDDEN IN THE PEOPLE

As for the people of Paris, even in adulthood a man remains, in some sense, the street urchin he once was. To portray the child is to portray the city. That is why we have studied this eagle inside this ragged sparrow. It is above all in the faubourgs, we insist, that the Parisian type shows itself most clearly. There the blood is pure; there the true face appears. There the people labor and suffer, and labor and suffering are the two sides of humanity. There are vast numbers of unknown beings there, and among them swarm the strangest types, from the porter of La Râpée to the knacker of Montfaucon. _Fex urbis_, cries Cicero; _mob_, Burke adds indignantly; rabble, multitude, populace. Such words are easily spoken. But let that pass. What does it matter? What is it to me if they go barefoot? They cannot read; so much the worse. But should that be a reason to abandon them? Should their misery be turned into a curse? Can light not reach these masses? Let us return to that cry: Light! And let us hold to it stubbornly. Light! Light! Who knows whether these dark places may not become transparent? Are not revolutions transformations? Come, philosophers: teach, enlighten, illuminate, think aloud, speak aloud, hurry joyfully toward the great sun, join hands with the public square, announce the good news, scatter your alphabets freely, proclaim rights, sing the Marseillaises, sow enthusiasm, tear green branches from the oaks. Make a whirlwind out of ideas. This crowd can be made sublime. Let us learn how to use that vast blaze of principles

and virtues which, at certain moments, flashes, erupts, and trembles. These bare feet, these bare arms, these rags, this ignorance, this degradation, this darkness—all of it may serve in the conquest of the ideal. Look beyond the people, and you will see truth. Let that vile sand you trample underfoot be thrown into the furnace; let it melt and boil there, and it will become splendid crystal. It is thanks to that crystal that Galileo and Newton will discover stars.

CHAPTER XIII—LITTLE GAVROCHE

[Illustration: Little Gavroche]

Eight or nine years after the events told in the second part of this story, people began to notice on the Boulevard du Temple and around the Château-d'Eau a little boy of eleven or twelve who matched, fairly closely, the picture of the street urchin sketched above. But instead of the laughter natural to his age, he carried a heart that was utterly dark and empty. He was bundled up in a pair of men's trousers, though they had not come from his father, and a woman's chemise, though it had not come from his mother. Someone, out of charity, had dressed him in rags. Yet he did have a father and a mother. His father paid him no attention, and his mother did not love him.

He was one of the most pitiable of all children: one of those who have a father and mother and are still, in every real sense, orphans.

This child never felt so much at ease as he did in the street. The pavement was less hard than his mother's heart.

His parents had launched him into life with a kick.

He had simply run away.

He was a noisy, pale, quick, sharp-eyed, mocking boy, lively in manner but with a sickly look about him. He came and went, sang, played hopscotch, rummaged in the gutters, and stole a little. But, like cats and sparrows, he laughed cheerfully when

people called him a rascal and flared up when they called him a thief. He had no shelter, no bread, no fire, no love; yet he was happy, because he was free.

When these poor creatures grow into men, the grinding stones of society close on them and crush them. But while they are still children, they slip through because they are so small. The smallest opening is enough to save them.

Still, abandoned as he was, every two or three months he would sometimes say, “Come, I’ll go see mamma!” Then he would leave the boulevard, the Cirque, and the Porte Saint-Martin, go down to the quays, cross the bridges, make his way to the outskirts, reach the Salpêtrière, and stop—where? At that very double-numbered house, 50–52, which the reader already knows: the Gorbeau hovel.

At that time, the shack at 50–52, usually empty and always bearing the sign “Rooms to Let,” happened, unusually enough, to be occupied by several people who, as so often happens in Paris, had nothing to do with one another. They all belonged to that poor class that begins where the lowest, hard-pressed petty bourgeoisie fall away, and then sinks from one level of misery to the next, down to the very bottom of society, to those two figures in whom the material life of civilization ends: the sewer worker who clears away the filth, and the rag-picker who gathers scraps.

The “principal lodger” from Jean Valjean’s time was dead and had been replaced by another woman exactly like her. I do not know which philosopher said it, but the saying goes: “There is

never any shortage of old women."

This new old woman was named Madame Bourgon. Nothing in her life stood out except a dynasty of three parrots, who had ruled her heart one after another.

The poorest of the people living in the shack was a family of four: father, mother, and two daughters already nearly grown. All four lived together in the same attic room, one of the little cells already mentioned.

At first glance, there was nothing especially striking about this family except their extreme poverty. When the father rented the room, he gave his name as Jondrette. Some time after moving in—a move that, to borrow the memorable phrase of the principal tenant, had looked remarkably like the arrival of nothing at all_—this Jondrette said to the woman who, like the one before her, served as both porter and stair-sweeper: "Mother So-and-So, if anyone happens to come asking for a Pole, or an Italian, or perhaps even a Spaniard, that is me."

This was the family of the merry barefoot boy. He came there and found misery, and, sadder still, no smile; a cold hearth and cold hearts. When he arrived, they asked him, "Where do you come from?" He answered, "From the street." When he left, they asked him, "Where are you going?" He answered, "To the streets." His mother said to him, "What did you come here for?"

In this absence of affection, the child lived like the pale plants that grow in cellars. It did not make him suffer, and he blamed no one. He did not really know what a father and mother were supposed to be.

Even so, his mother loved his sisters.

We forgot to mention that on the Boulevard du Temple, this child was known as Little Gavroche. Why was he called Little Gavroche?

Probably because his father’s name was Jondrette.

Some wretched families seem to have an instinct for breaking the thread.

The room the Jondrettes lived in at the Gorbeau hovel was the last one at the end of the corridor. The cell next to it was occupied by a very poor young man named M. Marius.

Let us explain who this M. Marius was.

CHAPTER I—NINETY YEARS AND THIRTY-TWO TEETH

In the Rue Boucherat, the Rue de Normandie, and the Rue de Saintonge, there are still a few old residents who remember a worthy man named M. Gillenormand and speak of him with pleasure. He was already old when they were young. His figure has not entirely vanished from the maze of streets near the Temple—for those who look sadly at that dim swarm of shadows called the past. Under Louis XIV, those streets were given the names of all the provinces of France, just as, in our own day, the streets of the new Tivoli quarter have been given the names of all the capitals of Europe. It is, by the way, a change in which progress can be seen.

M. Gillenormand, who was still very much alive in 1831, was one of those men who had become curiosities simply because they had lived so long. He seemed strange now because he had once been like everyone else, and now he was like no one. He was an unusual old man, truly a man from another age: the genuine, complete, somewhat proud eighteenth-century bourgeois, wearing his solid old middle-class identity with the same air a marquis wears his title. He was over ninety. He walked upright, spoke loudly, saw clearly, drank his liquor straight, ate well, slept well, and snored. He still had all thirty-two teeth. He wore glasses only when he read. He was naturally inclined to love affairs, though he claimed that for the past ten years he had completely and firmly given up women. He said it was because he could no longer attract them. He did

not say, “I am too old,” but, “I am too poor.” He would say, “If I were not ruined—Héée!” In fact, all he had left was an income of about fifteen thousand francs. His dream was to receive an inheritance and have an income of a hundred thousand livres to spend on mistresses. As the reader will understand, he did not belong to that feeble kind of old man who, like M. de Voltaire, seem to spend their whole lives dying. His was not the long life of a cracked pot barely holding together. This cheerful old man had always enjoyed good health. He was shallow, quick, and easily angered. He flew into rages over everything, usually for no sensible reason at all. If anyone contradicted him, he raised his cane. He beat people as he might have done in the grand century. He had an unmarried daughter over fifty, and when he was angry he scolded her harshly and would gladly have whipped her. To him, she seemed eight years old. He boxed his servants’ ears soundly and cried, “Ah! carogne!” One of his favorite oaths was: “By the pantoufloche of the pantouflochade!” He also had odd spells of calm. Every day he had himself shaved by a barber who had once been insane and who hated him, out of jealousy over M. Gillenormand’s attentions to the barber’s pretty, flirtatious wife. M. Gillenormand admired his own judgment in everything and declared himself extremely shrewd. One of his sayings was: “I truly have some insight; I can tell, when a flea bites me, which woman it came from.”

The phrases he used most often were “the sensible man” and “nature.” He did not mean by that last word the broad, lofty idea our age gives it. Instead, he worked it, in his own way, into the small satirical speeches he made by the fireside: “Nature,” he

said, “so that civilization may have a little of everything, even provides it with examples of its more entertaining forms of barbarism. Europe has miniature versions of Asia and Africa. The cat is a tiger for the drawing room; the lizard is a crocodile you could carry in your pocket. The dancers at the opera are pink female savages. They do not eat men; they crush them. Or, being magicians, they turn them into oysters and swallow them. The Caribs leave only the bones; these leave only the shell. Such are our morals. We do not devour, we nibble away; we do not exterminate, we scratch.”

CHAPTER II—LIKE MASTER, LIKE HOUSE

He lived in the Marais, at No. 6 Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire. He owned the house. It has since been torn down and rebuilt, and the number has probably changed in one of those renumberings that Paris streets so often go through. He occupied a large old apartment on the first floor, between the street and the gardens. It was furnished all the way up to the ceilings with great Gobelins and Beauvais tapestries showing pastoral scenes. The images on the ceilings and wall panels were repeated in miniature on the armchairs. Around his bed stood a huge nine-panel screen of Coromandel lacquer. Long, heavy curtains hung at the windows and fell in rich, broken folds of great splendor. The garden directly below his windows was connected to the corner room by a staircase of twelve or fifteen steps, which the old gentleman went up and down with remarkable agility. Besides a library next to his bedroom, he had a boudoir that he valued highly, an elegant, gallant retreat with magnificent straw hangings patterned with flowers and fleurs-de-lys. They had been made on the galleys of Louis XIV and ordered from his convicts by M. de Vivonne for his mistress. M. Gillenormand had inherited this room from a severe maternal great-aunt who died at the age of one hundred. He had been married twice. His manners were a blend of the courtier he had never been and the lawyer he might have become. He could be cheerful and affectionate when he chose. 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 once the worst-tempered of husbands and the most charming of lovers. He knew painting well. In his room he kept a marvelous portrait by Jordaens, of no one knew whom, painted in broad strokes and crowded with millions of details, in a confused and seemingly haphazard way. M. Gillenormand did not dress in the style of Louis XIV, nor in that of Louis XVI. He dressed like one of the Incroyables of the Directory. He had considered himself young until that time and had followed the fashions. His coat was made of light cloth, with wide lapels, a long swallow-tail, and large steel buttons. He wore it with knee-breeches and shoes with buckles. He always thrust his hands into his pockets. In a tone of authority, he would say, “The French Revolution is a heap of blackguards.”

CHAPTER III—LUC-ESPRIT

At sixteen, one evening at the opera, he had the distinction of being stared at through opera glasses by two beauties at once—famous, fully grown beauties of the day, the Camargo and Sallé, celebrated even by Voltaire. Caught between those two fires, he made a heroic retreat toward a little dancer, a girl named Nahenry, who was sixteen like him, as unnoticed as a cat, and with whom he was in love. He was full of memories. He would often cry out: “How pretty she was—that Guimard-Guimardini-Guimardinette—the last time I saw her at Longchamps, with her hair curled into lasting sentiments, her come-and-see of turquoises, her gown the color of newly arrived persons, and her little agitation muff!” In his youth he had worn a Nain-Londrin waistcoat, and he loved to talk about it at length. “I was dressed like a Turk of the Levant Levantin,” he would say. Madame de Boufflers, having happened to see him when he was twenty, had described him as “a charming fool.” He was appalled by all the names he saw in politics and power, which he considered vulgar and bourgeois. He read the journals—the newspapers, the gazettes, as he called them—while choking back bursts of laughter. “Oh!” he would say, “what people these are! Corbière! Humann! Casimir Périer! There’s a minister for you! I can just imagine reading this in a journal: ‘M. Gillenormand, minister!’ That would be a farce. Well! They are so stupid that it would pass.” He cheerfully called everything by its proper name, whether decent or indecent, and never restrained himself in the least before ladies. He spoke coarsely—using obscenities and filthy expressions—with a

calm, unastonished ease that somehow seemed elegant. It matched the informality of his century. It is worth noting that the age of circumlocution in verse was also the age of blunt crudity in prose. His godfather had predicted that he would become a man of genius, and had given him these two significant names: Luc-Esprit.

CHAPTER IV—A HUNDRED-YEAR-OLD ASPIRANT

As a boy at the College of Moulins, where he was born, he had won prizes and had even been crowned by the Duc de Nivernais, whom he called the Duc de Nevers. Neither the Convention, nor the execution of Louis XVI, nor Napoleon, nor the return of the Bourbons, nor anything else had ever erased the memory of that crowning. In his eyes, the Duc de Nevers was the great man of the century. “What a charming grand seigneur,” he said, “and how splendid he looked with his blue ribbon!”

In M. Gillenormand’s view, Catherine the Second had made up for the crime of the partition of Poland by buying, for three thousand roubles, the secret of the elixir of gold from Bestucheff. He became animated whenever he spoke of it. “The elixir of gold,” he cried, “Bestucheff’s yellow tincture, General Lamotte’s drops, in the eighteenth century—that was the great cure for the disasters of love, the universal remedy against Venus, at one louis for a half-ounce phial. Louis XV sent two hundred phials of it to the Pope.” He would have been deeply offended and completely upset if anyone had told him that the elixir of gold was nothing more than perchloride of iron. M. Gillenormand adored the Bourbons and hated 1789. He was always telling how he had managed to save himself during the Terror, and how much wit and cheerfulness he had needed to keep from having his head cut off. If any young man dared to

praise the Republic in front of him, he turned purple and became so furious he was almost ready to faint. He sometimes referred to his ninety years and said, “I hope I shall not see ninety-three twice.” At such moments, he let people understand that he intended to live to be a hundred.

CHAPTER V—BASQUE AND NICOLETTE

He had his theories. Here is one of them: “When a man is passionately fond of women, and has a wife he cares little for—a plain, ill-tempered, lawful wife, full of rights, backed by the legal code, and jealous whenever it suits her—there is only one way for him to get out of the difficulty and find some peace: let his wife control the money. That surrender sets him free. Then his wife keeps herself busy, becomes passionately attached to handling cash, gets her fingers green with copper, takes on the education of sharecroppers and the training of farmers, summons lawyers, presides over notaries, lectures clerks, visits legal officials, pursues lawsuits, draws up leases, dictates contracts, feels herself a sovereign, sells, buys, regulates, promises and compromises, binds and cancels, yields, concedes and takes back, arranges and disarranges, saves and squanders. She commits follies—which is her highest personal pleasure—and that consoles her. While her husband despises her, she has the satisfaction of ruining him.” M. Gillenormand had put this theory into practice himself, and it had become the story of his own life. His wife—the second one—managed his fortune in such a way that, one fine day, when M. Gillenormand found himself a widower, he had only just enough left to live on, after putting nearly all of it into an annuity of fifteen thousand francs, three-quarters of which would end with him. He had not hesitated over this, since he had no desire to leave property behind him. Besides, he had

observed that family estates are subject to strange turns of fate and can, for example, become _national property_; he had lived through the transformations of consolidated three per cents, and he had little faith in the Great Book of the Public Debt. “That’s all Rue Quincampoix!” he said. His house in the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire belonged to him, as we have already said. He kept two servants, “a man and a woman.” Whenever a servant entered his household, M. Gillenormand renamed him. He gave the men the name of their province: Nîmois, Comtois, Poitevin, Picard. His last valet was a large, broken-down, wheezing man of fifty-five who could not run twenty paces; but since he had been born at Bayonne, M. Gillenormand called him _Basque_. Every female servant in his house was called Nicolette, even Magnon, of whom we shall hear more later. One day a proud cook, a _cordon bleu_, from the exalted race of porters, presented herself. “How much 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 APPEAR

With M. Gillenormand, grief turned into anger; he was furious at being miserable. He was full of prejudices and just as full of liberties. Part of what made up his outward ease and inward self-satisfaction was, as we have already suggested, the fact that he had remained a lively old gallant and was widely regarded as one. He called this his “royal renown.” That royal renown sometimes brought him strange surprises. One day a basket was delivered to him, as if it contained oysters. Inside was a sturdy newborn boy, yelling like mad and properly wrapped in swaddling clothes, whom a servant girl dismissed six months earlier claimed was his. M. Gillenormand was then well into his eighty-fourth year. The whole household erupted in outrage. Whom did that shameless hussy expect to convince with such a story? What nerve! What a vile slander! M. Gillenormand himself was not angry at all. He looked at the child with the pleasant smile of a good-natured man secretly flattered by the accusation, and said aside: “Well now, what is all this? Why are you so astonished? You really know very little. The Duc d’Angoulême, bastard son of His Majesty Charles IX, married a foolish girl of fifteen when he was eighty-five. M. Virginal, Marquis d’Alluye, brother of Cardinal de Sourdis, Archbishop of Bordeaux, had at eighty-three, by Madame la Présidente Jacquin’s maid, a son, a true child of love, who became a Knight of Malta and a councillor 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 extraordinary in such things. And then, there is the Bible! Still, I declare that this little gentleman is not mine. He must be cared for. It is not his fault." This way of handling the matter was good-humored. The woman, whose name was Magnon, sent him another parcel the following year. It was another boy. At that point M. Gillenormand gave in. He sent both brats back to their mother and promised to pay eighty francs a month for their upkeep, on the condition that the said mother would not do it again. He added, "I insist that the mother treat them well. I shall go and see them from time to time." And he did. He had had a brother who was a priest, rector of the Academy of Poitiers for thirty-three years, and who died at seventy-nine. "I lost him young," he used to say. Little is remembered of this brother. He was a mild miser who, because he was a priest, thought he ought to give alms to the poor he met, but never gave them anything except bad or demonetized sous, thus discovering a way to go to hell by way of paradise. As for M. Gillenormand the elder, he never bargained over charity, but gave readily and generously. He was kind, abrupt, charitable, and if he had been rich, his tastes would have been magnificent. He wanted everything connected with him to be done on a grand scale, even his dishonesties. One day, after being blatantly cheated by a businessman in an inheritance matter, he broke out with this solemn exclamation: "That was done indecently! I am truly ashamed of such thieving. Everything has declined in this century, even the scoundrels. Morbleu! this is no way to rob a man of my standing. I am robbed as if in a forest, but badly robbed. Silvæ sint consule

dignæ!_" He had had two wives, as we have already said. By the first he had a daughter who remained unmarried; by the second, another daughter, who died at about thirty, after marrying, through love or chance or otherwise, a soldier of fortune who had served in the armies of the Republic and the Empire, 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 enormous amount of snuff and had a particularly graceful way of tugging at his lace cuff with the back of one hand. He believed very little in God.

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

This was M. Luc-Esprit Gillenormand. He had not lost his hair. It was gray rather than white, and he always wore it dressed in “dog’s ears.” In short, despite all that, he still had an air of dignity.

There was something of the eighteenth century about him: both frivolous and grand.

In 1814 and through the first years of the Restoration, M. Gillenormand—who was still young, being only seventy-four—lived in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, on Rue Servandoni, near Saint-Sulpice. He did not retire to the Marais until he had withdrawn from society, long after he had passed eighty.

And when he gave up society, he shut himself up inside his habits. The chief one, and the one he never broke, was this: during the day his door remained completely closed, and he would receive no one at all except in the evening. He dined at five o’clock, and after that his door was open. That had been the custom in his century, and he would not depart from it. “The day is vulgar,” he said, “and deserves nothing but a closed shutter. Fashionable people only light up their minds when the sky lights up its stars.” So he barred his door to everyone, even if it had been the king himself. That was the old-fashioned elegance of his time.

CHAPTER VIII—TWO DO NOT MAKE A MATCH

We have just mentioned M. Gillenormand's two daughters. They were born ten years apart. In their youth they were very unlike each other, both in character and in appearance, and they were as unlike sisters in feeling as they could possibly be. The younger had a lovely soul. She turned toward everything bright and beautiful. She cared for flowers, poetry, and music. Her spirit drifted into radiant, glorious spaces, full of enthusiasm and delicacy, and from her earliest youth she had given herself, in imagination, to some vague heroic figure. The elder had her own dream as well. In the blue distance she saw some very rich supplier, some contractor, some magnificently stupid husband, some self-made millionaire, or even a prefect. Receptions at the Prefecture, an usher in the antechamber with a chain around his neck, official balls, speeches at the town hall, being "Madame la Préfète"—all this had set her imagination spinning. So the two sisters wandered, each inside her own dream, in the days when they were young girls. Both had wings: one like an angel, the other like a goose.

No ambition is ever completely fulfilled, at least not in this world. No paradise becomes earthly in our time. The younger sister married the man of her dreams, but she died. The elder never married at all.

At the point when she enters the story we are telling, she was an old-fashioned model of virtue, a prude who could not be shocked, with one of the sharpest noses and one of the dullest

minds imaginable. One detail says a great deal: outside her immediate family, no one had ever known her first name. She was called _Mademoiselle Gillenormand, the elder_.

When it came to _cant_, Mademoiselle Gillenormand could have outdone a schoolgirl. Her modesty had turned into something dark and excessive. She carried a dreadful memory from her life: one day, a man had seen her garter.

Age only made this merciless modesty more extreme. Her guimpe was never opaque enough and never came high enough. She kept adding clasps and pins in places where no one would ever have thought to look. The strange thing about prudery is that it posts more guards as the fortress itself is less and less in danger.

And yet—if anyone can explain these old mysteries of innocence—she allowed her grandnephew, an officer in the Lancers named Théodule, to kiss her without any displeasure.

Even with this favored Lancer, the label _Prude_, which we have given her, fit her perfectly. Mademoiselle Gillenormand was a kind of twilight soul. Prudery is half virtue and half vice.

To prudery she added bigotry, which suited it perfectly. She belonged to the society of the Virgin, wore a white veil on certain feast days, muttered special prayers, revered "the holy blood," venerated "the sacred heart," and spent hours in contemplation before a rococo Jesuit altar in a chapel closed to ordinary worshippers. There she let her soul drift upward among little marble clouds and through great beams of gilded wood.

She had a friend from chapel, an elderly unmarried woman like herself, named Mademoiselle Vaubois. She was a complete fool, and beside her Mademoiselle Gillenormand had the satisfaction of seeming brilliant. Beyond the Agnus Dei and the Ave Maria, Mademoiselle Vaubois knew nothing except the various ways of making preserves. In her own perfect style, she was stupidity in its purest form, without the slightest trace of intelligence.

To put it plainly, Mademoiselle Gillenormand had gained more than she had lost with age. That often happens with passive natures. She had never been malicious, which is a kind of kindness; and over the years, time had worn down her sharp edges and softened her. She was melancholy, burdened by a vague sadness whose source she did not know herself. Her whole person gave off the numbness of a life that was already over, and that had never truly begun.

She kept house for her father. M. Gillenormand had his daughter beside him, just as we have seen Monseigneur Bienvenu living with his sister. Households made up of an old man and an elderly unmarried daughter are not uncommon, and they always

have the touching look of two frailties leaning on each other for support.

There was also, in this house, between the elderly spinster and the old man, a child—a little boy who was always silent and trembling in M. Gillenormand's presence. M. Gillenormand never spoke to the child except in a harsh voice, and sometimes with his cane raised: "Come here, sir! Rascal, scoundrel, come here! Answer me, you little rogue! Let me have a look at you, you good-for-nothing!" and so on, and so on. He adored him.

This was his grandson. We shall meet this child again later.

CHAPTER I—AN OLD SALON

When M. Gillenormand lived on the Rue Servandoni, he spent time in many excellent, highly aristocratic salons. Though he was a bourgeois, society welcomed him. He had wit in two forms: first, the wit he naturally possessed, and second, the wit people credited him with. Because of that, people sought him out and made much of him. He never went anywhere unless he could be the central figure. Some people insist on having influence at any cost and on keeping others occupied with them; if they cannot be oracles, they become jokers. M. Gillenormand was not like that. His dominance in the Royalist salons he frequented cost him none of his self-respect. Everywhere, he was an oracle. He had even managed to hold his own against M. de Bonald, and even against M. Bengy-Puy-Vallée.

Around 1817, he regularly spent two afternoons a week at a house in his own neighborhood, on the Rue Férou, with Madame la Baronne de T., a worthy and respectable woman whose husband had served as France's ambassador to Berlin under Louis XVI. Baron de T., who in his lifetime had been passionately devoted to ecstasies and magnetic visions, had died bankrupt during the emigration. He left as his entire fortune some very curious Memoirs about Mesmer and his tub, in ten manuscript volumes bound in red morocco with gilded edges. Madame de T. had never published the memoirs, out of pride, and lived on a meager income that had somehow survived, though no one knew how.

Madame de T. lived far from the Court, in what she called “a very mixed society,” maintaining a noble isolation that was both proud and poor. A few friends gathered around her widow’s hearth twice a week, and together they formed a purely Royalist salon. There they sipped tea and sighed or cried out in horror over the century, the charter, the Bonapartists, the disgrace of the blue ribbon, or the Jacobinism of Louis XVIII., depending on whether the mood turned toward lament or praise. In low voices, they also spoke of the hopes inspired by Monsieur, later Charles X.

The songs of the fishwives, in which Napoleon was called Nicolas–, were welcomed there with bursts of delight. Duchesses—the most refined and charming women in the world—went into raptures over couplets like the following, addressed to “the federates”:—

Tuck the bit of shirt hanging out back into your breeches. Let no one say the patriots have raised the white flag.20

There they entertained themselves with puns thought to be dreadful, with harmless wordplay they imagined was venomous, with quatrains, even with couplets. So, about the Dessolles ministry—a moderate cabinet that included MM. Decazes and Deserre—they produced this:

To steady the throne, shaken to its foundations, we must change the soil, the greenhouse, and the hut.21

Or they would draw up a list of the chamber of peers—“an abominably Jacobin chamber”—and then combine the names into little alliances, so as to produce, for example, phrases like

this: _Damas_. Sabran. Gouvion-Saint-Cyr_. They did all this in high spirits. In that society, they made a parody of the Revolution. They brought to the same anger, reversed in meaning, some obscure urge to sharpen it. They sang their own little _Ça ira:_—

Ah! It will go, it will go, it will go! Bonapartists to the lamp-post!

Songs are like the guillotine: they cut down whoever is at hand—this head today, that one tomorrow. It is only a change of target.

In the Fualdès affair, which belongs to this period, 1816, they sided with Bastide and Jausion because Fualdès was "a Buonapartist." They called the liberals f_riends_ and brothers_; that was considered the deadliest insult.

Like certain church towers, Madame de T.'s salon had two weathercocks. One was M. Gillenormand; the other was the Comte de Lamothe-Valois, about whom people whispered, with a kind of respect, "Do you know? That is the Lamothe from the affair of the necklace." Such strange pardons do happen within political parties.

Let us add this: among the bourgeoisie, respected positions lose their standing when familiarity becomes too easy. One must be careful about whom one lets in. Just as warmth is lost near those who are cold, esteem diminishes in the company of people who are looked down on. The old upper-class society believed itself above this rule, as it believed itself above all others. Marigny, Pompadour's brother, was received by M. le Prince de Soubise. In spite of that? No—because of it. Du Barry, the godfather of Vaubernier, was warmly welcomed in the

house of M. le Maréchal de Richelieu. That society is Olympus. Mercury and the Prince de Guémenée are equally at home there. A thief is admitted there, provided he is a god.

The Comte de Lamothe, who in 1815 was an old man of seventy-five, had nothing striking about him except his silent, weighty manner, his cold, angular face, his perfectly polished manners, his coat buttoned up to his cravat, and his long legs always crossed in loose, drooping trousers the color of burnt sienna. His face was the same color as his trousers.

This M. de Lamothe was highly regarded in the salon because of his “celebrity” and, oddly enough though it was true, because he bore the name of Valois.

As for M. Gillenormand, the regard he enjoyed was of the very highest kind. Despite his frivolity, and without it taking anything away from his dignity, he had a certain presence that was imposing, dignified, honorable, and elevated in a bourgeois way. His great age added to it. No one reaches a hundred without effect. In the end, the years gather a kind of venerable disarray around a man’s head.

He also said things that had the real sparkle of the old stone. For example, when the King of Prussia, after restoring Louis XVIII, came to visit him under the name of the Count de Ruppin, the descendant of Louis XIV received him almost as if he were the Marquis de Brandebourg, and with the most delicate impertinence. M. Gillenormand approved. “All kings who are not the King of France,” he said, “are provincial kings.” One day, in his presence, someone asked and another answered: “What

was the editor of the _Courrier Français_ sentenced to?" "To be suspended." "_Sus_ is unnecessary," M. Gillenormand remarked.22 Comments of that sort were appreciated in that setting.

At the Te Deum marking the anniversary of the Bourbons' return, he saw M. de Talleyrand go by and said, "There goes His Excellency the Devil."

M. Gillenormand was always accompanied by his daughter—that tall unmarried woman, over forty and looking fifty—and by a handsome little boy of seven, fair, rosy, fresh-faced, with cheerful, trusting eyes. Whenever he appeared in that salon, people would murmur around him, "How handsome he is! What a pity! Poor child!" This was the child we mentioned a little earlier. People called him "poor child" because his father was "a brigand of the Loire."

This "brigand of the Loire" was M. Gillenormand's son-in-law, already mentioned, whom M. Gillenormand called "the disgrace of his family."

CHAPTER II—ONE OF THE RED SPECTRES OF THAT TIME

At that time, anyone passing through the little town of Vernon and crossing its fine monumental bridge—which, let us hope, will soon be replaced by some hideous iron suspension bridge—might, by looking over the parapet, have noticed a man of about fifty below. He wore a leather cap, trousers, and a waistcoat of coarse gray cloth, with something yellow sewn onto it that had once been a red ribbon. He had wooden sabots on his feet. His skin was darkened by the sun, his face almost black, his hair almost white. A large scar ran from his forehead down onto his cheek. He was stooped, bent, and prematurely aged. Nearly every day he could be seen there, hoe and sickle in hand, working in one of the walled plots that meet the bridge and line the left bank of the Seine like a chain of terraces—charming little enclosures full of flowers. If they were much larger, one would call them gardens; if a little smaller, bouquets. Each of these enclosures touched the river at one end and a house at the other. Around 1817, the man in the waistcoat and wooden shoes lived in the smallest of these plots and the humblest of these houses. He lived there alone, in silence and poverty, with a woman who was neither young nor old, neither plain nor pretty, neither peasant nor bourgeoise, and who served him. The patch of ground he called his garden was famous in the town for the beauty of the flowers he grew there. These flowers were his work.

Through hard work, persistence, careful attention, and endless buckets of water, he had managed to create, after the Creator, tulips and dahlias that seemed as if nature itself had forgotten them. He was inventive. He had even anticipated Soulange Bodin in making small beds of heath soil for growing rare and valuable shrubs from America and China. In summer, he was out in his paths at daybreak, planting, pruning, hoeing, and watering. He moved among his flowers with a look of kindness, sadness, and gentleness. Sometimes he would stand still and lost in thought for hours, listening to a bird singing in the trees or to a child chattering in a nearby house. At other times, he would fix his eyes on a drop of dew at the tip of a blade of grass, where the sun turned it into a glowing jewel. His meals were very simple, and he drank more milk than wine. A child could easily make him give in, and his servant scolded him. He was so timid that he seemed almost bashful. He rarely went out and saw no one except the poor people who knocked at his window and his curé, the Abbé Mabeuf, a good old man. Still, if the townspeople, strangers, or any casual visitors curious to see his tulips rang at his little cottage, he opened the door with a smile. He was the “brigand of the Loire.”

Anyone who had read military memoirs, biographies, the Moniteur–, and the bulletins of the Grand Army would have noticed a name that appears fairly often: Georges Pontmercy. As a very young man, Georges Pontmercy had been a soldier in the Saintonge regiment. Then the Revolution broke out. The Saintonge regiment became part of the Army of the Rhine, since the old regiments of the monarchy kept their provincial names even after the monarchy fell, and were not reorganized into

brigades until 1794. Pontmercy fought at Spire, Worms, Neustadt, Turkheim, Alzey, and Mayence, where he was one of the two hundred men who made up Houchard's rearguard. He was among the last to stand firm against the corps of the Prince of Hesse, behind the old rampart of Andernach, and rejoined the main army only after the enemy's cannon had torn a breach from the top of the parapet down to the foot of the glacis. He served under Kléber at Marchiennes and at the battle of Mont-Palissel, where a biscaïen ball shattered his arm. He was then sent to the Italian frontier and was one of the thirty grenadiers who defended the Col de Tende with Joubert. Joubert was made adjutant-general, and Pontmercy became a sub-lieutenant. Pontmercy stood beside Berthier in the middle of the grapeshot at Lodi, on that day which made Bonaparte say, "Berthier has been cannoneer, cavalryman, and grenadier." He saw his old general, Joubert, fall at Novi at the very moment when, with his sabre raised, he was shouting, "Forward!" During one difficult campaign, he was put aboard a pinnace with his company and sent from Genoa to some obscure port on the coast. On the way, he ran into a nest of seven or eight English ships. The Genoese commander wanted to throw the cannon into the sea, hide the soldiers below deck, and slip past in the dark disguised as a merchant vessel. Pontmercy instead had the colors raised at the peak and sailed boldly past under the guns of the British frigates. Twenty leagues farther on, growing even bolder, he attacked with his pinnace and captured a large English transport carrying troops to Sicily, so overloaded with men and horses that it rode almost level with the sea. In 1805 he was in Malher's division, which took Günzberg from the

Archduke Ferdinand. At Weltingen, under a storm of bullets, he caught Colonel Maupetit in his arms after the colonel was mortally wounded at the head of the 9th Dragoons. He distinguished himself at Austerlitz in that admirable advance in echelons carried out under enemy fire. When the cavalry of the Imperial Russian Guard crushed a battalion of the 4th of the line, Pontmercy was one of the men who avenged it and broke the Guard. The Emperor awarded him the cross. Pontmercy saw Wurmser at Mantua, Mélas and Alexandria, and Mack at Ulm all taken prisoner in turn. He was part of the eighth corps of the Grand Army, commanded by Mortier, which captured Hamburg. He was then transferred to the 55th of the line, the old regiment of Flanders. At Eylau he was in the cemetery where the heroic Captain Louis Hugo, the author's uncle, held off the whole enemy army for two hours with only his company of eighty-three men. Pontmercy was one of the three who came out of that cemetery alive. He was at Friedland. Then he saw Moscow. Then the 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 formidable position of Laon. At Arnay-Le-Duc, by then a captain, he cut down ten Cossacks and saved not his general but his corporal. He was badly slashed in that action, and twenty-seven splinters were taken from his left arm alone. Eight days before the capitulation of Paris, he had just exchanged posts with a comrade and entered the cavalry. He had what was called under the old regime the double hand_—that is, he was equally skilled with sabre and musket as a soldier, and equally capable of handling a squadron

or a battalion as an officer. It was from this kind of ability, refined by military training, that certain special branches of the service developed, such as the dragoons, who were both cavalry and infantry at the same time. He followed 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 threw the flag at the Emperor's feet. He was covered in blood. While tearing down the banner, he had taken a sword cut across the face. The Emperor, delighted, cried out 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 that same "brigand of the Loire."

We have already seen part of his story. After Waterloo, Pontmercy—who, as you may remember, had been pulled from the sunken road at Ohain—managed to rejoin the army and made his way, from one field hospital to another, as far as the Loire encampments.

Under the Restoration, he was first put on half-pay and then ordered to live at Vernon under police watch. Louis XVIII treated everything that had happened during the Hundred Days as if it had never happened. He refused to recognize Pontmercy's status as an officer of the Legion of Honor, his rank of colonel, or his title of baron. Pontmercy, for his part, never missed a chance to sign himself "Colonel Baron Pontmercy." He owned only an old blue coat, and whenever he went out he pinned to it the rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honor. The Crown

Attorney had him warned that the authorities would prosecute him for wearing the decoration “illegally.” When an eager intermediary delivered the warning, Pontmercy answered with a bitter smile: “I do not know whether I no longer understand French, or whether you no longer speak it; but in any case, I do not understand.” Then he went out wearing his rosette for eight days in a row. They did not dare touch him. Two or three times, the Minister of War and the general commanding the department sent him letters addressed as follows: _“A Monsieur le Commandant Pontmercy.”_ He returned the letters unopened, with the seals still intact. At that same time, Napoleon at Saint Helena was treating in exactly the same way the letters from Sir Hudson Lowe addressed to _General Bonaparte_. Pontmercy had ended up, if we may be forgiven the phrase, with the same defiance in him as his Emperor.

In the same way, there were Carthaginian prisoners in Rome who refused to salute Flaminius and who carried a little of Hannibal’s spirit within them.

One day, in a street in Vernon, he ran into the district attorney, walked straight up to him, and said, “Mr. Crown Attorney, am I allowed to wear my scar?”

He had nothing except his small half-pay as a squadron chief. He rented the cheapest little house he could find in Vernon and lived there alone, as we have just seen. During the Empire, in the interval between two wars, he had found time to marry Mademoiselle Gillenormand. The old bourgeois, deeply offended at heart, had given his consent with a sigh, saying, “The greatest families are forced into it.” In 1815, Madame

Pontmercy—an admirable woman in every way, noble in feeling, rare in character, and worthy of her husband—died, leaving behind a child. That child had been the colonel's joy in his loneliness; but the grandfather firmly demanded his grandson, declaring that if the child were not given to him, he would disinherit him. The father gave in for the little boy's sake and turned his affection to flowers.

Besides, he had given up everything and neither caused trouble nor joined any conspiracy. His thoughts were divided between the harmless things he was doing then and the great things he had done before. He spent his time waiting for a pink to bloom or remembering Austerlitz.

M. Gillenormand had no dealings with his son-in-law. To him, the colonel was "a bandit." He never mentioned Pontmercy except now and then to make some mocking remark about "his Baronship." It had been clearly agreed that Pontmercy would never try to see his son or speak to him, on pain of having the boy returned to him disowned and disinherited. To the Gillenormands, Pontmercy was like a man with the plague. They meant to raise the child in their own way. Perhaps the colonel was wrong to accept such terms, but he submitted to them, believing he was doing what was right and sacrificing no one but himself.

Father Gillenormand's inheritance was small, but Mademoiselle Gillenormand the elder had a large fortune. This aunt had never married and was very wealthy on her mother's side, so her sister's son was her obvious heir. The boy, whose name was Marius, knew he had a father, but nothing beyond that. No one

ever spoke to him about it. Even so, in the social circle where his grandfather brought him, whispers, hints, and knowing looks gradually made things clearer to him. In the end, he came to understand part of the situation. And because he naturally absorbed the ideas and opinions around him, as if they were the very air he breathed, those views slowly sank in until he came to think of his father only with shame and a heavy pain in his heart.

While Marius was growing up this way, the colonel would quietly disappear every two or three months, come to Paris in secret, like a criminal breaking his exile, and station himself in Saint-Sulpice at the hour when Aunt Gillenormand brought Marius to mass. There, trembling in case the aunt might turn around, hidden behind a pillar, perfectly still and hardly daring to breathe, he would look at his child. The scarred old soldier was afraid of that elderly spinster.

That was how he came to know the curé of Vernon, M. l'Abbé Mabeuf.

That good priest was the brother of a warden at Saint-Sulpice. The warden had often noticed this man looking at his child, at the scar on his cheek, and with great tears in his eyes. The sight had struck him: a man with such a strong, manly bearing, yet crying like a woman. The face stayed in his mind. One day, when he had gone to Vernon to visit his brother, he met Colonel Pontmercy on the bridge and recognized him as the same man from Saint-Sulpice. The warden told the curé about it, and together they paid the colonel a visit on one pretext or another. That visit led to others. At first the colonel was very reserved, but in the end he opened his heart. The curé and the warden

finally learned the whole story, and how Pontmercy was sacrificing his own happiness for his child's future. From that time on, the curé regarded him with reverence and affection, and the colonel, for his part, grew fond of the curé. Besides, when both are sincere and good, no two men understand each other more deeply or become more closely united than an old priest and an old soldier. At bottom, they are the same kind of man. One has devoted his life to his country here below; the other to his country above. That is the only difference.

Twice a year, on the first of January and on St. George's Day, Marius wrote dutiful letters to his father. His aunt dictated them, and they sounded as though they had been copied from a standard form. This was all that M. Gillenormand allowed. The father replied with very tender letters, which the grandfather slipped into his pocket without reading.

CHAPTER III—REQUIESCANT

Madame de T.’s salon was the whole world to Marius Pontmercy. It was his only window onto life. But it was a dark window. What reached him through it was more cold than warmth, more night than day. This child, who had entered that strange world full of joy and light, soon grew melancholy and, even more unusually for his age, serious. Surrounded by all those strange and impressive figures, he looked around him in solemn amazement. Everything around him only deepened that feeling. In Madame de T.’s salon there were several very noble ladies named Mathan, Noé, Lévis—pronounced Lévi—and Cambis, pronounced Cambyse. In the child’s mind, those ancient faces and Biblical names blended with the Old Testament he was learning by heart. When they were all there, seated in a circle around a dying fire, dimly lit by a lamp with a green shade, with their stern profiles, their gray or white hair, and their long gowns from another age, in colors too mournful and dark to make out, speaking only now and then in words that sounded both majestic and severe, little Marius stared at them with frightened eyes. He was convinced that he was seeing not women, but patriarchs and magi; not living people, but phantoms.

Priests were sometimes mixed in with these ghostlike figures, along with a few gentlemen who frequented this old salon: the Marquis de Sass, private secretary to Madame de Berry; the Vicomte de Val, who published monorhymed odes under the pen name _Charles-Antoine_; the Prince de Beauff, who, though

still very young, already had gray hair and a charming, witty wife whose scarlet velvet gowns, cut very low and trimmed with gold cords, shocked these shades; the Marquis de C d'E, the man in all France who best understood "proportioned politeness"; the Comte d'Am, the kind man with the pleasant chin; and the Chevalier de Port-de-Guy, one of the mainstays of the Louvre library, then called the King's cabinet. M. de Port-de-Guy, bald and more elderly than truly old, liked to tell how, in 1793, when he was sixteen, he had been sent to the galleys as a refractory and chained to an eighty-year-old man, the Bishop of Mirepoix, who was also refractory, though as a priest, while he himself was so as a soldier. This happened at Toulon. Their task was to go at night to the scaffold and collect the heads and bodies of those who had been guillotined during the day. They carried those dripping corpses away on their backs, and their red convict blouses bore a clot of blood at the back of the neck, dry in the morning and wet again at night. Such tragic stories were common in Madame de T.'s salon, and after cursing Marat enough, they ended by applauding Trestaillon. A few deputies of the hard-to-identify sort played whist there: M. Thibord du Chalard, M. Lemarchant de Gomicourt, and the famous scoffer of the right, M. Cornet-Dincourt. The bailiff de Ferrette, in his short breeches and with his thin legs, sometimes passed through this salon on his way to M. de Talleyrand. He had once shared the pleasures of M. le Comte d'Artois, and unlike Aristotle crouching before Campaspe, he had made the Guimard crawl on all fours. In that way, he offered the ages the spectacle of a philosopher avenged by a bailiff. As for the priests, there was the Abbé

Halma, the very man to whom M. Larose, his collaborator on _la Foudre_, had said: “Bah! Who is not fifty years old? A few greenhorns, perhaps?” There was the Abbé Letourneur, preacher to the King; the Abbé Frayssinous, who was not yet count, bishop, minister, or peer, and who wore an old cassock with missing buttons; and the Abbé Keravenant, Curé of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. There was also the Pope’s Nuncio, then Monsignor Macchi, Archbishop of Nisibi, later a cardinal, notable for his long, thoughtful nose; and another monsignor, whose full title ran: 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_—a title connected with canonization matters and meaning, more or less, Master of Requests for the department of Paradise. Finally, there were two cardinals, M. de la Luzerne and M. de Cl T. Cardinal de Luzerne was a writer and was destined, a few years later, to have the honor of signing articles in the _Conservateur_ alongside Chateaubriand. M. de Cl T was Archbishop of Toul and often came to Paris to visit his nephew, the Marquis de T, who was Minister of Marine and War. Cardinal de Cl T was a cheerful little man who showed off his red stockings beneath his hitched-up cassock. His special passions were hating the Encyclopædia and playing billiards with desperate intensity. In those days, people passing through the Rue M on summer evenings, where the hôtel de Cl T then stood, would stop to listen to the crack of the balls and the Cardinal’s shrill voice calling to his conclavist, Monseigneur Cotiret, Bishop _in partibus_ of Caryste: “Watch, Abbé, I make a cannon.” Cardinal de Cl T had been brought to Madame de T.’s by his

closest friend, M. de Roquelaure, former Bishop of Senlis and one of the Forty. M. de Roquelaure was known for his tall figure and his constant attendance at the Academy. Through the glass door of the neighboring library hall, where the French Academy then held its meetings, curious onlookers could, every Tuesday, observe the former Bishop of Senlis, usually standing upright, freshly powdered, in violet stockings, with his back to the door, apparently so that his little collar could be seen to better advantage. All these churchmen, though most of them were as much courtiers as clerics, added to the solemnity of the T. salon. Its aristocratic character was further emphasized 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, though he was Prince de Mon—that is, a reigning prince abroad—had such an exalted idea of France and its peerage that he judged everything by that standard. It was he who said: "The cardinals are the peers of France of Rome; the lords are the peers of France of England." And yet, because the Revolution had to be present everywhere in this century, this feudal salon was, as we have said, ruled by a bourgeois. M. Gillenormand reigned there.

That was where the very heart and highest refinement of Parisian white society could be found. Reputations were kept under quarantine there, even Royalist reputations. Fame always carries a hint of anarchy. If Chateaubriand had entered, he would have seemed like Père Duchêne. Even so, a few of those they mocked did manage to get in, though only on sufferance. Comte Beug was admitted there, but only provisionally.

The “noble” salons of today no longer resemble those salons. The Faubourg Saint-Germain still smells of the fagot. To their credit, the Royalists of today are demagogues.

At Madame de T.’s, the company was of a higher order. Its taste was exquisite and proud, though covered by an elaborate politeness. The manners there allowed for all sorts of unconscious refinements that belonged to the old régime itself—buried, yet still alive. Some of these customs, especially in language, now seem eccentric. Anyone who knew them only superficially would have mistaken for provincial what was really antique. A woman was called _Madame la Générale_. _Madame la Colonelle_ had not entirely gone out of use. The charming Madame de Léon, no doubt in memory of the Duchesses de Longueville and de Chevreuse, preferred that form of address to her title of Princesse. The Marquise de Créquy was also called _Madame la Colonelle_.

It was this small circle of high society that introduced, at the Tuileries, the refined practice of addressing the King privately as _the King_, in the third person, and never as _Your Majesty_, because _Your Majesty_ had been “soiled by the usurper.”

There, men and events were put on trial. They mocked the age, which spared them the trouble of understanding it. They reinforced one another’s astonishment. They shared with one another the small amount of light they possessed. Methuselah informed Epimenides. The deaf man explained the course of events to the blind man. They insisted that the time that had passed since Coblentz had simply not existed. Just as Louis XVIII. was, by the grace of God, in the twenty-fifth year of his

reign, the émigrés were, by right, still in the twenty-fifth year of their youth.

Everything was calm and perfectly in tune; nothing felt vividly alive. People spoke so softly it was barely more than a breath. The newspapers, echoing the salons, seemed like something written on papyrus. There were a few young people, but they seemed half-dead themselves. The liveries in the antechamber were old-fashioned. These completely outdated figures were attended by servants just like them.

They all looked as though they had lived long ago and were stubbornly refusing the grave. Almost their entire vocabulary was made up of _Conserver, Conservation, Conservateur; to be in good odor_—that was what mattered. In fact, there was something aromatic about the opinions of these venerable circles, and their ideas seemed to carry that scent. It was a mummified society. The masters were embalmed, and the servants looked stuffed with straw.

A worthy old marquise, an _emigrée_ who had lost her fortune and kept only a single maid, still went on saying, “My people.”

What did they do in Madame de T.’s salon? They were ultra.

To be ultra—though the thing itself may not have vanished—no longer means much today. So let us explain it.

To be ultra is to go too far. It is to attack the sceptre in the name of the throne, and the mitre in the name of the altar. It is to mistreat the very thing you are trying to drag along; it is to kick over the traces. It is to complain about the fagot because

heretics have not been cooked enough by it. It is to reproach the idol for not inspiring enough idolatry. It is to insult out of excessive respect. It is to decide that the Pope is not papal enough, that the King is not kingly enough, and that the night has too much light. It is to find fault with alabaster, snow, the swan, and the lily in the name of whiteness. It is to support things so fanatically that you become their enemy. It is to be so completely for something that you end up against it.

The ultra spirit is especially characteristic of the first phase of the Restoration.

Nothing in history is quite like the quarter of an hour that begins in 1814 and ends around 1820, with the arrival of M. de Villèle, the practical man of the Right. Those six years were an extraordinary time: bright and bleak at once, cheerful and dark, lit as if by the glow of dawn and yet still covered by the shadows of the great disasters that filled the horizon and were only slowly fading into the past. In that mixture of light and shadow, a whole little world existed, both new and old, comic and sad, young and ancient, rubbing its eyes awake. Nothing resembles a return so much as an awakening. There was a group that looked at France with bad temper, while France looked back at it with irony: whole streets full of worthy old marquis-owls who had come back, and ghosts too, the "former" people, astonished by everything; brave and noble gentlemen who smiled to find themselves in France again, yet also wept—happy to see their country once more, despairing that they could not find their monarchy there. The nobility of the Crusades looked down on the nobility of the Empire—that is, the

nobility of the sword. Historic families had lost their sense of history. The sons of Charlemagne's companions scorned the companions of Napoleon. And, as we have just said, the swords returned the insult. The sword of Fontenoy was ridiculous, nothing but a piece of rusty iron. The sword of Marengo was hateful, merely a sabre. The old days did not recognize Yesterday. People had lost their feeling for greatness. Someone even called Bonaparte Scapin. That society no longer exists. Nothing of it, we repeat, survives today. If we pick out any one figure from it at random and try to bring it back to life in our minds, it seems as strange to us as the world before the Flood. That is because it too has, in fact, been swallowed by a deluge. It disappeared beneath two Revolutions. What waves ideas are! How quickly they sweep over everything they are meant to destroy and bury, and how swiftly they open terrible gulfs!

Such was the character of the salons in those distant, innocent days, when M. Martainville was thought to have more wit than Voltaire.

These salons had their own literary tastes and political views. They put their faith in Fiévée. M. Agier spoke in them with unquestioned authority. They discussed M. Colnet, the old bookseller and publicist from the Quay Malaquais. To them, Napoleon was simply the Corsican Ogre. Later, admitting M. le Marquis de Bonaparte, Lieutenant-General of the King’s armies, into history was a concession to the spirit of the age.

These salons did not stay pure for long. Starting in 1818, doctrinarians began to appear in them, adding a troubling new tone. Their habit was to be Royalists while apologizing for it.

Where the ultras were openly proud, the doctrinarians were somewhat embarrassed. They had wit, and they knew when to keep quiet. Their political creed was thoroughly laced with arrogance. They ought to have succeeded. They also went in, and quite usefully, for extremes of white neckties and tightly buttoned coats. The error—or misfortune—of the doctrinarian party was that it produced old young men. They struck the poses of sages. They dreamed of grafting a moderate form of power onto an absolute and excessive principle. They set conservative liberalism against the liberalism that tears everything down, and sometimes they did so with remarkable intelligence. They were heard to say: "Let us be grateful for Royalism! It has done more than one service. It has restored tradition, worship, religion, and respect. It is faithful, brave, chivalrous, affectionate, and devoted. It has joined, though reluctantly, the ancient grandeur of the monarchy to the new grandeur of the nation. Its fault is that it does not understand the Revolution, the Empire, glory, liberty, new ideas, the younger generation, or the age itself. But in making that mistake about us, have we not sometimes made the same mistake about them? The Revolution, whose heirs we are, ought to show intelligence in every direction. To attack Royalism is to misunderstand liberalism. What an error—and what blindness! Revolutionary France shows too little respect for historic France—that is, for its mother, and therefore for itself. After the 5th of September, the nobility of the monarchy is treated the way 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 we must always have something to ban! What is gained

by stripping the gilding from the crown of Louis XIV, or scraping away the coat of arms of Henry IV? We laugh at M. de Vaublanc for removing the N's from the bridge of Jena. But what did he do, really? And what are we doing now? Bouvines belongs to us just as much as Marengo. The fleurs-de-lys are ours just as much as the N's. That is our inheritance. Why should we make it smaller? We must not deny our country in its past any more than in its present. Why not accept the whole of history? Why not love the whole of France?"

That was how the doctrinaires both criticized and defended Royalism—Royalism, which disliked being criticized and was enraged by being defended.

The ultras defined the first phase of Royalism; the congregation marked the second. Skill comes after zeal. For now, let us leave it at this brief outline.

As this story unfolds, the author has come upon this curious moment in recent history and has had to glance at it in passing, tracing once again a few of the strange features of that society, now vanished. But he does so quickly, and without bitterness or mockery. Respectful and affectionate memories bind him to that past, because it touches his mother. And we should note this as well: that little world had a kind of greatness of its own. One may smile at it, but one can neither despise it nor hate it. It was the France of earlier days.

Marius continued his education, as all children do. When he passed out of Aunt Gillenormand's care, his grandfather placed him with a worthy teacher of the purest classical innocence.

This young soul, just opening to life, passed from a prude to a coarse pedant.

Marius went through his school years and then entered law school. He was a Royalist—fervent and rigid. He did not care much for his grandfather, whose gaiety and cynicism repelled him, and his feelings toward his father were dark and troubled.

Taken as a whole, he was a boy both cool and passionate, noble, generous, proud, religious, and enthusiastic; dignified to the point of harshness, and so pure that he was shy.

CHAPTER IV—END OF THE BRIGAND

The end of Marius's classical studies came at the same time as M. Gillenormand's withdrawal from society. The old man said goodbye to the Faubourg Saint-Germain and to Madame de T.'s salon, and settled in the Marais, in his house on the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire. There, besides the porter, he had as servants that chambermaid, Nicolette, who had replaced Magnon, and that wheezing, stout Basque who have already been mentioned.

In 1827, Marius had just turned seventeen. One evening, when he came home, he saw his grandfather holding a letter.

"Marius," said M. Gillenormand, "you will leave for Vernon tomorrow."

"Why?" asked Marius.

"To see your father."

Marius was suddenly overcome by trembling. He had imagined every possibility except this one: that one day he would be summoned to see his father. Nothing could have been more unexpected, more startling, or, let us admit it, more unwelcome to him. It meant forcing a reconciliation where there had long been estrangement. It was not a calamity, but it was an unpleasant obligation.

Along with his political hostility, Marius was convinced that his father—the slasher, as M. Gillenormand called him on his more

good-natured days—did not love him. That seemed obvious to him, since his father had left him in the care of others. Believing himself unloved, he did not love in return. “Nothing could be simpler,” he said to himself.

He was so stunned that he did not question M. Gillenormand. His grandfather went on:

“It seems he is ill. He is asking for you.”

After a pause, he added:

“Leave tomorrow morning. I believe there is a coach that leaves the Cour des Fontaines at six o’clock and arrives in the evening. Take it. He says there is urgency.”

Then he crushed the letter in his hand and shoved it into his pocket. Marius could have left that very evening and reached his father the next morning. At that time, a diligence from the Rue du Bouloi traveled to Rouen overnight and passed through Vernon. Neither Marius nor M. Gillenormand thought to ask about it.

The next day, at dusk, Marius arrived in Vernon. People were just beginning to light their candles. He asked the first person he met for “M. Pontmercy’s house.” In his own mind, he agreed with the Restoration and, like it, refused to recognize his father’s claim to the title of either colonel or baron.

He was shown the house. He rang, and a woman holding a small lamp opened the door.

“M. Pontmercy?” said Marius.

The woman stood motionless.

“Is this his house?” Marius asked.

The woman nodded yes.

“Can I speak to him?”

The woman shook her head.

“But I am his son!” Marius insisted. “He is expecting me.”

“He isn’t expecting you anymore,” the woman said.

Then he realized that she was crying.

She pointed to the door of a room on the ground floor, and he went in.

In the room, lit by a tallow candle on the mantelpiece, were three men: one standing, another kneeling, and one lying full length on the floor in his shirt. The man on the floor was the colonel.

The other two were the doctor and the priest, who was praying.

The colonel had been struck by brain fever three days earlier. From the very start of his illness, he had sensed something bad was coming, and he had written to M. Gillenormand asking for his son. The illness had worsened. On the very evening Marius arrived at Vernon, the colonel had a fit of delirium. He got out of bed despite the servant’s efforts to stop him, crying, “My son is not coming! I shall go to meet him!” Then he ran out of his room and collapsed on the floor of the antechamber. He had just died.

The doctor and the curé had been sent for. The doctor came too late. The son came too late as well.

In the dim candlelight, a large tear could be seen on the pale cheek of the colonel as he lay there, where it had fallen from his dead eye. The eye was dark, but the tear was not yet dry. That tear was for his son's delay.

Marius looked at this man, whom he was seeing for the first time: that noble, manly face; those open eyes that no longer saw; that white hair; those strong limbs marked here and there by brown scars from sword wounds and red star-like marks from bullet holes. He stared at the great scar that stamped heroism on a face where God had also set goodness. He thought: this man was his father, and this man was dead. A shiver passed through him.

The grief he felt was the same grief he would have felt at the sight of any other man lying dead before him.

Anguish—sharp, piercing anguish—filled that room. The servant woman was weeping in a corner, the curé was praying, and his sobs could be heard; the doctor was wiping his eyes; even the corpse itself seemed to be weeping.

The doctor, the priest, and the woman stood there in their grief, looking at Marius without saying a word; he was the stranger among them. Marius, who felt far too little, was ashamed and uncomfortable about his own coldness. He held his hat in his hand, then let it fall to the floor, hoping it would look as though grief had left him too weak to keep hold of it.

At the same time, he felt remorse, and he despised himself for acting this way. But was it really his fault? He did not love his father. Why should he?

The colonel had left nothing behind. The sale of the larger pieces of furniture barely covered the cost of his burial.

The servant found a scrap of paper and handed it to Marius. It contained the following words, written in the colonel's hand:

"_For my son_.—The Emperor made me a Baron on the battlefield of Waterloo. Since the Restoration denies my right to this title, which I bought with my blood, my son shall accept it and bear it. Of course, he will prove worthy of it." Below this, the colonel had added: "At that same battle of Waterloo, a sergeant saved my life. The man's name was Thénardier. I believe he has lately been keeping a small inn in a village near Paris, at Chelles or Montfermeil. If my son ever meets him, he will do all the good he can for Thénardier."

Marius took the paper and kept it, not out of duty to his father, but because of that vague respect for death that always weighs heavily on the human heart.

Nothing remained of the colonel. M. Gillenormand had his sword and uniform sold to a dealer in old clothes. The neighbors ravaged the garden and carried off the rare flowers. The rest of the plants became nettles and weeds, and died.

Marius stayed at Vernon only forty-eight hours. After the burial, he returned to Paris and went back to his law studies, thinking no more about his father than if he had never existed. In two

days the colonel was buried, and in three he was forgotten.

Marius wore crape on his hat. That was all.

CHAPTER V—WHY GOING TO MASS CAN TURN A MAN INTO A REVOLUTIONIST

Marius had kept the religious habits of his childhood. One Sunday, he went to hear Mass at Saint-Sulpice, in that same chapel of the Virgin where his aunt had taken him when he was a little boy. More distracted and thoughtful than usual that day, he stood behind a pillar and knelt, without really noticing, at a chair covered in Utrecht velvet. On the back was written this name: _Monsieur Mabeuf, warden_. Mass had barely begun when an old man came up to him and said:

“This is my seat, sir.”

Marius moved aside at once, and the old man took his chair.

When Mass was over, Marius was still standing a few steps away, lost in thought. The old man came up to him again and said:

“I beg your pardon, sir, for disturbing you a little while ago, and for disturbing you again now. You must have thought me intrusive, and I will explain.”

“There is no need for that, sir,” said Marius.

“Yes!” the old man went on. “I don’t want you to think badly of me. You see, I’m attached to this place. It seems to me the mass is better from here. Why? I’ll tell you. From this very spot, for the last ten years, I have watched a poor, brave father come

regularly every two or three months. He had no other chance, no other way to see his child, because family arrangements kept him away. He came at the hour when he knew his son would be brought to mass. The little boy never suspected his father was there. Perhaps he did not even know he had a father, poor innocent child! The father stayed hidden behind a pillar so he would not be seen. He looked at his child and wept. He adored that little fellow, poor man! I could see it plainly. In my eyes, this place has become sacred, and I have fallen into the habit of coming here to hear mass. I prefer it to the stall I am entitled to as church warden. I knew that unhappy gentleman a little as well. He had a father-in-law, a rich aunt, relatives—I don't know exactly who all—who threatened to disinherit the child if the father saw him. He gave himself up so that one day his son might be rich and happy. He was kept apart from him because of his political opinions. Certainly, I respect political opinions, but some people do not know where to stop. Mon Dieu! A man is not a monster because he was at Waterloo, and a father should not be separated from his child for a reason like that. He was one of Bonaparte's colonels. I believe he is dead. 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 splendid sword-cut, on my honor."

"Pontmercy," Marius said, turning pale.

"Exactly, Pontmercy. Did you know him?"

"Sir," said Marius, "he was my father."

The old warden clasped his hands and cried out:

“Ah! So you are the child! Yes, of course, he would be a man by now. Well, poor child, you can truly say that you had a father who loved you dearly!”

Marius offered the old man his arm and escorted him to his lodgings.

The next day, he said to M. Gillenormand:

“I have arranged a hunting party with some friends. Will you allow me to be away for three days?”

“Four!” his grandfather replied. “Go entertain yourself.”

Then he said to his daughter in a low voice, with a wink, “Some love affair!”

CHAPTER VI—THE CONSEQUENCES OF MEETING A WARDEN

Where Marius went will be revealed a little later.

Marius was gone for three days. Then he returned to Paris, went straight to the law school library, and asked for the files of the Moniteur—.

He read the Moniteur—. He read every history of the Republic and the Empire, the Memorial de Sainte-Hélène_, all the memoirs, all the newspapers, the bulletins, and the proclamations. He devoured everything. The first time he came across his father's name in the bulletins of the grand army, he was feverish for a week. He went to see the generals under whom Georges Pontmercy had served, and among others Comte H. Church-warden Mabeuf, whom he visited again. Marius spoke to him about the life at Vernon, the colonel's retirement, his flowers, and his solitude. Marius came at last to fully understand that rare, gentle, sublime man, that kind of lion-lamb who had been his father.

Meanwhile, so absorbed was he in this study, which took up all his time and all his thoughts, that he hardly saw the Gillenormands at all. He appeared at meals; after that, they would look for him and find that he was nowhere to be found. Father Gillenormand smiled. “Bah! bah! He is just at the age for girls!” Sometimes the old man added, “The deuce! I thought it was only a flirtation. It seems it is a matter of passion!”

It was a passion indeed. Marius was well on the way to worshipping his father.

At the same time, his ideas went through an extraordinary change. This change came in many stages, one after another. Since this is the story of many minds in our own day, we think it may be useful to follow those stages step by step and point out each one.

The history he had just begun to look into filled him with dread.

Its first effect was to overwhelm him with brilliance.

Until then, the Republic and the Empire had been nothing to him but huge, terrifying words. The Republic was a guillotine at dusk; the Empire, a sword in the dark. He had just looked at them more closely, and where he had expected to find only a chaos of shadows, he saw instead—with a kind of astonished mix of fear and joy—stars shining: Mirabeau, Vergniaud, Saint-Just, Robespierre, Camille Desmoulins, Danton; and then a sun rising: Napoleon. He no longer knew where he stood. The brilliance overwhelmed him, and he drew back, dazzled. Little by little, as his astonishment faded, he grew used to that radiance. He looked at these great deeds without losing his

balance, and he studied these figures without fear. The Revolution and the Empire now appeared before his mind clearly and in perspective. He saw each of these clusters of events and men gathered into two immense facts: in the Republic, the sovereignty of civil rights restored to the people; in the Empire, the sovereignty of the French idea imposed on Europe. He saw the great figure of the people rise out of the Revolution, and the great figure of France emerge from the Empire. In his conscience, he declared that all this had been good. What his dazzled condition overlooked in this first judgment, which was far too sweeping, we do not think it necessary to point out here. We are recording the state of a mind in motion. Progress does not happen in a single step. Having said that once and for all, both about what comes before and what follows, we continue.

He then realized that, until that moment, he had understood his country no better than he had understood his father. He had known neither one nor the other, and a kind of chosen darkness had covered his eyes. Now he saw clearly. On one side he admired; on the other, he adored.

He was overwhelmed with regret and remorse. In despair, he thought that everything in his heart could now be spoken only to a grave. Oh, if his father had still been alive, if he had still had him, if God in his mercy and goodness had allowed his father to remain among the living, how he would have run to him, thrown himself into his arms, and cried out: “Father! Here I am! It is I! I have the same heart as you! I am your son!” How he would have embraced that white head, soaked his hair with tears, looked at

his scar, clasped his hands, cherished his coat, kissed his feet! Why had his father died so soon, before his time, before his son's justice and love could reach him? Marius carried a constant sob in his heart that said to him every moment: "Alas!" At the same time, he became genuinely more serious, more steady, more certain in his thoughts and his faith. Again and again, flashes of truth came and completed his understanding. It seemed as though something inside him were growing. He felt a kind of natural expansion that gave him two things that were new to him—his father and his country.

Just as everything opens when you have the key, he now found an explanation for what he had hated, and he came to understand what he had once loathed. From that point on, he clearly saw the providential, divine, and human meaning of the great events he had been taught to despise, and of the great men he had been taught to curse. When he thought about his former opinions—opinions that were really only from yesterday, yet already seemed very old to him—he felt indignant, and yet he smiled.

Once he had restored his father in his own mind, he naturally went on to restore Napoleon as well.

But this second change, we must admit, did not come easily.

From childhood, he had absorbed the views of the party of 1814 about Bonaparte. At that time, all the prejudices of the Restoration—its interests and its instincts as well—worked to distort Napoleon's image. It hated him even more than Robespierre. It had very skillfully taken advantage of the

nation's exhaustion and of mothers' hatred. Bonaparte had become an almost mythical monster, and to impress that image on the public imagination—which, as we have just noted, is much like the imagination of children—the party of 1814 made him appear in one frightening disguise after another, ranging from what is terrible yet still grand to what is terrible and grotesque, from Tiberius to a bogeyman. So when people spoke of Bonaparte, they were free either to weep or to burst out laughing, as long as hatred was underneath it all. Marius had never held any other idea of that man, as he was called. Those ideas had taken root with all the stubbornness in his nature. Inside him was a willful little being who hated Napoleon.

But as he read history and studied Napoleon, especially through historical documents and source materials, the veil that had hidden Napoleon from Marius's eyes was gradually torn away. He began to glimpse something immense, and he suspected that he had been deceived until then about Bonaparte, just as he had been deceived about everything else. Day by day he saw more clearly. Slowly, step by step, he began to climb—at first almost reluctantly, then with exhilaration, as if drawn by an irresistible force—first the dark steps, then the dimly lit ones, and at last the bright and glorious steps of enthusiasm.

One night he was alone in his little room under the roof. His candle was burning. He was reading with his elbows on the table beside the open window. All kinds of drifting thoughts came to him out of the night and mixed with his own. What a spectacle night is. You hear muffled sounds without knowing where they come from. You see Jupiter, twelve hundred times

larger than the earth, glowing like a torch. The blue of the sky turns black. The stars shine. It is overwhelming.

He was reading the bulletins of the Grand Army, those heroic passages written on the battlefield. Every so often he saw his father's name there, always alongside the Emperor's. The whole vast Empire rose before him. He felt something building and surging inside him. At moments, it seemed to him that his father passed close by like a breath and whispered in his ear. Little by little, he slipped into a strange state. He thought he could hear drums, cannon, trumpets, the steady march of battalions, and the dull, distant gallop of cavalry. From time to time, his eyes lifted to the sky and fixed on the colossal constellations shining in the boundless depths of space; then they dropped back to his book, where they seemed to see other colossal things moving in confusion. His heart tightened. He was carried away, trembling and breathless. Suddenly, without knowing exactly what was in him or what impulse he was following, he leaped to his feet, stretched both arms out the window, stared into the gloom, the silence, the infinite darkness, the eternal immensity, and cried out: "Long live the Emperor!"

From that moment on, everything was settled. The Ogre of Corsica, the usurper, the tyrant, the monster said to be the lover of his own sisters, the actor who took lessons from Talma, the poisoner of Jaffa, the tiger, Buonaparte—all of that disappeared. In his mind, it gave way to a vague, dazzling radiance, and high above, beyond reach, there shone the pale marble phantom of Caesar. For his father, the Emperor had been only the beloved captain one admires and for whom one

gives one's life. For Marius, he was something more. He was the destined builder of the French order, following the Roman order in ruling the universe. He was a prodigious architect of destruction, the heir of Charlemagne, Louis XI, Henry IV, Richelieu, Louis XIV, and the Committee of Public Safety. He had his stains, no doubt, his faults, even his crimes, because he was a man; but he was majestic in his faults, brilliant in his stains, and powerful in his crimes.

He was the man destiny had chosen, the one who had forced every nation to say, "The great nation!" He was more than that: he was France itself, conquering Europe with the sword in his hand and the world with the light he spread. In Bonaparte, Marius saw that dazzling figure that will always rise on the frontier and stand guard over the future. A despot, yes, but a dictator born from a republic and embodying a revolution. To him, Napoleon became the human image of the people, just as Jesus Christ is the human image of God.

As with all new converts to a faith, his conversion went to his head. He threw himself into it completely and carried it too far. That was simply his nature. Once he started downhill, it was almost impossible for him to slow himself. A kind of worship of the sword took hold of him and tangled itself up with his devotion to the ideal. He did not see that, along with genius, he was also accepting force—in other words, that he was giving two places in his idol worship: one to what was divine, the other to what was brutal. In many ways, he had begun to deceive himself in other respects as well. He accepted everything. It is possible to run into error while on the way to truth. He had a

fierce kind of sincerity that embraced everything at once. On this new path he had entered, whether judging the faults of the old regime or measuring Napoleon's glory, he ignored the circumstances that might have softened the judgment.

In any case, an immense step had been taken. Where he had once seen the fall of the monarchy, he now saw the rise of France. His whole direction had changed. What had once been east for him was now west. He had turned completely around.

All these inner revolutions took place without his family having the slightest suspicion of them.

When, in the course of this secret inner work, he had completely shed his old Bourbon and ultra skin, when he had cast off the aristocrat, the Jacobite, and the Royalist, when he had become fully a revolutionary, deeply democratic and republican, he went to an engraver on the Quai des Orfévres and ordered a hundred cards printed with this name: _Le Baron Marius Pontmercy_.

This was simply the strict logical result of the change that had taken place in him, a change in which everything centered on his father.

But since he knew no one and had no porter with whom he could leave his cards, he put them back in his pocket.

By a natural process, the closer he felt to his father, to his father's memory, and to the causes for which the colonel had fought twenty-five years earlier, the farther he grew from his grandfather. We said long ago that M. Gillenormand's

temperament did not suit him. Even then, all the discord between a serious young man and a frivolous old one was already there. Géronte's cheerfulness jars and angers Werther's melancholy. As long as they had shared the same political opinions and ideas, Marius had been able to meet M. Gillenormand on that common ground, as though on a bridge. When the bridge collapsed, an abyss opened between them. And beyond all that, Marius felt inexpressible urges to rebel when he thought that it was M. Gillenormand who, for foolish reasons, had cruelly torn him away from the colonel, depriving the father of his child and the child of his father.

Out of pity for his father, Marius had almost come to dislike his grandfather.

Yet, as we have already said, none of this showed outwardly. He simply grew colder and colder, spoke little at meals, and was seldom at home. When his aunt scolded him for it, he answered very gently and used his studies, his lectures, his examinations, and so on as excuses. His grandfather never moved from his unfailing diagnosis: "He's in love! I know all about it."

From time to time, Marius went away for short periods.

"Where does he keep going like this?" said his aunt.

On one of these trips, which were always very short, he went to Montfermeil to carry out the instruction his father had left him, and he looked for the old sergeant from Waterloo, the innkeeper Thénardier. Thénardier had gone bankrupt, the inn was closed, and no one knew what had become of him. Marius was away from home for four days on this search.

“He is definitely going wild,” said his grandfather.

They thought they had noticed that he wore something on his chest, under his shirt, hanging from his neck by a black ribbon.

CHAPTER VII—SOME PETTICOAT

We have mentioned a lancer.

He was M. Gillenormand's great-grandnephew on his father's side, and he lived the life of a soldier, away from the family and far from home. Lieutenant Théodule Gillenormand had everything needed to make what people call a fine officer. He had "a lady's waist," and a triumphant way of dragging his sword and twisting his moustache into a hook. He came to Paris very seldom—so seldom that Marius had never seen him. The cousins knew each other only by name. We have, I think, already said that Théodule was Aunt Gillenormand's favorite, partly because she never saw him. When you do not see people, you can imagine every possible perfection in them.

One morning, the elder Mademoiselle Gillenormand returned to her room as upset as her calm nature allowed. Marius had just asked his grandfather for permission to take a short trip, adding that he intended to leave that very evening. "Go!" his grandfather had replied. Then M. Gillenormand had added aside, lifting his eyebrows to the top of his forehead, "There he goes, spending the night out again." Mademoiselle Gillenormand went upstairs deeply perplexed, and on the staircase she let out this exclamation: "This is too much!" followed by this question: "But where can he be going?" She immediately imagined some affair of the heart, more or less improper—a woman hidden in the shadows, a secret meeting, a mystery—and she would not have minded poking her

spectacles into it. Getting a taste for mystery is like getting the first hint of scandal; even saintly souls do not dislike it. In the hidden corners of bigotry, there is always some curiosity about scandal.

So she found herself seized by a vague desire to uncover the whole story.

To calm the curiosity that was stirring her more than usual, she took refuge in her handiwork. She began scalloping, layer upon layer of cotton, one of those Empire and Restoration embroideries full of cartwheels. The work was awkward, and the worker was irritable. She had been sitting over it for several hours when the door opened. Mademoiselle Gillenormand lifted her nose. Lieutenant Théodule stood before her, giving the regulation salute. She cried out with delight. A woman may be old, prudish, devout, and an aunt, but it is still pleasant to see a lancer walk into her room.

“You here, Théodule!” she cried.

“I’m just passing through town, aunt.”

“Give me a hug.”

“Here goes!” said Théodule.

He kissed her, and Aunt Gillenormand went to her writing desk and opened it.

“You’ll stay with us for at least a week, won’t you?”

“I’m leaving this very evening, aunt.”

“That’s impossible!”

“Mathematically impossible!”

“Stay, my dear little Théodule, I beg you.”

“My heart says yes, but my orders say no. It’s very simple. They’re changing our garrison. We were stationed at Melun, and now we’re being transferred to Gaillon. We have to pass through Paris to get from the old post to the new one. So I said, ‘I’m going to see my aunt.’”

“Here’s something for your trouble.”

And she placed ten louis in his hand.

“For my pleasure, you mean, my dear aunt.”

Théodule kissed her again, and she had the pleasure of feeling the braid on his uniform scrape the skin on her neck.

“Are you making the trip on horseback with your regiment?” she asked.

“No, aunt. I wanted to see you, so I got special permission. My servant is taking my horse, and I’m traveling by diligence. By the way, I want to ask you something.”

“What is it?”

“Is my cousin Marius Pontmercy traveling that way too?”

“How do you know that?” his aunt said, suddenly stung by sharp curiosity.

“When I arrived, I went to the diligence office to reserve my seat in the coupé.”

“Well?”

“Another traveler had already come to reserve a seat on the imperial. I saw his name on the card.”

“What name?”

“Marius Pontmercy.”

“The wretched boy!” his aunt exclaimed. “Ah! Your cousin is not a sensible young man like you. Just think—he’s going to spend the night in a diligence!”

“Just as I am.”

“But for you, it’s duty; for him, it’s recklessness.”

“Nonsense!” said Théodule.

At that moment, an idea came to the elder Mademoiselle Gillenormand. If she had been a man, she would have smacked her forehead. She turned to Théodule and said:

“Do you know whether your cousin recognizes you?”

“No. I’ve seen him, but he has never bothered to notice me.”

“So you’re going to travel together?”

“He’ll be on the imperial, and I’ll be in the coupé.”

“Where is this diligence going?”

“To Andelys.”

“Then that’s where Marius is going?”

“Unless he gets off along the way, as I do. I’m getting down at Vernon to take the branch coach to Gaillon. I know nothing about Marius’s travel plans.”

“Marius! What an ugly name! Whatever made them call him Marius? At least your name is Théodule.”

“I’d rather be called Alfred,” said the officer.

“Listen, Théodule.”

“I’m listening, aunt.”

“Pay attention.”

“I am.”

“Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“Well, Marius is going away!”

“Eh! eh!”

“He’s traveling.”

“Ah! ah!”

“He’s spending the night away from home.”

“Oh! oh!”

“We’d like to know what’s behind all this.”

Théodule replied with the calm composure of a man made of bronze:

“Some woman or other.”

Then, with that inward laugh that shows complete certainty, he added:

“A girl.”

“That’s obvious,” his aunt cried. She thought she could hear M. Gillenormand speaking, and her certainty became irresistible at that word _fillette_, pronounced almost exactly the same way by the granduncle and the grandnephew. She went on:

“Do us a favor. Follow Marius for a little while. He doesn’t know you, so it will be easy. Since there’s a girl involved, try to catch sight of her. You must write and tell us the whole story. It will amuse his grandfather.”

Théodule was not especially fond of this kind of spying, but the ten louis impressed him, and he thought there might be more to come later. He accepted the task and said, “As you wish, aunt.”

Then he added under his breath, to himself: “So here I am, playing chaperone.”

Mademoiselle Gillenormand hugged him.

“You are not the sort of man to play tricks like that, Théodule. You respect discipline. You obey orders like a slave. You are a man of scruples and duty, and you would never leave your family just to go see some woman.”

The lancer made the same pleased face Cartouche might have made if someone had praised his honesty.

The next evening, Marius got onto the stagecoach without suspecting that anyone was watching him. As for the watcher, the first thing he did was fall asleep. He slept thoroughly and dutifully. Argus snored all night.

At daybreak, the conductor of the stagecoach shouted, “Vernon! Change of horses at Vernon! Passengers for Vernon!” and Lieutenant Théodule woke up.

“Good,” he muttered, still half asleep. “This is where I get off.”

Then, as he woke more fully and his memory gradually returned, he remembered his aunt, the ten louis, and the report he had promised to give on everything Marius did. That made him laugh.

“Maybe he isn’t even in the coach anymore,” he thought, as he buttoned up the waistcoat of his undress uniform. “He may have stopped at Poissy. He may have stopped at Triel. If he didn’t get out at Meulan, he may have got out at Mantes, unless he got out at Rolleboise, or went on as far as Pacy, with the option of turning left at Évreus or right at Laroche-Guyon. Go chase after him yourself, aunty. What the devil am I supposed to write to that dear old soul?”

At that moment, a pair of black trousers came down from the imperial and appeared at the window of the coupé.

“Could that be Marius?” said the lieutenant.

It was Marius.

A little peasant girl, bustling among the horses and postilions at the end of the vehicle, was offering flowers to the travelers. “Buy flowers for your ladies!” she cried.

Marius went up to her and bought the finest flowers from her shallow basket.

"Come now," said Théodule, jumping down from the coupé, "now you've really made me curious. Who on earth is he taking those flowers to? She must be remarkably beautiful to deserve such a fine bouquet. I want to see her."

No longer following orders, but driven by his own curiosity, he went after Marius like a hunting dog that has picked up a trail for itself.

Marius paid Théodule no attention. Stylish women were getting down from the diligence, but he did not even look at them. He seemed unaware of everything around him.

"He really is deeply in love!" thought Théodule.

Marius headed toward the church.

"Excellent," Théodule said to himself. "A rendezvous with a touch of mass is the very best kind. Nothing is more delightful than a flirtatious glance cast right over God's head."

When he reached the church, Marius did not go inside. Instead, he walked around the apse and disappeared behind one of its corners.

"So the meeting is outside," said Théodule. "Let's have a look at the girl."

And he crept forward on tiptoe toward the corner Marius had turned.

When he got there, he stopped short in astonishment.

Marius was kneeling in the grass on a grave, his forehead buried in his hands. He had scattered his bouquet over it. At the end of the grave, on the small rise that marked the head, stood a black wooden cross with this name in white letters: COLONEL BARON PONTMERCY. Marius's sobs could be heard.

The "girl" was a grave.

CHAPTER VIII—MARBLE AGAINST GRANITE

This was where Marius had come the first time he stayed away from Paris. This was where he came every time M. Gillenormand said, "He is sleeping out."

Lieutenant Théodule was completely shaken by this unexpected encounter with a tomb. He felt a strange, unpleasant emotion he could not explain, made up of respect for the grave mixed with respect for the colonel. He withdrew and left Marius alone in the cemetery, and even that retreat had a kind of military discipline to it. Death seemed to him to be wearing grand epaulets, and he almost saluted it. Since he did not know what to write to his aunt, he decided not to write at all. Most likely, Théodule's discovery about Marius's love life would have led to nothing if, through one of those mysterious turns of chance that happen so often, the scene at Vernon had not been followed almost at once by a reaction in Paris.

Marius returned from Vernon on the third day, around the middle of the morning, and got out at his grandfather's door. Exhausted from two nights in the diligence, and wanting to make up for lost sleep with an hour at the swimming school, he hurried up to his room, took just enough time to throw off his traveling coat and the black ribbon he wore around his neck, and then went off to bathe.

M. Gillenormand, who had risen early, like all healthy old men, heard him come in and hurried up the stairs as fast as his old

legs would allow to the top floor where Marius lived, intending to embrace him, question him at the same time, and find out where he had been.

But the young man had gone downstairs faster than the old man had come up, and when Father Gillenormand entered the attic, Marius was already gone.

The bed had not been slept in, and spread out on it, though not in any spirit of defiance, lay the greatcoat and the black ribbon.

“I like this better,” said M. Gillenormand.

A moment later, he entered the salon, where Mademoiselle Gillenormand was already seated, busily embroidering her cartwheels.

He made a triumphant entrance.

M. Gillenormand held the greatcoat in one hand and the neck ribbon in the other, and cried out:—

“Victory! We’re about to break through the mystery! We’re going to learn every last detail. We’re going to put our finger on the secret debaucheries of our sly friend! Here is the romance itself. I have the portrait!”

In fact, a black shagreen case, like one used for a portrait medallion, hung from the ribbon.

The old man took the case and stared at it for some time without opening it. He wore a look of pleasure, delight, and anger, like a poor starving man watching a magnificent dinner pass right under his nose when he cannot touch it.

“Because this is obviously a portrait. I know all about such things. People wear that sort of thing close to the heart, with great tenderness. How foolish they are! It is probably some dreadful horror that will make us shudder! Young men have such terrible taste these days!”

“Let us see it, father,” said the old maid.

The case opened when they pressed a spring. Inside, they found nothing but a carefully folded paper.

“From the same to the same,” said M. Gillenormand, bursting out laughing. “I know what it is. A love letter.”

“Ah! Let us read it!” said the aunt.

And she put on her spectacles. They unfolded the paper and read the following:

“_For my son_.—The Emperor made me a Baron on the battlefield of Waterloo. Since the Restoration denies my right to this title, which I bought with my blood, my son shall take it and bear it. Of course he will prove worthy of it.”

The feelings of father and daughter cannot be described. They felt as cold as if the breath of death had touched them. They did not say a word to each other.

M. Gillenormand only said, in a low voice, as if speaking to himself:

“It is the butcher’s handwriting.”

The aunt examined the paper, turned it over in every direction, and then put it back in its case.

At that same moment, a small oblong packet wrapped in blue paper fell from one of the greatcoat’s pockets. Mademoiselle Gillenormand picked it up and unfolded the blue paper.

It contained Marius’ hundred cards. She handed one to M. Gillenormand, who read: _Le Baron Marius Pontmercy_.

The old man rang the bell, and Nicolette came in. M. Gillenormand took the ribbon, the case, and the coat, threw them onto the floor in the middle of the room, and said:

“Take those things away.”

A full hour passed in complete silence. The old man and the old maid sat with their backs to each other, and each was probably thinking the same thoughts in private.

At the end of the hour, Aunt Gillenormand said: “This is a fine state of affairs!”

A few moments later, Marius appeared. He came in. Before he had even crossed the threshold, he saw his grandfather holding one of his calling cards in his hand, and as soon as the old man caught sight of him, he cried out in that smug, grinning, middle-class tone of superiority that was so crushing:

“Well, well, well, well, well! So you’re a baron now. Allow me to congratulate you. What does this mean?”

Marius flushed slightly and replied:

“It means that I am my father’s son.”

M. Gillenormand stopped laughing and said harshly:

“I am your father.”

“My father,” Marius answered, his eyes lowered and his expression stern, “was a humble and heroic man who served the Republic and France with glory, who was great in the greatest chapter of history men have ever made, who lived in military camps for twenty-five years under grapeshot and bullets, in snow and mud by day and under rain at night, who captured two flags, who received twenty wounds, who died forgotten and abandoned, and who made only one mistake: loving too deeply two ingrates, his country and myself.”

This was more than M. Gillenormand could endure. At the word Republic–, he stood up—or rather, sprang to his feet. Every word Marius had just spoken struck the old Royalist like blasts from a forge on a burning coal. His face changed from pale to red, from red to purple, and from purple to fiery crimson.

“Marius!” he cried. “You wretched boy! I don’t know what your father was, and I don’t want to know. I know nothing about him, and I do not know the man. But this much I do know: there was never anything but scoundrels among those people. Every one of them was a rogue, a murderer, a red-cap, a thief! All of them, I tell you! All of them! I don’t know a single exception. All of them! Do you hear me, Marius? And let me tell you this: you are no more a baron than my slipper is. They were all bandits in Robespierre’s service. Everyone who served B-u-o-naparté

was a brigand. They were all traitors who betrayed, betrayed, betrayed their rightful king. All cowards who ran from the Prussians and the English at Waterloo. That is what I know. Whether Monsieur your father belongs in that group, I cannot say. I am sorry for it; so much the worse for him, your humble servant!"

Now it was Marius who burst into flame, and M. Gillenormand who fanned it. Marius trembled from head to foot. He did not know what he was about to do; his brain burned. He was like a priest watching all his consecrated wafers scattered to the wind, like a fakir seeing a passer-by spit on his idol. It was unbearable that such words had been spoken in front of him. What was he to do? His father had just been trampled on and insulted before his eyes—but by whom? By his grandfather. How could he defend one without offending the other? He could not insult his grandfather, and he could not leave his father unavenged. On one side was a sacred grave; on the other, white hair.

For several moments he stood there, reeling as if drunk, with this whole storm raging through his mind. Then he lifted his eyes, stared hard at his grandfather, and cried out in a voice of thunder:

"Down with the Bourbons, and with that great hog Louis XVIII.!"

Louis XVIII had been dead for four years, but that made no difference to him.

The old man, who had been crimson with anger, turned whiter than his hair. He turned toward a bust of Monsieur le Duc de

Berry on the mantelpiece and bowed deeply to it, with a strange kind of majesty. Then he crossed the room twice, slowly and without a word, from the fireplace to the window and back again, covering the full length of the room and making the polished floor creak as if a stone statue were walking over it.

On his second pass, he bent over his daughter, who had been watching the scene with the dazed look of some old-fashioned, bewildered lamb, and said to her with a smile that was almost calm, “A baron like this gentleman and a bourgeois like me cannot stay under the same roof.”

Then he suddenly drew himself up—pale, trembling, and terrifying, his brow seeming higher in the fierce light of his anger—stretched out his arm toward Marius, and shouted:

“Get out!”

Marius left the house.

The next day, M. Gillenormand said to his daughter:

“You will send that bloodsucker sixty pistoles every six months, and you will never mention his name to me.”

He had such a vast store of anger to work off, and no idea what else to do with it, that for the next three months he kept addressing his daughter as _you_ instead of _thou_.

For his part, Marius had gone away in a fury. One thing, it must be said, made his anger worse. In family dramas, there are always these small strokes of bad luck that make everything more tangled. They add to the sense of injury, even though they do not really increase the wrong itself. As Nicolette hurriedly

carried Marius' "duds" to his room at his grandfather's order, she had probably dropped, on the dark attic staircase, the black shagreen medallion that held the paper written by the colonel. Neither the paper nor the case was ever found afterward. Marius was convinced that "Monsieur Gillenormand"—from that day on he referred to him in no other way—had thrown "his father's testament" into the fire. He knew the few lines the colonel had written by heart, so nothing was lost in that sense. But the paper itself, the handwriting, that sacred relic—all that was his very heart. What had become of it?

Marius left without saying where he was going, and without knowing himself. He had thirty francs, his watch, and a few clothes in a hand-bag. He got into a hackney coach, hired it by the hour, and let it take him at random toward the Latin Quarter.

What was to become of Marius?

CHAPTER I—A GROUP THAT CAME VERY CLOSE TO BECOMING HISTORIC

At that time, though everything seemed calm on the surface, a faint revolutionary tremor was in the air. The spirit that had risen from the depths of ’89 and ’93 still lingered. Youth was on the verge of shedding its old skin, if the reader will forgive the phrase. People were changing, almost without realizing it, under the pressure of the age. Just as the needle turns on a compass, so souls were turning too. Each person was taking the next step he was destined to take. Royalists were becoming liberals, and liberals were becoming democrats. It was a rising tide, tangled with a thousand backward currents; and the nature of those backward currents is to mix everything together. That is why such strange combinations of ideas appeared: people worshipped both Napoleon and liberty. We are writing history here. These were the mirages of that period. Opinions pass through phases. Voltairian royalism, an odd variety, was followed by something no less strange: Bonapartist liberalism.

Other groups of minds were more serious. In that direction, people were probing principles and committing themselves to what was right. They became passionate about the absolute and caught sight of infinite possibilities. The absolute, by its very rigidity, drives minds upward and sets them drifting through boundless space. Nothing produces dreams like dogma. And nothing gives birth to the future like dreams. Utopia today, living reality tomorrow.

These advanced opinions rested on two foundations. First, a beginning of mystery was threatening "the established order of things," in a way that was secretive and suspect. It was a sign of the highest revolutionary importance. The hidden thoughts of power meet the hidden thoughts of the people underground. The slow brewing of insurrections answers the planned preparation of _coups d'état_.

France did not yet have any of those vast underground organizations like the German _Tugendbund_ or the Italian Carbonari. But here and there there were dark workings beneath the surface, already beginning to branch out. The Cougourde was taking shape at Aix. In Paris, among other groups of that kind, there was the society of the Friends of the A B C.

Who were these Friends of the A B C? They were a society that seemed to aim at the education of children, but in truth aimed at the elevation of man.

They called themselves the Friends of the A B C—the _abaissé_, the brought low, the degraded—in other words, the people.

Their aim was to raise the people up. It was a pun, and we would be wrong to laugh at it. Puns have sometimes played a serious part in politics. Consider _Castratus ad castra_, which helped make Narses a general; consider _Barbari et Barberini_; consider _Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram_, and so on.

The Friends of the A B C were not many in number. It was a secret society still in its earliest stage, almost just a small circle—if small circles ever ended by producing heroes. They met in Paris in two places: near the fish market, at a wine shop called _Corinthe_, of which we shall hear more later; and near the Panthéon, at a little café in the Rue Saint-Michel called the _Café Musain_, now demolished. The first meeting place was close to the workers, the second to the students.

The Friends of the A B C usually held their meetings in a back room at the Café Musain.

This room was fairly far from the café itself and connected to it by a very long corridor. It had two windows and a door that opened onto a private staircase leading to the little Rue des Grès. There they smoked, drank, gambled, and laughed. They talked loudly about everything, and whispered about certain other matters. An old map of France under the Republic was nailed to the wall—a detail quite enough to arouse the suspicions of any police spy.

Most of the Friends of the A B C were students, and they were on friendly terms with the working class. Here are the names of the principal members. To some extent, they belong to history: Enjolras, Combeferre, Jean Prouvaire, Feuilly, Courfeyrac,

Bahorel, Lesgle or Laigle, Joly, Grantaire.

These young men formed a kind of family, bound together by friendship. All of them, except Laigle, came from the South.

[Illustration: Friends of the A B C]

It was a remarkable group. It disappeared into the unseen depths that now lie behind us. At this point in the drama we have reached, it may not be unnecessary to cast a little light on these young faces before the reader sees them plunge into the darkness of a tragic adventure.

Enjolras, whose name we mention first—the reader will see why later—was an only child and well off.

Enjolras was a captivating young man, and he could also be formidable. He was almost angelically handsome, yet there was something fierce about him—like a savage Antinous. To see the thoughtful gravity in his gaze, you might have thought he had already passed through the apocalypse of revolution in some earlier life. He seemed to carry its memory as if he had witnessed it himself. He knew every small detail of that great upheaval. He had both a priestly and a warlike nature, a strange combination in someone so young. In immediate, practical terms, he was a soldier of democracy; above the struggles of the moment, he was a priest of the ideal. His eyes were deep, his eyelids slightly red, his lower lip full and quick to curl with disdain, and his forehead broad and high. A broad forehead in a face is like a wide horizon in a landscape. Like certain young men at the start of this century and the end of the last who became famous very early, he had an extreme youthfulness

about him. He was as rosy as a girl, though at times he turned pale. He was already a man, yet he still looked like a child. At twenty-two, he seemed only seventeen. He was serious, and he gave the impression of not even knowing that such a thing as woman existed on earth. He had only one passion—the right; only one thought—to bring down every obstacle. On Mount Aventine, he would have been Gracchus; in the Convention, he would have been Saint-Just. He barely noticed roses, ignored spring, and did not hear the birds singing. Evadne's bare throat would have stirred him no more than it would have stirred Aristogeiton. Like Harmodius, he thought flowers were useful only for hiding a sword. Even his pleasures were severe. He lowered his eyes with chaste reserve before everything that was not the Republic. He was the marble lover of liberty. His speech was sternly inspired and carried the tremor of a hymn. At times, sudden surges of feeling broke out of him. Woe to any love affair that dared come near him. If some grisette from the Place Cambrai or the Rue Saint-Jean-de-Beauvais, seeing that face of a youth fresh from college, that page-like bearing, those long golden lashes, those blue eyes, that windblown hair, those rosy cheeks, those fresh lips, those beautiful teeth, had felt desire for that perfect dawn of youth and tried the power of her beauty on Enjolras, one astonishing and terrible look would at once have shown her the abyss. It would have taught her not to mistake the mighty cherub of Ezekiel for Beaumarchais's gallant Cherubino.

At Enjolras's side, who embodied the Revolution's logic, Combeferre embodied its philosophy. The difference between the two is this: the Revolution's logic may end in war, but its

philosophy can end only in peace. Combeferre completed and corrected Enjolras. He was less exalted, but wider in outlook. He wanted to fill every mind with broad, universal ideas. He said, “Revolution, but civilization,” and around the mountain peak he opened a vast view of blue sky. The Revolution was easier to breathe in with Combeferre than with Enjolras. Enjolras expressed its divine right; Combeferre, its natural right. The first aligned himself with Robespierre; the second kept to Condorcet. Combeferre lived more fully in the life of the ordinary world than Enjolras did. If these two young men had lived to enter history, one would have been the just man, the other the wise man. Enjolras was more virile; Combeferre more humane. _Homo_ and _vir_—that exactly captured the difference in their shades of character. Combeferre was as gentle as Enjolras was severe, by natural purity. 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 theatre, attended public lectures, learned about the polarization of light from Arago, and grew excited over a lesson in which Geoffroy Sainte-Hilaire explained the double function of the external carotid artery and the internal one—the one that nourishes the face and the one that nourishes the brain. He kept up with everything that was happening. He followed science step by step. He compared Saint-Simon with Fourier, deciphered hieroglyphics, broke open any pebble he found and reasoned from it about geology, drew a silkworm moth from memory, pointed out the bad French in the Dictionary of the Academy, studied Puységur and Deleuze, affirmed nothing—not even miracles—and denied nothing—not even ghosts. He turned over the files of the _Moniteur_ and

reflected. He declared that the future lies in the schoolmaster's hands, and he devoted himself to questions of education. He wanted society to work without ceasing to raise the moral and intellectual level, to mint science, to circulate ideas, to enlarge the minds of the young. He feared that the present poverty of method, the literary narrowness limited to the two or three centuries called classical, the tyrannical dogmatism of official pedants, and scholastic prejudices and routines would end by turning our colleges into artificial oyster beds. He was learned, a purist, precise, a graduate of the Polytechnic, a serious student, and at the same time thoughtful "even to chimæras," as his friends said. He believed in every dream: railroads, the abolition of pain in surgical operations, fixing images in the dark chamber, the electric telegraph, the steering of balloons. And he was not greatly troubled by the fortresses raised on every side against the human mind—superstition, despotism, and prejudice. He was one of those who believe that science will eventually reverse the situation. Enjolras was a chief; Combeferre was a guide. One inspired men to fight under him; the other to march behind him. That is not to say that Combeferre could not fight. He did not shrink from hand-to-hand struggle with obstacles, or from attacking them by force and explosion. But he preferred to bring the human race gradually into harmony with its destiny through education, the teaching of axioms, and the proclamation of positive laws. Between two kinds of light, he preferred illumination to conflagration. A conflagration can create an aurora, no doubt—but why not wait for dawn? A volcano gives light, but daybreak gives better light still. Perhaps Combeferre preferred

the whiteness of the beautiful to the blaze of the sublime. Light clouded with smoke, progress bought at the price of violence, only half satisfied this tender and serious spirit. The headlong rush of a people into truth—a ’93—terrified him. Yet stagnation disgusted him even more; in it he saw decay and death. On the whole, he preferred scum to miasma, the torrent to the cesspool, and Niagara Falls to the lake of Montfaucon. In short, he wanted neither delay nor haste. While his passionate friends, captivated by the absolute, adored and called for splendid revolutionary adventures, Combeferre was inclined to let progress—true progress—follow its natural course. He may have seemed cold, but he was pure; methodical, but beyond reproach; phlegmatic, but unshakable. Combeferre would have knelt and clasped his hands to help the future arrive in all its candor, with nothing to disturb the immense and virtuous evolution of the races. _The good must be innocent_, he repeated constantly. And indeed, if the greatness of the Revolution lies in keeping the dazzling ideal fixed before its eyes and flying toward it through lightning, with fire and blood in its talons, the beauty of progress lies in remaining spotless. And between Washington, who represents the one, and Danton, who embodies the other, there is the same difference that separates the swan from the angel with eagle’s wings.

Jean Prouvaire was gentler still than Combeferre. His name was Jehan, because of one of those small passing whims that became mixed up with the great, deep movement that gave rise to the serious study of the Middle Ages. Jean Prouvaire was in love. He kept a pot of flowers, played the flute, wrote verse, loved the people, felt compassion for women, wept over

children, and placed God and the future in the same trust. He even reproached the Revolution for bringing about the death of a royal head—that of André Chénier. His voice was usually soft, but it could suddenly become manly. He was highly educated, almost to the point of erudition, and was nearly an Orientalist. Above all, he was good; and, as anyone knows who understands how closely goodness comes to greatness, in poetry he preferred what was vast. He knew Italian, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and used them only to read four poets: Dante, Juvenal, Aeschylus, and Isaiah. In French literature, he preferred Corneille to Racine, and Agrippa d'Aubigné to Corneille. He loved wandering through fields of wild oats and cornflowers, and he concerned himself almost as much with clouds as with events. His mind had two directions: one turned toward man, the other toward God. He either studied or contemplated. All day, he immersed himself in social questions—wages, capital, credit, marriage, religion, freedom of thought, education, penal servitude, poverty, association, property, production, and distribution—the whole riddle of this lower world that covers the human anthill in darkness. At night, he looked up at the planets, those enormous beings. Like Enjolras, he was rich and an only son. He spoke gently, bent his head, lowered his eyes, smiled shyly, dressed badly, seemed awkward, blushed at the slightest thing, and was very timid. Yet he was fearless.

Feuilly was a working man, a maker of fans, orphaned young and left without either father or mother. He struggled to earn three francs a day, and he lived with one great idea: to help free the world. He had another concern as well—to educate himself.

He called that, too, a kind of liberation. He had taught himself to read and write, and everything he knew he had learned on his own. Feuilly had a generous heart. The reach of his sympathy was vast. This orphan had, in a sense, adopted whole peoples. Since his mother had failed him, he turned his thoughts to his country. With the deep instinct of an ordinary man, he reflected on what we now call the idea of nationality. He studied history for the express purpose of being able to be angry with full understanding. In this circle of young idealists, mostly concerned with France, he stood for the rest of the world. His special subjects were Greece, Poland, Hungary, Roumania, and Italy. He repeated these names constantly, whether the moment called for them or not, with the stubbornness of a man who knows he is right. The wrongs done by Turkey to Greece and Thessaly, by Russia to Warsaw, and by Austria to Venice filled him with fury. Above all, the great crime of 1772 stirred him. Nothing is more powerful than truth spoken in indignation, and he had that kind of eloquence. He could go on without end about that infamous year, 1772: about that noble and brave people destroyed by treachery, about that threefold crime, about that monstrous trap that became the model for all the later suppressions of states—those terrible acts by which many a great nation has since been struck down and, so to speak, stripped of its birth certificate. All the social crimes of modern times, he said, begin with the partition of Poland. The partition of Poland was a theorem, and all present political outrages were its corollaries. For nearly a century, there had not been a despot or a traitor who had not signed, approved, countersigned, and copied, without changing a word, the partition of Poland.

Whenever one examined the record of modern betrayals, that crime appeared first. The Congress of Vienna looked to it before carrying out its own. 1772 gave the signal for the attack; 1815 finished the kill. That was Feuilly's constant theme. This poor laborer had made himself the teacher of Justice, and Justice repaid him by making him great. The truth is that right has eternity on its side. Warsaw can no more become Tartar than Venice can become Teuton. Kings waste both their effort and their honor trying to make it so. Sooner or later, what has been forced under rises again and comes back into view. Greece becomes Greece once more; Italy becomes Italy again. The protest of right against violence never dies. The theft of a nation cannot be made legitimate by the passage of time. Crimes on that scale have no future. A nation cannot have its identity pulled out of it like a handkerchief from a pocket.

Courfeyrac had a father known as Monsieur de Courfeyrac. During the Restoration, one of the bourgeoisie's mistaken ideas about aristocracy and nobility was their faith in the little word "de." As everyone knows, that particle means nothing in itself. But the middle class of the _Minerve_ period valued that poor _de_ so highly that they felt obliged to give it up. Monsieur de Chauvelin called himself Monsieur Chauvelin; Monsieur de Caumartin became Monsieur Caumartin; Monsieur de Constant de Robecque became Benjamin Constant; Monsieur de Lafayette became Monsieur Lafayette. Courfeyrac did not want to lag behind the others, and simply called himself Courfeyrac.

When it comes to Courfeyrac, we could almost stop here and simply say of the rest: "For Courfeyrac, see Tholomyès."

Courfeyrac did in fact have that lively youthful energy that might be called the _beauté du diable_ of the mind. Later, it fades away, just as a kitten's playfulness does, and all that grace ends up, in the bourgeois on two legs and in the tomcat on four paws, in something much less charming.

This kind of wit is handed down from one generation of students to the next, among the successive waves of youth passing through the schools. They pass it along from hand to hand, _quasi cursores_, and it is almost always exactly the same. So, as we have just said, anyone who heard Courfeyrac in 1828 would have thought he was hearing Tholomyès in 1817. But Courfeyrac was an honorable man. Beneath the outward resemblance in their style of mind, the difference between him and Tholomyès was immense. The hidden man in each of them was completely different. In Tholomyès there was a district attorney; in Courfeyrac, a paladin.

Enjolras was the leader, Combeferre was the guide, and Courfeyrac was the center. The others gave off more light; he gave off more warmth. In truth, he had all the qualities of a center: fullness and radiance.

Bahorel had taken part in the bloody uprising of June 1822, during the funeral of the young Lallemand.

Bahorel was a good-natured man who kept bad company. He was brave, extravagant, wasteful, and almost generous; talkative, and sometimes eloquent; bold to the point of shamelessness. He was the best sort of fellow imaginable. He wore daring waistcoats and held scarlet opinions. He was a

loud, all-out blusterer—in other words, he loved nothing so much as a quarrel, unless it was an uprising; and nothing so much as an uprising, unless it was a revolution. He was always ready to smash a window, then rip up the pavement, then bring down a government, just to see what would happen. He was a student in his eleventh year. He had poked around in the law, but never practiced it. His motto was: “Never a lawyer,” and his coat of arms might have been a nightstand with a square cap visible inside it. Whenever he passed the law school, which was rare, he buttoned up his frock coat—the paletot had not yet been invented—and took sanitary 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 found subjects for ballads, and in his professors opportunities for caricature. He squandered a fairly large allowance, something like three thousand francs a year, on doing nothing.

His parents were peasants, and he had managed to fill them with respect for their son.

He said of them: “They are peasants, not bourgeois; that is why they are intelligent.”

Bahorel was a man of whims, scattered across countless cafés. The others had regular habits; he had none. He wandered. To stray is human. To wander aimlessly is Parisian. In truth, he had a sharp mind and was more of a thinker than he seemed.

He served as a link between the Friends of the A B C and other groups that were still unorganized but were destined to take shape later.

In this gathering of young minds, there was one bald member.

The Marquis d'Avaray, whom Louis XVIII made a duke for helping him into a hackney coach on the day he went into exile, used to tell how, in 1814, when the King returned to France and was landing at Calais, a man handed him a petition.

"What do you want?" said the King.

"Sire, a post office."

"What is your name?"

"L'Aigle."

The King frowned, looked at the signature on the petition, and saw the name written this way: LESGLE. That spelling, which was not Bonaparte-style, touched him, and he began to smile. "Sire," the man with the petition went on, "one of my ancestors was a keeper of the hounds named Lesgueules. That surname gave rise to my own. I am called Lesgueules, shortened to Lesgle, and corrupted into l'Aigle." This made the King smile broadly. Later, he gave the man the post office at Meaux, whether by design or by chance.

The bald member of the group was the son of this Lesgle, or Légle, and he signed himself Légle [de Meaux]. For short, his companions called him Bossuet.

Bossuet was cheerful but unlucky. His particular talent was failing at everything. To make up for it, he laughed at everything. At twenty-five, he was already bald. His father had eventually come to own a house and a field, but he, the son, quickly managed to lose both in a bad investment. He had

nothing left. He had intelligence and wit, but everything he undertook went wrong. Nothing worked out for him, and everyone deceived him. Whatever he built collapsed on top of him. If he split wood, he cut off a finger. If he had a mistress, he soon discovered that he also had a friend. Some mishap befell him every moment, and that was why he stayed so merry. He used to say, “I live under falling tiles.” He was not easily surprised, because for him an accident was simply what he had expected. He accepted his bad luck calmly and smiled at fate’s teasing, like a man listening to jokes. He was poor, but his supply of good humor never ran out. He quickly reached his last sou, but never his last laugh. When adversity came through his door, he greeted that old acquaintance warmly. He slapped every catastrophe on the belly. He was so familiar with misfortune that he called it by a nickname: “Good day, Guignon,” he would say.

These attacks from fate had made him inventive. He was full of resourcefulness. He had no money, yet when he felt like it, he still found ways to indulge in “unbridled extravagance.” One night he went so far as to spend a “hundred francs” on a supper with a wench, and in the middle of the revelry he made this memorable remark: “Pull off my boots, you five-louis jade.”

Bossuet was slowly making his way toward a career in law, studying legal matters much as Bahorel did. He had no fixed home, and sometimes no home at all. He stayed first with one friend, then with another, most often with Joly. Joly was studying medicine and was two years younger than Bossuet.

Joly was a younger version of the “imaginary invalid.” What he had gained from studying medicine was that he had become more of a patient than a doctor. At twenty-three, he believed he was in delicate health and spent his life examining his tongue in the mirror. He declared that a man becomes magnetic like a needle, and in his room he arranged his bed with the head to the south and the foot to the north, so that the great electric current of the earth would not disturb the circulation of his blood at night. During thunderstorms, he took his pulse. In every other respect, he was the merriest of them all. All these youthful, obsessive, frail, cheerful contradictions lived together in harmony, and the result was an eccentric and delightful person whom his friends, lavish with extra consonants, called Jolllly. “You can fly away on those four L’s,” Jean Prouvaire said to him.23

Joly had a habit of touching the tip of his nose with the end of his cane, which is said to be a sign of a shrewd mind.

All these young men, different as they were, and serious at heart despite everything, shared the same religion: Progress.

They were all true sons of the French Revolution. Even the most lighthearted among them grew solemn when they spoke the date ’89. Their actual fathers may have been royalists, doctrinaires, or anything else; that earlier confusion, belonging to a generation before their own, meant nothing to them. The pure blood of principle ran in their veins. They gave themselves, without qualification or compromise, to incorruptible right and absolute duty.

Bound together and initiated, they were sketching the hidden outline of the ideal.

Among all those glowing hearts and deeply convinced minds, there was one skeptic. How had he ended up there? By being placed next to them. This skeptic was named Grantaire, and he liked to sign himself with this rebus: R. Grantaire was a man who took care not to believe in anything. Even so, he was one of the students who had learned the most during his time in Paris. He knew where to get the best coffee, at the Café Lemblin, and the best billiards, at the Café Voltaire; where to find good cakes and pretty girls, at the Ermitage on the Boulevard du Maine; spatchcocked chicken 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. He also knew boxing, foot-fencing, and a few dances, and he was an accomplished single-stick player. On top of that, he was a tremendous drinker. He was extraordinarily ugly. The prettiest boot-stitcher of that time, Irma Boissy, exasperated by his ugliness, passed this sentence on him: "Grantaire is impossible." But Grantaire's vanity could not be shaken. He gazed at all women with tender persistence, as though saying to every one of them, "If I only chose!" and he tried to make his friends believe that he was generally much sought after.

All those words—rights of the people, rights of man, the social contract, the French Revolution, the Republic, democracy, humanity, civilization, religion, progress—meant almost nothing to Grantaire. He smiled at them. Skepticism, that decay of the mind, had not left him a single whole idea. He lived in irony. This

was his axiom: “There is only one certainty: my full glass.” He mocked every kind of devotion in every camp, the father as much as the brother, Robespierre junior as much as Loizerolles. “They are far enough ahead to be dead,” he would say. Of the crucifix he said, “There is a gibbet that succeeded.” A wanderer, a gambler, a libertine, often drunk, he offended these young dreamers by constantly humming: “J’aimons les filles, et j’aimons le bon vin.” Air: Vive Henri IV.

Yet this skeptic had one passion. It was not a doctrine, an idea, an art, or a science; it was a man: Enjolras. Grantaire admired him, loved him, and revered him. In this band of absolute minds, whom did this anarchic scoffer attach himself to? To the most absolute of them all. How had Enjolras gained such power over him? Through his ideas? No. Through his character. This is something one often sees. A skeptic drawn to a believer is as natural as the law of complementary colors. We are attracted to what we lack. No one loves light like a blind man. The dwarf worships the drum-major. The toad always keeps its eyes on the sky. Why? To watch the bird in flight. Grantaire, twisted inwardly by doubt, loved watching faith rise in Enjolras. He needed Enjolras. That pure, healthy, steady, upright, stern, open nature captivated him, though he was not fully aware of it and never thought to explain it to himself. By instinct, he admired his opposite. His soft, pliant, disordered, sickly, shapeless ideas clung to Enjolras as if to a backbone. His moral spine leaned on that strength. In Enjolras’ presence, Grantaire became someone again. Besides, he himself was made up of two elements that seemed completely incompatible. He was ironic and warmhearted. His mind could live without belief, but his heart

could not live without friendship. It was a deep contradiction, for affection is a kind of conviction. That was simply his nature. There are men who seem born to be the reverse side, the counterpart, the underside. They are Pollux, Patrocles, Nisus, Eudamidas, Hephestion, Pechmeja. They exist only when supported by another man; their name is a continuation, written only after the conjunction _and_; and their life is not truly their own, but the other side of a life that belongs to someone else. Grantaire was one of these men. He was the reverse side of Enjolras.

One might almost say that natural affinities begin with the alphabet itself. In the sequence, O and P cannot be separated. You may say O and P, or Orestes and Pylades.

Grantaire, Enjolras' true satellite, moved within this circle of young men. He lived there, and nowhere else gave him any pleasure. He followed them everywhere. His delight was to watch those figures coming and going through the haze of wine. They put up with him because of his good humor.

Enjolras, the true believer, looked down on this skeptic; and because he was sober himself, he despised this drunkard. He granted him a small, lofty kind of pity. Grantaire was a Pylades who was never accepted. Enjolras always treated him harshly, pushed him away roughly, and rejected him; yet Grantaire kept coming back. He used to say of Enjolras, "What fine marble!"

CHAPTER II—BLONDEAU'S FUNERAL ORATION BY BOSSUET

One afternoon—which, as will be seen later, happened to coincide in some way with the events already related—Laigle de Meaux could be seen leaning lazily against the doorpost of the Café Musain. He looked like a caryatid on holiday, though the only thing he was carrying was his daydream. He was gazing at the Place Saint-Michel. Leaning one's back against something is much like lying down while still standing up, a posture thinkers do not dislike. Laigle de Meaux was reflecting, without sadness, on a small mishap that had happened to him two days earlier at the law school, and that had altered his personal plans for the future—plans that had never been very clear anyway.

A daydream does not stop a cab from passing, or keep the dreamer from noticing it. Laigle de Meaux, whose eyes were wandering in a vague, idle way, caught sight through his half-sleeping reverie of a two-wheeled carriage moving across the square at a walking pace, as if it did not quite know where it was going. Who was this cabriolet for? Why was it moving so slowly? Laigle looked more closely. Beside the driver sat a young man, and in front of him was a fairly large hand-bag. On the bag, plainly visible to passers-by, was a card sewn to the fabric with the following name written in large black letters: MARIUS PONTMERCY.

At that name, Laigle changed his posture. He straightened up and called out to the young man in the cabriolet:

“Monsieur Marius Pontmercy!”

The cabriolet that had been hailed stopped.

The young man, who also seemed lost in thought, lifted his eyes:

“Eh?” he said.

“You are M. Marius Pontmercy?”

“Certainly.”

“I was looking for you,” Laigle de Meaux went on.

"How so?" Marius demanded. It was indeed Marius; he had just left his grandfather's house, and he was now facing someone he was seeing for the first time. "I don't know you."

"And I don't know you either," Laigle replied.

Marius thought he had run into a joker, the start of some prank in the middle of the street. He was not in a good mood just then, and he frowned. Laigle de Meaux continued calmly:

"You weren't at the school the day before yesterday."

"That's possible."

"It's certain."

"You're a student?" Marius asked.

"Yes, sir. Like you. The day before yesterday, I happened to go into the school. You know, people sometimes have whims like that. The professor was just calling the roll. You know how absurd they are about such things. If your name goes unanswered at the third call, it's struck from the list. Sixty francs gone into the abyss."

Marius began to listen.

“It was Blondeau taking attendance. You know Blondeau—he has a sharp, spiteful nose, and he loves sniffing out absentees. He craftily started with the letter P. I wasn’t paying attention, since that letter didn’t concern me. Things were going smoothly enough. No names had been struck off yet; everyone was there. Blondeau was disappointed. I said to myself, ‘Blondeau, my dear fellow, you won’t get even the tiniest execution today.’ Then suddenly Blondeau called, ‘Marius Pontmercy!’ No one answered. Blondeau, full of hope, repeated more loudly, ‘Marius Pontmercy!’ and picked up his pen. Monsieur, I am a man of compassion. I quickly said to myself, ‘Here is a brave soul about to be crossed off. Attention. Here is a real mortal who is not punctual. He is not a model student. He is no plodding scholar, no raw pedant stuffed with letters, theology, science, and wisdom, one of those dull minds cut to a pattern, made to be a mere pin. He is an honorable idler, a stroller, a man of country outings, a cultivator of grisettes, a suitor of the ladies, and at this very moment perhaps with my mistress. Let us save him. Death to Blondeau!’ At that moment Blondeau dipped his pen, black with erasures, into the ink, swept his yellow eyes around the lecture hall, and called for the third time, ‘Marius

Pontmercy!' I answered, 'Present!' That is why your name was not struck off."

"Sir!—" said Marius.

"And why mine was," added Laigle de Meaux.

"I do not understand you," said Marius.

Laigle went on:—

"Nothing could be simpler. I was standing near the desk so I could answer, and near the door so I could run for it. The professor was looking at me rather intently. Suddenly Blondeau, who must be the malicious nose Boileau was talking about, jumped to the letter L. L is my letter. I am from Meaux, and my name is Lesgle."

"L'Aigle!" Marius interrupted. "What a splendid name!"

"Monsieur, Blondeau came to that splendid name and called out, 'Laigle!' I answered, 'Present!' Then Blondeau looked at me with the mildness of a tiger and said, 'If you are Pontmercy, you are not Laigle.' A remark that may sound slightly offensive to you, but for me it was downright tragic. Having said that, he struck my name off."

Marius cried:—

"I am deeply sorry, sir—"

"First of all," Laigle broke in, "I ask permission to preserve Blondeau in a few heartfelt words of praise. I'll take it for granted that he is dead. It would not require much change in his gauntness, his pallor, his coldness, or 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 roll call, who was upright, square, exact, rigid, honest, and hideous. God struck him off as He struck me off.’”

Marius went on:

“I am very sorry—”

“Young man,” said Laigle de Meaux, “let this be a lesson to you. Next time, be exact.”

“I truly beg your pardon a thousand times.”

“Do not put your neighbor in danger of having his name struck off again.”

“I am extremely sorry—”

Laigle burst into laughter.

“And I am delighted. I was on the verge of becoming a lawyer. Being struck off saves me. I give up the triumphs of the bar. I shall not defend the widow, and I shall not attack the orphan. No more toga, no more stage. My erasure is ready and waiting for me. I owe it to you, Monsieur Pontmercy. I mean to pay you a formal visit of thanks. Where do you live?”

“In this cab,” said Marius.

“A sign of wealth,” Laigle replied calmly. “My congratulations. You have a residence there that costs nine thousand francs a year.”

At that moment, Courfeyrac came out of the café.

Marius smiled sadly.

“I have been paying that rent for the last two hours, and I would very much like to be rid of it. But there is a sort of story connected with it, and I do not know where to go.”

“Come to my place, sir,” said Courfeyrac.

“I have first claim,” Laigle remarked, “but I have no home.”

“Be quiet, Bossuet,” said Courfeyrac.

“Bossuet,” said Marius, “but I thought your name was Laigle.”

“De Meaux,” Laigle replied; “figuratively, Bossuet.”

Courfeyrac got into the cab.

“Driver,” he said, “the Hôtel de la Porte-Saint-Jacques.”

That very evening, Marius found himself settled into a room at the Hôtel de la Porte-Saint-Jacques, right next to Courfeyrac.

CHAPTER III—MARIUS' SURPRISES

Within a few days, Marius had become Courfeyrac's friend. Youth is the time when bonds form quickly and wounds heal fast. In Courfeyrac's company, Marius could breathe freely, which was something entirely new for him. Courfeyrac asked him no questions. In fact, the idea never even occurred to him. At that age, faces reveal everything at once. Words are unnecessary. There are young men of whom it may be said that their faces talk. You look at them, and you know them.

One morning, however, Courfeyrac suddenly asked him:

"By the way, do you have any political opinions?"

"What a question!" said Marius, almost offended.

"What are you?"

"A democrat-Bonapartist."

"The color of a rat that feels safe again," said Courfeyrac.

The next day, Courfeyrac introduced Marius at the Café Musain. Then, smiling, he whispered in his ear, "I must give you your entrance to the revolution." And he led him into the hall of the Friends of the A B C. He presented him to the other comrades with this simple word, which Marius did not understand: "A pupil."

Marius had landed in a wasps' nest of wit. Yet though he was quiet and serious, he still had both wings and weapons.

Until then, Marius had lived alone and had grown used, by habit and temperament, to talking to himself and thinking in private. So this flock of young men around him unsettled him a little. Their different ideas all demanded his attention at once and pulled him in every direction. The lively movement of these free, active minds threw his own thoughts into confusion. Sometimes, in his distress, his ideas seemed to slip so far away that he struggled to gather them back. He heard them speak about philosophy, literature, art, history, and religion in ways he had never expected. He caught sight of strange new angles, and because he could not yet place them properly, he was not entirely sure he was seeing anything but chaos. When he gave up his grandfather's beliefs for his father's, he had thought he had finally found firm ground. Now he began to suspect, uneasily and without daring to admit it even to himself, that he had not. The angle from which he saw everything began to shift again. A kind of inner swaying set all the horizons of his mind in motion. It was a strange inward upheaval. He almost suffered from it.

It seemed that, for those young men, nothing was sacred. Marius heard startling claims on every subject, and they troubled his still timid mind.

A theater poster appeared before them, bearing the title of a tragedy from the old repertory known as classic. "Down with tragedy beloved by the bourgeois!" cried Bahorel. And Marius heard Combeferre reply:

“You are mistaken, Bahorel. The bourgeoisie loves tragedy, and on that point it should be left in peace. Wigged tragedy has its reason for existing, and I am not one of those who, in the name of Æschylus, deny its right to exist. Nature has its crude sketches; creation contains ready-made parodies: a beak that is not really a beak, wings that are not really wings, gills that are not really gills, paws that are not really paws, a cry of pain that makes one want to laugh—that is the duck. Since poultry exists alongside the bird, I do not see why classic tragedy should not exist alongside antique tragedy.”

Or perhaps chance arranged for Marius to walk down 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, because of a remarkable household that lived here sixty years ago. It was made up of Jean-Jacques and Thérèse. From time to time, little children were born there. Thérèse gave birth to them; Jean-Jacques passed them off as foundlings.”

And Enjolras spoke sharply to Courfeyrac:

“Silence in the presence of Jean-Jacques! I admire that man. He may have disowned his own children, but he adopted the people.”

Not one of these young men ever said the words: The Emperor. Only Jean Prouvaire sometimes said Napoleon; all the others said “Bonaparte.” Enjolras pronounced it “Buonaparte.”

Marius felt vaguely surprised. Initium sapientiæ_.

CHAPTER IV—THE BACK ROOM OF THE CAFÉ MUSAIN

One of the conversations among the young men, which Marius attended and sometimes joined in, came as a real shock to him.

It happened in the back room of the Café Musain. Nearly all the Friends of the A B C had gathered there that evening. The argand lamp had been ceremoniously lit. They talked about all sorts of things, calmly but noisily. Except for Enjolras and Marius, who remained silent, everyone was making speeches more or less at random. Conversations among friends sometimes fall into this kind of peaceful uproar. It was as much a game and a racket as a conversation. They threw words back and forth and caught them as they came. Chatter filled every corner of the room.

No woman was allowed into this back room except Louison, the café's dish-washer, who passed through it from time to time on her way to do her washing in the "lavatory."

Grantaire, completely drunk, was making the corner he had claimed unbearable with the noise, arguing and contradicting everyone at the top of his voice, and shouting:

"I'm thirsty. Mortals, I'm dreaming that the great Heidelberg tun has had a stroke, and that I am one of the dozen leeches to be applied to it. I want a drink. I want to forget life. Life is a hideous invention by someone I do not know. It lasts no time at all, and it is worth nothing. One breaks one's neck just trying to live. Life is a stage set with very few usable entrances. Happiness is an

antique reliquary painted on one side only. Ecclesiastes says, 'All is vanity.' I agree with that worthy man, who perhaps never existed. Zero, not wishing to go completely naked, dressed itself in vanity. O vanity! The patching up of everything with grand words! A kitchen becomes a laboratory, a dancer a professor, an acrobat a gymnast, a boxer a pugilist, an apothecary a chemist, a wigmaker an artist, a hodman an architect, a jockey a sportsman, a wood-louse a pterigybranche. Vanity has a right side 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 in rags. I weep over the one and laugh at the other. What people call honors and dignities, and even dignity and honor, are generally made of pinchbeck. Kings make toys out of human pride. Caligula made a horse a consul; Charles II made a knight of a sirloin. So wrap yourself up now between Consul Incitatus and Baronet Roastbeef. As for the real worth of people, it is no longer respectable in the least. Listen to the praise neighbor gives neighbor. White attacking white is ferocious; if the lily could speak, what a dressing-down it would give the dove! A bigoted woman chattering about a devout woman is more venomous than the asp and the cobra. It is a shame that I am ignorant; otherwise I would quote you a whole mass of things. But I know nothing. For example, I have always been witty. When I was a pupil of Gros, instead of smearing miserable little pictures, I spent my time stealing apples; rapin is the masculine of rapine. That is enough about me; as for the rest of you, you are worth no more than I am. I laugh at your perfections, excellencies, and qualities. Every virtue leans toward a fault: economy borders on

avarice, the generous man stands next door to the spendthrift, the brave man brushes against the braggart; say very pious, and you almost say a little bigoted. There are as many vices in virtue as there are holes in Diogenes' cloak. Whom do you admire, the slain man or the slayer, Cæsar or Brutus? Men generally favor the slayer. Long live Brutus—he has killed! There is the virtue. Virtue, perhaps, but madness too. Those great men have strange blemishes. The Brutus who killed Cæsar was in love with the statue of a little boy. The statue was by the Greek sculptor Strongylion, who also made that Amazon called the Beautiful Leg, Eucnemos, which Nero carried with him on his travels. Strongylion left only two statues, and they brought Nero and Brutus into agreement. Brutus was in love with one, Nero with the other. All history is nothing but tedious repetition. One century plagiarizes another. The battle of Marengo copies the battle of Pydna; the Tolbiac of Clovis and the Austerlitz of Napoleon are as alike as two drops of water. I do not attach much importance to victory. Nothing is so stupid as conquering; true glory lies in convincing. But try proving anything! If you are satisfied with success, what mediocrity; and if with conquest, what wretchedness. Alas, vanity and cowardice everywhere. Everything bows to success, even grammar. Si volet usus, says Horace. Therefore I despise the human race. Shall we come down to nations at all? Do you want me to begin admiring peoples? Which people, exactly? Greece? The Athenians, those Parisians of long ago, killed Phocion, as we might say Coligny, and flattered tyrants so shamelessly 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 thin that he had to weight his shoes with lead so the wind would not blow him away. In the great square at Corinth there stood a statue by Silanion, listed by Pliny; it represented Episthates. What did Episthates do? He invented a trip. That sums up Greece and glory. Let us move on. Shall I admire England? Shall I admire France? France? Why? Because of Paris? I have already told you what I think of Athens. England? Why? Because of London? I hate Carthage. And besides, London, the capital of luxury, is the headquarters of misery. In the parish of Charing-Cross alone, a hundred people die of hunger every year. Such is Albion. And to crown it all, I have seen an Englishwoman dancing with a wreath of roses and blue spectacles. So much for England! If I do not admire John Bull, shall I admire Brother Jonathan? I have 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 the bile. Shall we go into ecstasies over Russia? Voltaire admired it. He also admired China. I admit that Russia has its beauties, among them a robust despotism; but I pity the despots. Their health is delicate. A beheaded Alexis, a stabbed Peter, a strangled Paul, another Paul kicked flat, various Ivans strangled and throat-cut, numerous Nicholases and Basils poisoned—all this suggests that the palace of the Emperors of Russia is in a state of glaring unhealthiness. All civilized peoples offer the thinker this detail for admiration: war. And war, civilized war, gathers up and exhausts every form of brutality, from the brigandage of the Trabuceros in the gorges of Mont Jaxa to the plundering of the Comanche Indians in the Doubtful

Pass. ‘Bah!’ you will say to me, ‘but Europe is surely better than Asia?’ I grant that Asia is a farce; but I do not quite see what you western peoples find so laughable in the Grand Lama, you who have mixed into your fashions and elegances all the elaborate 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 at all! In Brussels they drink the most beer, in Stockholm the most brandy, in Madrid the most chocolate, in Amsterdam the most gin, in London the most wine, in Constantinople the most coffee, in Paris the most absinthe; there you have all the useful knowledge. Paris wins in the end. In Paris, even the rag-pickers are sybarites; Diogenes would rather have been a rag-picker of the Place Maubert than a philosopher at the Piræus. Learn this too: the rag-pickers’ wineshops are called bibines; the most famous are the Saucepan and the Slaughter-House. Therefore, tea-gardens, goguettes, caboulots, bouibuis, mastroquets, bastringues, manezingues, rag-pickers’ bibines, caravanseries of the caliphs—I assure you, I am a voluptuary. I dine at Richard’s for forty sous a head. I must have Persian carpets on which to roll naked Cleopatra! Where is Cleopatra? Ah, so it is you, Louison. Good day.”

So Grantaire, drunk beyond mere intoxication, burst into a speech from his corner in the back room of the Café Musain, grabbing at the dishwasher as she passed.

Bossuet stretched out a hand toward him, trying to quiet him, but Grantaire started up again, worse than before:

“Aigle de Meaux, keep your hands off. That grand gesture of yours—like Hippocrates refusing Artaxerxes’ trinkets—has no effect on me. I release you from the duty of calming me down. Besides, I am sad. What do you want me to tell you? Man is wicked, man is misshapen; the butterfly is a triumph, man is a failure. God blundered when he made that creature. A crowd is just a collection of ugliness. The first man who comes along is a scoundrel; _femme_—woman—rhymes with _infâme_—infamous. Yes, I have the spleen, mixed with melancholy, homesickness, and hypochondria. I am annoyed, I am furious, I yawn, I am bored, I am weary to death, and I am a fool! Let God go to the devil!”

“Be quiet, then, capital R!” Bossuet went on. He had been arguing a point of law on the side and was buried more than waist-deep in a sentence of legal slang, of which this was the ending:

“—And as for me, though I am scarcely a jurist and, at most, only an amateur lawyer, I maintain this: that, under the customs of Normandy, at Saint-Michel, and for each year, an equivalent payment must be made for the benefit of the lord of the manor, without prejudice to the rights of others, by each and all alike, proprietors as well as those in possession by inheritance, and that, for all emphyteutic holdings, leases, freeholds, domain contracts, mortgages—”

“Echo, mournful nymph,” Grantaire hummed.

Near Grantaire, a nearly silent table, with a sheet of paper, an inkstand, and a pen set between two glasses of brandy, showed

that someone was sketching out a vaudeville.

This important business was being discussed in low voices, and the two heads bent over the work were almost touching: “Let’s start by finding names. Once you have the names, you find the plot.”

“That’s true. Dictate. I’ll write.”

“Monsieur Dorimon.”

“An independent gentleman?”

“Naturally.”

“His daughter, Célestine.”

“—tine. What next?”

“Colonel Sainval.”

“Sainval is worn out. I should say Valsin.”

Besides the vaudeville hopefuls, another group was also using the uproar as cover to talk quietly. They were discussing a duel. An old fellow of thirty was advising a young one of eighteen and explaining what kind of opponent he was up against.

“The devil! Watch yourself. He’s an excellent swordsman. His style is clean. He attacks well, wastes no feints, has wrist, speed, dash, lightning quickness, a precise guard, mathematical parries—bigre!—and he’s left-handed.”

In the corner opposite Grantaire, Joly and Bahorel were playing dominoes and talking about love.

“You’re lucky, you really are,” Joly was saying. “You have a mistress who is always laughing.”

“That’s one of her faults,” Bahorel replied. “A mistress should not laugh. It encourages a man to deceive her. When you see her cheerful, your remorse disappears; when you see her sad, your conscience starts to sting.”

“Ungrateful man! A woman who laughs is a wonderful thing! And you never quarrel!”

“That’s because of the treaty we made. When we formed our little Holy Alliance, we each marked out our own frontier, and neither of us ever crosses it. Everything on the winter side belongs to Vaud; everything on the wind side belongs to Gex. That is why we have peace.”

“Peace is happiness digesting.”

“And you, Joly, where do things stand in your affair with Mamselle—you know who I mean?”

“She is sulking at me with cruel patience.”

“And yet you are just the sort of lover whose gauntness should melt a heart.”

“Alas!”

“If I were you, I’d leave her alone.”

“That’s easy enough to say.”

“And easy enough to do. Isn’t her name Musichetta?”

“Yes. Ah, my poor Bahorel, she is a magnificent girl—very literary, with tiny feet and little hands. She dresses well, and she is white and dimpled, with the eyes of a fortune-teller. I’m mad about her.”

“My dear fellow, then if you want to please her, you must dress elegantly and make an impression with your knees. Buy yourself a good pair of double-milled cloth trousers at Staub’s. That will help.”

“At what price?” shouted Grantaire.

The third corner was given over to a debate about poetry. Pagan mythology was being pitted against Christian mythology. The argument centered on Olympus, and Jean Prouvaire defended it out of sheer romanticism.

Jean Prouvaire was timid only when he was calm. Once stirred up, he burst out. A kind of gaiety sharpened his enthusiasm, and he became laughing and lyrical at the same time.

“Let us not insult the gods,” he said. “The gods may not have left after all. Jupiter does not strike me as dead. You say the gods are dreams. Very well. Even in nature as it is today, after those dreams have fled, we still find all the great old pagan myths. A mountain with the outline of a fortress, like the Vignemale, still seems to me like the headdress of Cybele. No one has proved to me that Pan does not come at night to blow into the hollow trunks of the willows, covering the holes one by one 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 granted Charter was being treated roughly. Combeferre was defending it without much force. Courfeyrac was energetically tearing openings in it. On the table lay a battered copy of the famous Touquet Charter. Courfeyrac had snatched it up and was waving it around, punctuating his arguments with the crackle of the sheet of paper.

“First of all, I won’t have any kings. If only for economic reasons, I want nothing to do with them; a king is a parasite. Kings do not come free. Listen to this: the cost of kings. When François I died, France’s national debt stood at an income of thirty thousand livres. When Louis XIV died, it had reached two billion six hundred million, at twenty-eight livres to the mark, which in 1760, according to Desmarets, was equal to four billion five hundred million, and would be equal to twelve billion today. Second, and no offense to Combeferre, a granted charter is a poor tool of civilization. To ease the transition, soften the passage, lessen the shock, and lead the nation gradually from monarchy to democracy by means of constitutional fictions—what miserable reasons those are! No, no, let us never try to enlighten the people with false light. Principles shrink and fade in the cellar of constitutionalism. No illegitimacy, no compromise, no gift from the king to the people. Every such gift contains an Article 14. Beside the hand that gives is the claw that takes back. I reject your charter outright. A charter is a mask; the lie is underneath. A people that accepts a charter gives up its rights. Law is law only when it is whole. No! No charter!”

It was winter, and a couple of bundles of sticks were crackling in the fireplace. The sight was too tempting, and Courfeyrac could not resist. He crushed the poor Touquet Charter in his fist and threw it into the fire. The paper flared up. Combeferre watched Louis XVIII's masterpiece burn with philosophical calm, and merely said:

"The charter has turned into flame."

Then came sarcasm, wit, jokes, that French quality called _entrain_ and that English quality called humor, good taste and bad, sound arguments and foolish ones. All the wild fireworks of conversation shot upward together and crossed from every corner of the room, creating a kind of cheerful bombardment over their heads.

CHAPTER V—A WIDER HORIZON

When young minds collide, they have this wonderful quality: you can never predict the spark or guess where the lightning will strike. What will flash out next? No one knows. A burst of laughter can spring from a tender feeling.

The serious enters at the very moment of a joke. A passing impulse can hinge on the first word that happens to be spoken. Each person's spirit rules itself, and a joke is enough to open the way for the unexpected. These are conversations that veer abruptly, where the point of view changes in an instant. Chance directs conversations like these.

A grave thought, oddly sparked by a clash of words, suddenly cut through the exchange of quips in which Grantaire, Bahorel, Prouvaire, Bossuet, Combeferre, and Courfeyrac were all fencing in confusion.

How does a phrase suddenly appear in a conversation? Where does it come from, that it should at once seize the attention of everyone listening? As we have just said, no one knows. In the middle of the uproar, Bossuet suddenly ended some remark to Combeferre with this date:

"June 18, 1815—Waterloo."

At the name of Waterloo, Marius, who had been leaning on the table with his elbows beside a glass of water, lifted his wrist from under his chin and began to stare fixedly at the company.

“Pardieu!” cried Courfeyrac (“Parbleu” was going out of use at that time), “there is something strange about the number 18, and it strikes me. It is Bonaparte’s fatal number. Put Louis before it and Brumaire after it, and you have the whole destiny of the man, with this remarkable feature: the end follows close on the heels of the beginning.”

Enjolras, who had remained silent until then, broke the silence and made this remark to Combeferre:

“You mean the crime and the expiation.”

The word crime went beyond what Marius—already deeply shaken by the sudden mention of Waterloo—could bear.

He stood up, walked slowly to the map of France spread across the wall, where an island could be seen in a separate inset at the bottom, placed his finger on that inset, and said:

“Corsica, a little island that made France very great.”

It was like a breath of icy air. Everyone stopped talking. They felt that something was about to happen.

Bahorel, who had been answering Bossuet, was just striking one of the dramatic poses he was fond of. He dropped it and listened.

Enjolras, his blue eyes fixed on no one and seeming to stare into space, answered without looking at Marius:

“France does not need Corsica in order to be great. France is great because she is France. _Quia nomina leo_.”

Marius had no wish to draw back. He turned to Enjolras, and his voice rang out with a tremor that came from the depths of his being:

“God forbid I should belittle France! But refusing to merge Napoleon with France is not the same as diminishing her. Come, let us argue it out. I am a newcomer among you, but I admit that you astonish me. Where do we stand? Who are we? Who are you? Who am I? Let us be clear about the Emperor. I hear you say _Buonaparte_, stressing the _u_ like the Royalists. I should warn you that my grandfather does even better; he says _Buonapartié_. I thought you were young men. So where is your enthusiasm? And what are you doing with it? Whom do you admire, if not the Emperor? And what more could you want? If you reject that great man, then what great men would satisfy you? He had everything. He was complete. In his mind he contained the full range of human powers. He made codes like Justinian. He dictated like Cæsar. In his conversation there were flashes of Pascal and thunderclaps of Tacitus. He made history, and he wrote it. His bulletins are Iliads. He joined Newton’s calculation to Mahomet’s metaphor. In the East he left behind words as vast as the pyramids. At Tilsit he taught Emperors what majesty was. At the Academy of Sciences he answered Laplace. In the Council of State he matched Merlin. He gave a soul to the geometry of the first and to the chicanery of the second. He was a jurist among attorneys and sidereal among astronomers. Like Cromwell blowing out one of two candles, he could go to the Temple to haggle over a curtain tassel. He saw everything. He knew everything. Yet that did not keep him from laughing gently beside the cradle of his little child. And then, all at once,

terrified Europe listened. Armies began to move. Artillery trains thundered. Pontoons stretched across the rivers. Clouds of cavalry charged through the storm. There were cries, trumpets, and thrones trembling everywhere. The borders of kingdoms shook on the map. People heard the sound of a superhuman sword being drawn from its sheath. They saw him—him—rise upright on the horizon, a blazing torch in his hand and fire in his eyes, spreading in the thunder his two wings, the grand army and the old guard. He was the archangel of war!"

Everyone fell silent, and Enjolras bowed his head. Silence almost always has the effect of agreement, as though the opponent has been driven into a corner. Marius went on with even greater fervor, speaking almost without stopping for breath:

"Let us be fair, my friends! What a magnificent fate for a nation: to be the empire of such an emperor, when that nation is France and when it joins its own genius to his! To appear and rule, to advance and triumph, to make every capital a stopping place, to take his grenadiers and turn them into kings, to decree the fall of dynasties, and to remake Europe at the speed of a cavalry charge; to feel that when you threaten, you are laying your hand on the hilt of God's sword; to follow, in one man, Hannibal, Caesar, and Charlemagne; to belong to someone who fills your dawns with the astonishing news of a battle won, to wake in the morning to the cannon of the Invalides, to cast into blazing depths those immense words that burn forever—Marengo, Arcola, Austerlitz, Jena, Wagram! To make whole constellations of victories flare out at every moment from the heights of the

centuries, to make the French Empire the counterpart of the Roman Empire, to be the great nation and to give birth to the Grand Army, to send its legions across the earth as a mountain sends out its eagles in every direction—to conquer, to dominate, to strike like lightning, to become in Europe a nation gilded with glory, to let a titan's trumpet call ring across the centuries, to conquer the world twice, by force and by splendor—that is sublime; and what could be greater?"

"To be free," said Combeferre.

Marius lowered his head in turn. That cold, simple phrase had cut through his epic outburst like a blade of steel, and he felt it sink deep within him. When he looked up again, Combeferre was gone. Apparently satisfied with that answer to the grand praise that had just been spoken, he had left, and everyone except Enjolras had followed him. The room was empty. Enjolras, alone now with Marius, was looking at him gravely. Marius, however, having gathered his thoughts a little, did not think himself defeated. A trace of inner agitation still remained in him, and it was no doubt about to turn into arguments carefully marshaled against Enjolras, when suddenly they heard someone singing as he went down the stairs. It was Combeferre, and this is what he was singing:"

"If Caesar offered me glory and war, and I had to give up my mother's love, I would say to the great Caesar: Take back your sceptre and your chariot. I love my mother better, oh gué! I love my mother better!"25

The wild, tender way Combeferre sang gave this couplet a strange kind of grandeur. Marius, lost in thought and staring at the ceiling, repeated almost automatically, “My mother?—”

At that moment, Marius felt Enjolras’ hand on his shoulder.

“Citizen,” Enjolras said to him, “my mother is the Republic.”

CHAPTER VI—RES ANGUSTA

That evening left Marius deeply shaken, with a shadow of melancholy in his soul. He felt like the earth might feel when iron tears it open so that grain can be sown in it: at first it feels only the wound; the stirring of the seed and the joy of the harvest come later.

Marius was gloomy. He had only just found a faith; was he already supposed to give it up? He told himself he would not. He insisted to himself that he would not doubt, and yet, in spite of himself, he began to doubt. To stand between two religions, one you have not yet left and another you have not yet entered, is unbearable; twilight pleases only bat-like souls. Marius saw clearly, and he needed true light. The half-light of doubt hurt him. However much he wanted to stay where he was, he could not remain there. Something irresistible pushed him onward: to continue, to move forward, to examine, to think, to go farther. Where would it lead him? After taking so many steps that had brought him closer to his father, he feared taking one that might separate him from him. His distress grew with every reflection that came to him. A steep wall seemed to rise around him. He was in harmony neither with his grandfather nor with his friends; in the eyes of the former he was too bold, and in the eyes of the latter he was behind the times. He saw clearly that he was isolated in both directions, from the side of age and from the side of youth. He stopped going to the Café Musain.

In the troubled state of his conscience, he no longer thought about certain serious aspects of life. But the realities of life do

not let themselves be forgotten. They soon jostled him sharply.

One morning, the hotel owner came into Marius' room and said:

"Monsieur Courfeyrac has guaranteed your bill."

"Yes."

"But I need my money."

"Ask Courfeyrac to come speak with me," said Marius.

When Courfeyrac arrived, the innkeeper left them alone. Marius then told him something he had not thought to mention before: he was practically alone in the world and had no relatives.

"What will become of you?" said Courfeyrac.

"I honestly have no idea," Marius replied.

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

"Do you have any money?"

"Fifteen francs."

"Do you want me to lend you some?"

"Never."

"Do you have any clothes?"

"This is all I have."

"Do you have any valuables?"

"A watch."

“Silver?”

“Gold. Here it is.”

“I know a used-clothing dealer who will buy your frock-coat and a pair of trousers.”

“Good.”

“Then all you’ll have left is one pair of trousers, a waistcoat, a hat, and a coat.”

“And my boots.”

“What! You’re not planning to go barefoot? What luxury!”

“That will be enough.”

“I know a watchmaker who will buy your watch.”

“Good.”

“No, it isn’t good. What will you do after that?”

“Whatever is necessary. Anything honest, that is.”

“Do you know English?”

“No.”

“Do you know German?”

“No.”

“That makes things worse.”

“Why?”

“Because a friend of mine, a publisher, is putting together a kind of encyclopedia. You could have translated articles from English or German for it. The pay is poor, but a person can live on it.”

“I’ll learn English and German.”

“And what will you do in the meantime?”

“In the meantime, I’ll live off my clothes and my watch.”

They sent for a dealer in secondhand clothes. He paid twenty francs for the discarded garments. Then they went to the watchmaker. He bought the watch for forty-five francs.

“That’s not bad,” Marius said to Courfeyrac as they returned to the hotel. “With my fifteen francs, that makes eighty.”

“And the hotel bill?” Courfeyrac pointed out.

“Good heavens, I’d forgotten that,” said Marius.

The landlord brought his bill, and it had to be paid at once. It came to seventy francs.

“I have ten francs left,” said Marius.

“Devil take it,” cried Courfeyrac. “You’ll spend five francs while you learn English, and five more while you learn German. That means swallowing a language very quickly, or a hundred sous very slowly.”

Meanwhile, Aunt Gillenormand, who was really kind-hearted beneath her fluster when things went wrong, had finally tracked down Marius’s address.

One morning, when he came back from law school, Marius found a letter from his aunt and the _sixty pistoles_—that is, six hundred francs in gold—in a sealed box.

Marius sent the thirty louis back to his aunt with a respectful letter, saying that he had enough to live on and would now be able to provide for all his needs himself. At that moment, he had three francs left.

His aunt did not tell his grandfather about this refusal, for fear of making him even angrier. Besides, had he not said, “Let me never hear that blood-drinker’s name again!”

Marius left the Hôtel de la Porte Saint-Jacques, because he did not want to go into debt there.

CHAPTER I—MARIUS IN POVERTY

[Illustration: The Value of Misfortune]

Life became hard for Marius. Selling off his clothes and his watch was nothing. He was living through that terrible, indescribable condition the French call _la vache enragée_—in other words, he was enduring extreme hardship and deprivation. It meant days without bread, nights without sleep, evenings without a candle, and a hearth with no fire. It meant weeks without work and a future without hope. It meant a coat worn through at the elbows, an old hat that made young girls laugh, and coming home at night to find the door locked because the rent had not been paid. It meant the insolence of the porter and the cookshop keeper, the sneers of neighbors, humiliation, wounded dignity, whatever work one could get, disgust, bitterness, and despair. Marius learned how a person lives on all this, and how sometimes these are the only things one has to swallow. At that point in life, when a man needs his pride because he needs love, he felt himself mocked for being badly dressed and ridiculous for being poor. At the age when youth fills the heart with sovereign pride, he more than once lowered his eyes to his broken-down boots, and he knew the unjust shame and burning blush of poverty. It is an admirable and terrible trial, from which the weak come out degraded and the strong come out sublime. It is a crucible into which destiny throws a man whenever it wants to make either a scoundrel or a demigod.

Many great acts are carried out in small struggles. There is a kind of courage, unnoticed and stubborn, that defends itself step by step against that deadly assault of need and degradation. These are noble and mysterious victories that no one sees, that earn no fame, and that no trumpet greets. Life, misfortune, loneliness, abandonment, and poverty are battlefields too, and they have their heroes—obscure heroes who are sometimes greater than the heroes who win glory.

This is how strong and uncommon natures are formed. Misery, though almost always a stepmother, is sometimes a mother. Destitution can give birth to strength of soul and spirit. Distress nurses pride. Unhappiness is rich nourishment for the magnanimous.

There was a time in Marius's life when he swept his own landing, bought a sou's worth of Brie from the fruit seller, and waited until dusk to slip into the baker's for a loaf, which he carried back to his attic as secretly as if he had stolen it. Sometimes people saw an awkward young man glide into the butcher's shop on the corner, pushing through the joking cooks who jostled him, with large books under his arm and a look that was both timid and resentful. When he came in, he took off his hat from a forehead beaded with sweat, bowed deeply to the butcher's astonished wife, asked for a mutton chop, paid six or seven sous, wrapped it in paper, tucked it under his arm between two books, and left. It was Marius. He lived for three days on that chop, which he cooked himself.

On the first day he ate the meat, on the second the fat, and on the third he gnawed the bone. Aunt Gillenormand tried again and again, sending him the sixty pistoles several times. Every time, Marius sent them back, saying he needed nothing.

He was still mourning his father when the inner revolution we have just described took place in him. From that time on, he never took off his black clothes. But his clothes were wearing out faster than he could replace them. The day came when he no longer had a coat. The trousers would be next. What could he do? Courfeyrac, for whom Marius had also done a number of favors, gave him an old coat. For thirty sous, Marius had some porter turn it, and it became a new coat. But it was green. So Marius stopped going out before nightfall. The darkness made his coat look black. Since he wanted always to appear in mourning, he dressed himself in the night.

In spite of all this, he was admitted to practice as a lawyer. People assumed that he lived in Courfeyrac's room, which was respectable enough, and where a certain number of law books, supported and supplemented by several battered novels, passed for the library required by the regulations. He had his letters sent to Courfeyrac's address.

When Marius became a lawyer, he told his grandfather in a letter that was cold in tone but still respectful and obedient. M. Gillenormand trembled as he took the letter. He read it, tore it into four pieces, and threw it into the wastebasket. Two or three days later, Mademoiselle Gillenormand heard her father, alone in his room, speaking out loud to himself. He always did that when he was deeply upset. She listened, and the old man was

saying, “If you were not a fool, you would know that a man cannot be both a baron and a lawyer.”

CHAPTER II—MARIUS IN POVERTY

Misery is like everything else: in time, it becomes bearable. In the end, it takes on a shape and settles into place. A person simply keeps going—that is, grows in a thin, stunted way that is still enough to stay alive. This was how Marius Pontmercy's life came to be organized:

He had already been through the worst hardship; the narrow passage ahead was beginning to widen a little. Through hard work, persistence, courage, and determination, he had managed to earn about seven hundred francs a year from his labor. He had learned German and English, and thanks to Courfeyrac, who had introduced him to his publisher friend, Marius held the modest position of general helper in the publishing house's literary work. He wrote prospectuses, translated newspapers, prepared notes for editions, compiled biographies, and so on. The result, year after year, was seven hundred francs. He lived on it. How? Not too badly. We will explain.

For thirty francs a year, Marius rented a tiny room in the Gorbeau house—a sort of closet without even a fireplace, furnished with only the bare essentials. The furniture was his own. He paid the old head tenant three francs a month to sweep out his little room and bring him, every morning, a bit of hot water, a fresh egg, and a small roll. That was his breakfast. Depending on whether eggs were expensive or cheap, it cost him between two and four sous. At six in the evening, he went

down Rue Saint-Jacques to dine at Rousseau's, across from Basset the stamp-dealer, on the corner of Rue des Mathurins. He never had soup. He ordered a plate of meat for six sous, half a portion of vegetables for three, and a dessert for three. For another three sous, he could eat as much bread as he liked. He drank water, not wine. When he paid at the counter, where Madame Rousseau—still plump, rosy, and stately in those days—presided, he gave the waiter a sou, and Madame Rousseau rewarded him with a smile. Then he left. For sixteen sous, he got both dinner and a smile.

This Restaurant Rousseau, where very few bottles were emptied and a great many water carafes were, was less a restaurant than a soothing remedy. It no longer exists. The owner had an excellent nickname: people called him Rousseau the Aquatic.

So his breakfast cost four sous and his dinner sixteen, making twenty sous a day for food, or three hundred and sixty-five francs a year. Add thirty francs for rent, thirty-six francs for the old woman, and a few small extra expenses, and for four hundred and fifty francs Marius was fed, housed, and attended to. His clothes cost a hundred francs, his linen fifty, and his washing another fifty. Altogether, his expenses did not go beyond six hundred and fifty francs. He was rich. He sometimes lent a friend ten francs. Courfeyrac had once managed to borrow sixty from him. As for heating, since Marius had no fireplace, he had simply "simplified matters."

Marius always kept two complete suits of clothes: one old one for everyday wear, and the other brand-new for special occasions. Both were black. He had only three shirts—one on his back, one in the chest of drawers, and one with the washerwoman. He replaced them as they wore out. They were always in rags, which is why he buttoned his coat all the way up to his chin.

It had taken Marius years to reach this more prosperous state. They were hard years—some difficult to get through, others steep to climb. Marius never gave up for a single day. He endured every kind of poverty, and did everything except go into debt. He could honestly say that he had never owed anyone a sou. To him, debt was the beginning of slavery. He even told himself that a creditor was worse than a master, because a master owns only your person, while a creditor owns your dignity and can strike at it. Rather than borrow, he went hungry. He had spent many days without eating. He felt that extremes touch, and that if one is not careful, fallen circumstances can lead to moral degradation. So he guarded his pride fiercely. Certain formalities or gestures that, in any other situation, would have seemed like simple courtesy now struck him as servility, and he braced himself against them. His face carried a kind of stern flush. He was shy to the point of seeming rude.

Through all these trials, he sometimes felt sustained and even lifted up by a hidden strength within himself. The soul helps the body, and at certain moments it raises it. It is the only bird that carries its own cage.

Along with his father's name, another name was carved into Marius's heart: Thénardier. Serious and passionate by nature, Marius surrounded that man with a kind of halo. In his mind, Thénardier was the brave sergeant who had saved his father's life at Waterloo, carrying the colonel to safety through bullets and cannon fire. Marius could never think of this man apart from his father. He honored them together. It was like a two-tiered devotion: the great altar for the colonel, and a smaller one for Thénardier. What made Marius's grateful affection for Thénardier even stronger was the thought of the misery into which he knew Thénardier had fallen. At Montfermeil, Marius had learned of the unfortunate innkeeper's ruin and bankruptcy. From that moment on, he made extraordinary efforts to track him down and reach him in the dark depths of poverty where he had vanished. Marius searched the whole region. He went to Chelles, Bondy, Gournay, Nogent, and Lagny. He kept at it for three years, spending on these searches the little money he had managed to save. No one could give him any news of Thénardier; people believed he had gone abroad. His creditors had looked for him too—with less affection than Marius, but with equal persistence—and they had not been able to find him either. Marius blamed himself and was almost angry with himself for failing in the search. It was the only debt his father had left him, and Marius considered it a point of honor to repay it. "What!" he thought. "When my father lay dying on the battlefield, Thénardier managed to find him through the smoke and grapeshot and carry him away on his shoulders, though he owed him nothing. And I, who owe Thénardier so much, cannot reach him in the darkness where he lies suffering, perhaps

dying, and bring him back to life in my turn! Oh, I will find him!" In truth, Marius would have given one of his arms to find Thénardier. To save him from misery, he would have given all his blood. To see Thénardier, to do something for him, to say to him, "You do not know me; but I know you. Here I am. Command me!"—this was Marius's sweetest and noblest dream.

CHAPTER III—MARIUS GROWN UP

At this point, Marius was twenty years old. Three years had passed since he had left his grandfather. Neither of them had changed their position. Neither tried to come closer or arrange a meeting. Besides, what would have been the point? Marius was the brass vase, and Father Gillenormand was the iron pot.

We must admit that Marius was wrong about his grandfather's heart. He had imagined that M. Gillenormand had never loved him, and that the crusty, harsh, smiling old man—who cursed, shouted, raged, and waved his cane—felt for him, at most, only the thin and stern affection of comic old fools. Marius was mistaken. There may be fathers who do not love their children, but there is no grandfather who does not adore his grandson. Deep down, as we have said, M. Gillenormand worshipped Marius. He loved him in his own way, mixed with sharp words and cuffs on the ear. But once the boy was gone, he felt a dark emptiness in his heart. He would not let anyone mention the child to him, even while secretly regretting that he had been obeyed so completely. At first, he hoped that this Bonapartist, this Jacobin, this terrorist, this Septembrist, would come back. But the weeks went by, then the years, and to M. Gillenormand's great despair, the "blood-drinker" never appeared. "I could not have done otherwise than turn him out," the grandfather said to himself. Then he asked himself, "If I had to do it over again, would I do it?" His pride answered at once, "Yes," but his old head, shaking silently, replied sadly, "No." He had his periods of

sadness. He missed Marius. Old men need affection as much as they need the sun. It gives them warmth. Strong as he was by nature, Marius's absence had changed him. Nothing in the world could have made him take a step toward "that scoundrel," but he suffered. He never asked about him, yet he thought of him constantly. He lived in the Marais more and more shut away from the world. He was still cheerful and violent as before, but his cheerfulness had a strained harshness, and his outbursts always ended in a kind of gentle, gloomy dejection. Sometimes he said, "Oh! if only he would come back, what a fine box on the ear I would give him!"

As for his aunt, she cared too little to feel much affection. Marius had become, to her, little more than a vague dark figure, and in time she concerned herself with him less than with the cat or the parrot she probably kept. What deepened Father Gillenormand's private suffering was that he kept it entirely to himself and never let anyone guess it existed. His grief was like those newly invented furnaces that consume their own smoke. Sometimes meddlesome people spoke to him about Marius and asked, "What is your grandson doing?" "What has become of him?" The old bourgeois would answer with a sigh that he was a sad case, and, if he wanted to seem cheerful, he would flick his cuff and say, "Monsieur le Baron de Pontmercy is practicing petty law in some corner somewhere."

While the old man lived in regret, Marius congratulated himself. As often happens with generous natures, hardship had stripped away his bitterness. He thought of M. Gillenormand only kindly now, but he had resolved to accept nothing more from the man

who had been unkind to his father_. That was the softened form of his original outrage. Besides, he was glad to have suffered, and glad to be suffering still. He suffered for his father's sake. The harshness of his life satisfied him and even gave him pleasure. He told himself, with a kind of joy, that it was certainly the least he could do_; that it was an act of atonement; that if this had not happened, he would have been punished some other way, later, for his impious indifference toward his father—and such a father! He felt it would not have been just for his father to bear all the suffering while he bore none. And in any case, what were his labors and poverty beside the colonel's heroic life? In short, the only way he could draw near to his father and become like him was to be brave in the face of poverty, just as the other had been brave before the enemy. No doubt, he thought, that was what the colonel had meant by the words: "He will be worthy of it." Marius no longer wore those words on his breast, since the colonel's writing had disappeared, but he still carried them in his heart.

And on the day his grandfather had thrown him out, he had still been a child; now he was a man. He could feel it. Misery, we must say again, had done him good. When poverty in youth has its full effect, it has this great power: it drives the whole will toward effort and lifts the whole soul toward higher things. Poverty strips material life bare at once and shows it in all its ugliness; from that comes an indescribable reaching toward the ideal life. A rich young man has a hundred flashy, vulgar distractions—horse races, hunting, dogs, tobacco, gambling, fine meals, and the rest of it. These occupy the lower side of the soul at the expense of what is nobler and more delicate. A poor

young man struggles to earn his bread; he eats, and once he has eaten, he has nothing left but thought. He goes to the spectacles God provides for free. He looks at the sky, space, the stars, flowers, children, the humanity in whose midst he suffers, the creation in whose midst he shines. He looks at humanity so long that he begins to see its soul; he looks at creation so deeply that he catches sight of God. He dreams, and in dreaming feels himself great; he goes on dreaming, and feels himself tender. From the selfishness of the man who suffers, he passes into the compassion of the man who reflects. A noble feeling rises in him: forgetfulness of self and pity for all. As he thinks of the countless joys nature offers, gives, and pours out to souls that are open, while withholding them from souls that are closed, he comes to pity not himself but the millionaire of money—he, the millionaire of the mind. As light enters his spirit, all hatred leaves his heart. And is he unhappy? No. The misery of a young man is never wholly miserable. The first young fellow you meet, however poor he may be, with his strength, his health, his quick step, his bright eyes, his warm blood, his black hair, his red lips, his white teeth, his clean breath, would still stir the envy of an aged emperor. And every morning he begins again the work of earning his bread; and while his hands earn it, his back grows proud and his mind fills with ideas. When his work is done, he returns to unspeakable ecstasies, to contemplation, to joy. He sees his feet planted among troubles, obstacles, on the pavement, in nettles, sometimes in the mud; but his head is in the light. He is steadfast, calm, gentle, peaceful, attentive, serious, content with little, and kind. And he thanks God for giving him those two forms of wealth that many

rich men do not have: work, which makes him free, and thought, which gives him dignity.

This was what had happened to Marius. To be honest, he leaned a little too far toward contemplation. Once he had managed to earn a living with some degree of security, he stopped pushing himself. He told himself that poverty was a good thing, and he cut time away from work to devote it to thought. In other words, he sometimes spent whole days meditating, absorbed and swallowed up like a visionary in the silent delight of ecstasy and inner light. He had set himself the problem of how to live: to do as little material work as possible so that he could devote himself as much as possible to work of the spirit; in other words, to give a few hours to real life and throw the rest into the infinite. Because he believed he lacked nothing, he did not realize that contemplation, understood in this way, eventually becomes a form of idleness. He was satisfying only the first necessities of life, and he was resting from his labors too soon.

It was clear that, for a nature so energetic and passionate, this could only be temporary. At the first collision with the unavoidable complications of destiny, Marius would wake up.

Meanwhile, although he was a lawyer, and whatever Father Gillenormand might think of it, he was not practicing. He was not even doing petty legal work. Meditation had drawn him away from pleading. Hanging around attorneys, following the courts, hunting up cases—what a tedious life! Why should he do it? He saw no reason to change the way he earned his living. The obscure and poorly paid publishing house where he worked

had become, for him, a reliable source of employment that did not demand too much effort, as we have said, and that was enough for his needs.

One of the publishers he worked for—M. Magimel, I think—offered to take him into his own house, give him comfortable lodging, provide him with steady work, and pay him fifteen hundred francs a year. Comfortable lodging! Fifteen hundred francs! Certainly. But give up his freedom! Live on a fixed salary! Become a kind of hired man of letters! In Marius' view, if he accepted, his situation would improve and worsen at the same time: he would gain comfort and lose his dignity. It would be a fine, complete unhappiness turned into a disgusting and ridiculous form of torment—something like a blind man recovering sight in only one eye. He refused.

Marius lived alone. Because he preferred to stay apart from everything, and because he had been too badly frightened, he never fully joined the circle led by Enjolras. They remained good friends and were always ready to help each other in any way they could, but their connection went no further. Marius had two friends: one young, Courfeyrac, and one old, M. Mabeuf. He felt more drawn to the old man. First of all, he owed him the revolution that had taken place within him; it was through him that he had come to know and love his father. "He cured my cataract," he said.

The churchwarden had certainly played a decisive role.

Still, M. Mabeuf had done nothing more than serve as the calm, impassive instrument of Providence in the matter. He had

enlightened Marius by chance and without knowing it, like a candle that someone carries into a room; he was the candle, not the person carrying it.

As for the political revolution within Marius, M. Mabeuf was completely incapable of understanding it, wanting it, or guiding it.

Since we shall meet M. Mabeuf again later, a few words about him will not be unnecessary.

CHAPTER IV—M. MABEUF

On the day M. Mabeuf said to Marius, “Certainly I approve of political opinions,” he was stating exactly how he felt. Politics meant nothing to him. He approved of every opinion equally, as long as people left him in peace—rather like the Greeks, who called the Furies “the beautiful, the good, the charming,” the Eumenides. M. Mabeuf’s real political creed was a passionate love of plants and, above all, of books. Like everyone else in that era, he had to wear some label ending in _-ist_; but he was neither Royalist, Bonapartist, Chartist, Orleanist, nor Anarchist. He was a _bouquinist_, a collector of old books. He could not understand how people could spend their time hating one another over such nonsense as the charter, democracy, legitimacy, monarchy, the republic, and so on, when the world was full of mosses, grasses, and shrubs to examine, and piles of folios—and even 32mos—to leaf through. He was careful not to make himself useless. Owning books did not keep him from reading them, and being a botanist did not keep him from gardening. When he came to know Pontmercy, they had this bond between them: the colonel did for flowers what M. Mabeuf did for fruit. M. Mabeuf had managed to produce seedling pears as delicious as the pears of St. Germain. It seems to have been from one of his experiments that the October Mirabelle, now famous and no less fragrant than the summer Mirabelle, first came. He went to mass more out of gentleness than devotion. He loved human faces but hated human noise, and church was the only place where he found people gathered together and silent. Feeling that he ought to be something in the State, he had

chosen the profession of churchwarden. Even so, he had never managed to love any woman as much as a tulip bulb, or any man as much as an Elzevir. He was well past sixty when someone asked him one day, “Have you never been married?” “I have forgotten,” he replied. When it sometimes happened to him—and who has not said it?—to sigh, “Oh! if only I were rich!” it was not while admiring a pretty girl, as Father Gillenormand did, but while looking at an old book. He lived alone with an elderly housekeeper. He suffered a little from gout, and when he slept, his old fingers, stiff with rheumatism, curled in the folds of the sheets. He had written and published a _Flora of the Environs of Cauteretz_, with colored plates, a work that was fairly well regarded and sold well. People rang his bell in the Rue Mésières two or three times a day to ask for it. It brought him as much as two thousand francs a year, which made up almost his entire fortune. Though poor, he had managed, through patience, sacrifice, and time, to build a precious collection of rare books of every kind. He never went out without a book under his arm, and he often came back with two. The only decoration in the four ground-floor rooms that made up his lodgings was framed herbariums and engravings by the old masters. The sight of a sword or a gun made his blood run cold. He had never gone near a cannon in his life, not even at the Invalides. He had a reasonably good stomach, a brother who was a curé, perfectly white hair, no teeth—either in his mouth or in his mind—a tremor in every limb, a Picard accent, a childlike laugh, the look of an old sheep, and he was easily frightened. Add to that the fact that, among the living, he had no friend and no acquaintance except an old bookseller at the

Porte-Saint-Jacques named Royal. His dream was to naturalize indigo in France.

His servant was innocent in her own way as well. The poor, kind old woman had never married. Sultan, her cat—who might have mewed Allegri's Miserere in the Sistine Chapel—had filled her heart and satisfied all the passion she possessed. Her dreams had never reached as far as a man. She had never been able to love anything beyond her cat. Like him, she had a moustache. Her pride was her caps, which were always white. On Sundays, after mass, she spent her time counting the linen in her chest and laying out on her bed the lengths of dress fabric she bought and never had made into gowns. She could read. M. Mabeuf had nicknamed her Mother Plutarque.

M. Mabeuf had grown fond of Marius because Marius, young and gentle as he was, brought warmth to his old age without disturbing his shy nature. Youth joined with gentleness affects old people like sunshine without wind. When Marius was full of military glory, gunpowder, marches and countermarches, and all those astonishing battles in which his father had dealt and received such mighty sword-strokes, he went to see M. Mabeuf. And M. Mabeuf spoke to him about his hero from the point of view of flowers.

His brother, the curé, died around 1830, and almost at once, as when night begins to fall, the whole horizon darkened for M. Mabeuf. A notary's bankruptcy cost him ten thousand francs, the entire sum he possessed, both from his brother's estate and from his own means. The July Revolution brought on a crisis in publishing. In hard times, the first thing that does not sell is a

Flora. The Flora of the Environs of Cauteretz came to a halt. Weeks went by without a single buyer. Sometimes M. Mabeuf would start at the sound of the bell. “Monsieur,” Mother Plutarque would say sadly, “it is the water-carrier.” At last, one day, M. Mabeuf left the Rue Mésières, gave up his post as churchwarden, left Saint-Sulpice, and sold not some of his books but some of his prints—the things he cared least about. He moved into a small house on the Rue Montparnasse. Even there, however, he stayed only one quarter, for two reasons. First, the ground floor and garden cost three hundred francs, and he did not dare spend more than two hundred on rent. Second, because the house was near Faton’s shooting-gallery, he could hear pistol shots, which he found unbearable.

He took his _Flora_, his copper plates, his herbariums, his portfolios, and his books, and moved to the area near the Salpêtrière, into a kind of thatched cottage in the village of Austerlitz. For fifty crowns a year, he rented three rooms and a garden surrounded by a hedge, with a well in it. He used the move as an opportunity to sell almost all his furniture. On the day he settled into his new home, he was in very high spirits. He hammered in the nails for hanging his engravings and herbariums with his own hands, then spent the rest of the day digging in his garden. That night, noticing that Mother Plutarque looked sad and lost in thought, he tapped her on the shoulder and said with a smile, “We have the indigo!”

Only two visitors were allowed to see the thatched cottage at Austerlitz: the bookseller from the Porte-Saint-Jacques and Marius. The name Austerlitz, loud and blustering as it was, was

in truth extremely unpleasant to him.

As we have just noted, minds absorbed in some idea of wisdom or folly—or, as often happens, both at once—are slow to respond to the realities of ordinary life. Their own fate seems distant to them. From that kind of concentration comes a passivity that, if it were the result of deliberate thought, would look like philosophy. A person declines, sinks, fades away, even falls to pieces, and is scarcely aware of it. It does end in an awakening, it is true, but the awakening comes late. In the meantime, it is as if we remain neutral in the contest between our happiness and our misery. We are the prize at stake, and yet we watch the game with indifference.

So it was that, through the cloud gathering around him, while his hopes went out one by one, M. Mabeuf remained serenely calm, though in a somewhat childlike way. His mind moved with the steady rhythm of a pendulum. Once he had set himself on an illusion, he kept going for a long time, even after the illusion was gone. A clock does not stop the instant it loses its key.

M. Mabeuf had his harmless pleasures. They cost almost nothing and came out of nowhere; the smallest accident could provide them. One day, Mother Plutarque was reading a novel in one corner of the room. She read aloud because she felt she understood it better that way. Reading aloud lets a person reassure herself that she really grasps what she is reading. Some people read very loudly, as if they were personally vouching for every line.

Mother Plutarque was reading her novel with exactly that kind of force. M. Mabeuf heard her, though he was not really listening.

As she went on, Mother Plutarque came to this sentence. It concerned an officer of dragoons and a beautiful woman:

"—The beauty pouted, and the dragoon—"

At that point, she stopped to wipe her glasses.

"Bouddha and the Dragon," M. Mabeuf murmured. "Yes, it is true, there was once a dragon that, from the depths of its cave, breathed fire from its jaws and set the heavens ablaze. This monster had already devoured many stars, and it also had the claws of a tiger. Bouddha entered its den and managed to convert the dragon. That is a fine book you are reading, Mother Plutarque. No legend is more beautiful."

And M. Mabeuf drifted into a delightful reverie.

CHAPTER V—POVERTY, A GOOD NEIGHBOR TO MISERY

Marius was fond of this guileless old man, who saw himself slowly slipping into poverty and gradually grew astonished by it, yet never became sad. Marius met Courfeyrac and visited M. Mabeuf, though not often; at most twice a month.

Marius liked to take long walks alone along the outer boulevards, or in the Champs-de-Mars, or down the least crowded paths in the Luxembourg. He would often spend half a day simply looking at a market garden: the lettuce beds, the chickens on the manure heap, the horse turning the water wheel. Passers-by looked at him with surprise, and some thought his clothes suspicious and his expression sinister. He was only a poor young man, drifting in aimless thought.

It was on one of his walks that he came across the Gorbeau house. Drawn by how isolated it was and how little it cost, he moved in there. The people there knew him only by the name Monsieur Marius.

Some of his father's old generals and former comrades invited him to visit them once they learned who he was. Marius accepted. These visits gave him a chance to talk about his father. So from time to time he went to see Comte Pajol, General Bellavesne, General Fririon, and people at the Invalides. There was music and dancing there. On those evenings, Marius wore his new coat. But he only went to these parties and balls when the weather was freezing, because he could not afford a

carriage and did not want to arrive unless his boots were polished like mirrors.

He sometimes said, though without bitterness, “People are made in such a way that in a drawing room you may be dirty everywhere except on your shoes. If you want to be well received there, only one thing has to be beyond reproach: not your conscience—your boots.”

Every passion except those of the heart fades in daydreaming. Marius’s political fever disappeared that way. The Revolution of 1830 helped along the process by satisfying him and calming him. Aside from his occasional bursts of anger, he remained the same. He still held the same beliefs, but they had softened. More exactly, he no longer had opinions; he had sympathies. What party did he belong to? The party of humanity. Within humanity he chose France; within the nation he chose the people; within the people he chose woman. It was above all toward that point that his pity turned. Now he preferred an idea to an action, a poet to a hero, and admired a book like Job more than an event like Marengo. And then, when he came back in the evening through the boulevards after a day spent in thought, and through the branches of the trees caught sight of the measureless space beyond—the nameless glimmers, the abyss, the shadow, the mystery—all that is merely human seemed very beautiful to him.

He believed—and he was right—that he had reached the truth of life and of human philosophy. In the end, he looked only at heaven, the one thing Truth can see from the bottom of her well.

That did not stop him from multiplying his plans, his combinations, his frameworks, his projects for the future. In this dreamy state, any eye that could have looked into Marius's inner life would have been dazzled by the purity of his soul. In truth, if our mortal eyes could look into other people's consciences, we would judge a man far more accurately by what he dreams than by what he thinks. Thought involves will; dreams do not. Reverie, because it is completely spontaneous, still takes the shape of our spirit, even when it rises into the vast and the ideal. Nothing comes more directly or more honestly from the deepest part of us than our unplanned, limitless longings for the splendors of destiny. In those longings, even more than in deliberate, rational, carefully ordered ideas, a man's true character is revealed. Our chimeras are what resemble us most closely. Each of us dreams of the unknown and the impossible according to his own nature.

Around the middle of 1831, the old woman who waited on Marius told him that his neighbors, the miserable Jondrette family, had been put out on the street. Marius spent almost all his time away from home and barely knew he had any neighbors at all.

"Why were they turned out?" he asked.

"Because they haven't paid their rent. They owe two quarters."

"How much is it?"

"Twenty francs," said the old woman.

Marius had thirty francs saved in a drawer.

“Here,” he said to the old woman, “take these twenty-five francs. Pay the poor people’s rent, give them five francs, and don’t tell them it came from me.”

He thought of Marius, who was a student and would probably go with the others to “deliberate, at noon, in the Place du Panthéon.”

By chance, the regiment to which Lieutenant Théodule belonged was assigned to garrison duty in Paris. This gave Aunt Gillenormand a second idea. The first time, she had thought of using Théodule to spy on Marius; now she planned to have Théodule take Marius’s place.

In any case, if the grandfather happened to feel that vague desire for a young face in the house—those first rays of dawn can sometimes be sweet to a life in ruins—it seemed wise to find another Marius. “Think of it as a simple misprint,” she told herself, “the kind you find in books. Instead of Marius, read Théodule.”

A grandnephew is almost the same thing as a grandson; if you do not have a lawyer, you make do with a lancer.

One morning, as M. Gillenormand was about to read something in the _Quotidienne_, his daughter came in and said, in her gentlest voice—for the matter concerned her favorite:—

“Father, Théodule is coming this morning to pay his respects to you.”

“Who is Théodule?”

“Your grandnephew.”

“Ah!” said the grandfather.

Then he went back to his reading and gave no more thought to his grandnephew, who was just some Théodule or other. Before long he flew into a rage, as he almost always did when he read. The paper he was holding, Royalist of course, announced for the next day, without any softening language, one of those small events that happened daily in Paris at that time: “The students of the law and medical schools are to assemble at noon in the Place du Panthéon—to deliberate.” The issue was one of the controversies of the day: the artillery of the National Guard, and a dispute between the Minister of War and “the citizen militia” over the cannon stationed in the courtyard of the Louvre. The students were going to “deliberate” about it. That alone was more than enough to make M. Gillenormand furious.

He thought of Marius, a student, who would probably go with the others to “deliberate, at midday, on the Place du Panthéon.”

While he was lost in this painful train of thought, Lieutenant Théodule came in, dressed in ordinary civilian clothes like a bourgeois, which was a shrewd move on his part, and Mademoiselle Gillenormand discreetly introduced him. The lancer had reasoned like this: “The old druid has not put all his money into a life annuity. It is wise to dress as a civilian now and then.”

Mademoiselle Gillenormand said aloud to her father:—

“Théodule, your grandnephew.”

And in a low voice to the lieutenant:—

“Approve of everything.”

And then she left.

The lieutenant, who was not at all used to such imposing meetings, stammered a little nervously, “Good day, uncle,” and gave a salute that began as an automatic military gesture and ended as a polite civilian bow.

“Ah! So it’s you. Good. Sit down,” said the old gentleman.

Having said that, he completely forgot about the lancer.

Théodule sat down, and M. Gillenormand got to his feet.

M. Gillenormand began pacing back and forth with his hands in his pockets, talking out loud and tugging irritably, with his old fingers, at the two watches he wore in his two fobs.

“That pack of brats! They gather in the Place du Panthéon! Upon my word, boys who were still with their nurses only yesterday! If you squeezed their noses, milk would come out. And tomorrow at noon they’re going to hold a debate. What is the world coming to? What is the world coming to? It’s obvious we’re heading for ruin. This is what the descamisados– have brought us to! Debating the citizen artillery! Going out to chatter in the open air under the mockery of the National Guard! And who are they going to meet there? Just look where Jacobinism leads. I’d wager anything you like, a million to one, that there will be no one there but returned convicts and released galley-slaves. Republicans and galley-slaves—they’re one and the same. Carnot used to say, ‘Where would you have me go, traitor?’ Fouché replied, ‘Anywhere you like, imbecile!’ That’s

what Republicans are like."

"That's true," said Théodule.

M. Gillenormand turned his head halfway, noticed Théodule, and went on:

“Just think—that scoundrel was vile enough to turn Carbonaro! Why did you leave my house? So you could go become a Republican! Psst! To begin with, the people want nothing to do with your republic. They have common sense. They know perfectly well that there have always been kings and always will be. They know perfectly well that the people are only the people, after all. They laugh at your republic—do you understand, you idiot? Isn’t it a dreadful whim? To fall in love with Père Duchesne, to make sheep’s-eyes at the guillotine, to sing love songs and play the guitar under the balcony of ’93—it is enough to make one spit at all these young men, they are such fools! They are all the same. Not one of them escapes. All they have to do is breathe the air in the street, and they lose their senses. The nineteenth century is poison. The first rascal who comes along grows a beard like a goat, imagines himself a grand villain, and abandons his old relatives. He is a Republican, he is a romantic. What does that mean, romantic? Do me the favor of telling me. It means every kind of madness. A year ago, they all rushed to _Hernani_. Now really, just think—_Hernani_!—Antitheses! Abominations that are not even written in French! And then they keep cannons in the courtyard of the Louvre. That is what this age has come to!”

“You are right, uncle,” said Théodule.

M. Gillenormand went on:

“Cannons in the Museum courtyard! What for? Do you want to fire grapeshot at the Apollo Belvedere? What do those cartridges have to do with the Venus de Medici? Oh, the young men of today are all scoundrels! What a fine specimen their Benjamin Constant is! And the ones who are not rogues are fools. They do everything they can to make themselves ugly. They dress badly. They are afraid of women. In the presence of petticoats, they take on a beggar’s look that sends girls into fits of laughter. Upon my word, you would think the poor creatures were ashamed of love. They are misshapen, and to complete the picture, they are stupid. They repeat the puns of Tiercelin and Potier. They wear sack coats, stablemen’s waistcoats, shirts of coarse linen, trousers of rough cloth, and boots of coarse leather, and their nonsense sounds just like their clothing looks. You could use their jargon to resole their old shoes. And this whole clumsy pack of boys has political opinions, if you please. Political opinions ought to be strictly forbidden. They invent systems, remake society, tear down the monarchy, throw all laws to the ground, put the attic in the cellar’s place and my porter in the King’s place, turn Europe upside down, and reconstruct the world. And all their love affairs amount to slyly staring at the ankles of washerwomen as they climb into their carts. Ah, Marius! Ah, you scoundrel! To go shouting in the public square! To discuss, to debate, to take measures! They call that taking measures, good God! Disorder has lowered itself into silliness. I have seen chaos; now I see a muddle. Students deliberating about the National Guard—such a thing could not

be seen even among the Ogibewas or the Cadodaches! Savages who go naked, with their heads dressed like shuttlecocks and clubs in their paws, are less brutish than those bachelors of arts. Those four-penny monkeys! And they set themselves up as judges! Those creatures deliberate and reason! The end of the world has come! This is plainly the end of this miserable terraqueous globe. One final hiccup was needed, and France has produced it. Deliberate, my rascals! This is what happens when they go read newspapers under the arcades of the Odéon. It costs them a sou—and their good sense, their intelligence, their heart, their soul, and their wits. They come out of there and desert their families. All newspapers are plagues, every one of them, even the _Drapeau Blanc!_ At bottom, Martainville was a Jacobin. Ah, just Heaven! You may well boast that you have driven your grandfather to despair—you certainly have!"

"That's obvious," said Théodule.

And taking advantage of the moment while M. Gillenormand paused for breath, the lancer added in an authoritative tone:

"There ought to be no newspaper but the _Moniteur_, and no book but the _Annuaire Militaire_."

M. Gillenormand went on:

“Just look at their Sieyès! A regicide who ends up a senator; that is always how they end. They start by giving each other the scar of calling one another _thou_ as citizens, only so that in the end they can be called _Monsieur le Comte_. _Monsieur le Comte_ indeed—September murderers! The philosopher Sieyès! I will at least give myself credit for this: I have never thought any more highly of the philosophies of all those philosophers than I did of the performances of the clown at Tivoli. One day I saw the Senators crossing the Quai Malplaquet in violet velvet cloaks embroidered with bees, wearing hats in the style of Henri IV. They were hideous. You would have taken them for monkeys from the tiger’s court. Citizens, I tell you that your progress is madness, your humanity a dream, your revolution a crime, your republic a monster, and that your young and virgin France comes from the brothel. I maintain it against anyone, whoever you may be—journalists, economists, lawyers, or even if you were better judges of liberty, equality, and fraternity than the guillotine’s blade! And that is what I announce to you, my fine fellows!”

“Parbleu!” cried the lieutenant. “That is absolutely true.”

M. Gillenormand stopped in the middle of a gesture, turned sharply, fixed Lancer Théodule with a hard stare, and said:

“You are a fool.”

CHAPTER I—THE SOBRIQUET: HOW FAMILY NAMES ARE FORMED

At this time, Marius was a handsome young man of height, with thick, intensely black hair, a broad, intelligent forehead, wide, passionate nostrils, and an air of calm sincerity. Over his whole face there was something impossible to define: proud, thoughtful, and innocent all at once. His profile, though softly rounded in every line, lost none of its firmness. It had a certain Germanic gentleness that had entered French features through Alsace and Lorraine, along with that complete lack of sharp angles which had made the Sicambri so easy for the Romans to recognize, and which marks the leonine rather than the aquiline type. He was at that age when, in a thoughtful man, the mind is made up almost equally of depth and innocence. Put him in a serious situation, and he had everything needed to seem foolish; turn the key one notch further, and he might become sublime. His manner was reserved, cool, polished, and not especially warm. But his mouth was charming, his lips were the reddest, and his teeth the whitest in the world, so that his smile softened the overall severity of his face. At certain moments, that pure brow and that sensuous smile created a strange contrast. His eyes were small, but his gaze was expansive.

During the worst period of his misery, he noticed that young women turned to look at him as he passed. He would flee or hide, with despair in his heart. He thought they were staring

because of his shabby clothes and laughing at them. In truth, they looked at him because of his grace, and they dreamed about him.

This silent misunderstanding between him and the pretty girls he passed made him shy. He chose none of them, for the simple reason that he ran away from all of them. So he went on living like that indefinitely—foolishly, as Courfeyrac said.

Courfeyrac also said to him: “Don’t try to be venerable.” They called each other thou; young friendships naturally tend to slip into that form of address. “Let me give you a bit of advice, my dear fellow. Don’t read so many books, and spend a little more time looking at the girls. The little minxes have their good qualities, O Marius! If you keep on fleeing and blushing, you’ll end up becoming coarse.”

At other times, Courfeyrac would run into him and say, “Good morning, Monsieur l’Abbé!”

Whenever Courfeyrac made a remark like that to him, Marius became even more careful than usual to avoid women, young and old alike, for the next week. He also avoided Courfeyrac.

Still, in all the vast world, there were two women Marius did not run away from, though he paid absolutely no attention to either of them. In fact, he would have been very surprised to hear them described as women. One was the old bearded woman who swept out his room and prompted Courfeyrac to say, “Since his servant wears the beard, Marius does not wear one himself.” The other was a sort of little girl whom he saw very often and never once really looked at.

For more than a year, Marius had noticed, on one of the walks in the Luxembourg—the one that runs along the parapet of the Pépinière—a man and a very young girl who were almost always sitting side by side on the same bench, at the loneliest end of the path, on the Rue de l’Ouest side. Whenever chance, which so often interferes with the walks of people lost in their own thoughts, led Marius to that path—and it did so almost every day—he found the pair there. The man seemed to be about sixty. He looked sad and grave, and his whole appearance had the sturdy yet worn look often seen in soldiers who have left the service. If he had worn a decoration, Marius would have said, “He is a retired officer.” He had a kind but distant manner, and he never let his eyes rest on anyone else’s. He wore blue trousers, a blue frock coat, and a broad-brimmed hat that always seemed new, along with a black cravat and a Quaker shirt—that is, one dazzlingly white but made of coarse linen. A grisette passing near him one day said, “There’s a very neat widower.” His hair was very white.

The first time the young girl who accompanied him came and sat down on the bench they seemed to have made their own,

she was a sort of child of thirteen or fourteen, so thin that she was almost plain, awkward, and unremarkable, though her eyes hinted that she might one day be beautiful. The only problem was that she always held them up with a kind of unpleasant boldness. Her clothes looked both old and childish, like the dress of schoolgirls in a convent: a badly cut gown of black merino. They looked like father and daughter.

For a few days, Marius watched this man, who was not yet old, and this little girl, who was not yet really a young woman. After that, he stopped paying attention to them. For their part, they did not seem even to notice him. They spoke together with a calm, detached air. The girl talked constantly and cheerfully. The old man said very little, and from time to time he rested his eyes on her with an indescribably fatherly tenderness.

Marius had fallen into the automatic habit of walking along that path. He always found them there.

This was how things went:

Marius liked to enter at the end of the path farthest from their bench. He would walk the whole length of it, pass in front of them, then go back to the end where he had started and begin again. He did this five or six times during each walk, and he took that walk five or six times a week, without it ever occurring either to him or to them to exchange so much as a greeting. That man and that young girl, though they seemed—and perhaps because they seemed—to avoid all attention, had naturally attracted some notice from the five or six students who from time to time walked along the Pépinière: the serious

ones after their lectures, the others after their game of billiards. Courfeyrac, who belonged to the latter group, had noticed them several times; but finding the girl plain, he had quickly and deliberately kept away. As he retreated, he tossed a nickname at them like a parting shot. Struck only by the child's dress and the old man's white hair, he called the daughter Mademoiselle Lanoire and the father Monsieur Leblanc. Since no one knew them by any other name, the nickname became the accepted one for lack of a real name. The students would say, "Ah! Monsieur Leblanc is on his bench." And Marius, like the rest, found it convenient to call this unknown gentleman Monsieur Leblanc.

We will follow their example and call him M. Leblanc, to make this story easier to tell.

So during the first year, Marius saw them at nearly the same hour almost every day. He liked the man, but found the girl dull.

CHAPTER II—LUX FACTA EST

In the second year, at exactly the point this story has now reached, Marius's habit of going to the Luxembourg was interrupted. He himself hardly knew why, but nearly six months passed without his setting foot in the alley. Then one day he finally went back. It was a calm summer morning, and Marius was in high spirits, as people often are in fine weather. It seemed to him that his heart held all the birds' songs he could hear, and all the patches of blue sky he caught through the leaves overhead.

He went straight to "his alley," and when he reached the end of it, he saw that familiar pair still sitting on the same bench. But when he came closer, although it was certainly the same man, it seemed to him that it was no longer the same girl. The person before him now was a tall and beautiful young creature, with all the loveliest lines of womanhood still joined to all the innocent grace of childhood—a brief, passing moment that can be summed up in two words: fifteen years old. She had magnificent brown hair lit with threads of gold; a forehead that seemed carved from marble; cheeks like rose petals; a pale blush; a trembling whiteness; an exquisite mouth, from which smiles flashed like sunbeams and words flowed like music; a head Raphael might have given to Mary, set on a neck Jean Goujon might have given to Venus. And as if nothing were to be missing from that enchanting face, her nose was not handsome but pretty. It was neither straight nor curved, neither Italian nor Greek. It was a Parisian nose—that is, expressive, delicate,

irregular, and pure—the kind that drives painters to despair and delights poets.

As Marius passed near her, he could not see her eyes, which remained lowered. He saw only her long chestnut lashes, dark with shadow and modesty.

Yet the beautiful girl kept smiling as she listened to what the white-haired old man was saying, and nothing could have been more captivating than that fresh smile beneath those lowered eyes.

For a moment, Marius thought she was another daughter of the same man, probably the first girl's sister. But when his usual walk brought him past the bench a second time, and he looked at her closely, he realized she was the same girl. In six months, the child had become a young woman; that was all. Nothing is more common than this. There comes a moment when girls seem to bloom in the blink of an eye and suddenly become roses. Only yesterday they were children; today they unsettle the heart.

This child had not only grown; she had been transformed into something almost ideal. Just as three days in April are enough to cover certain trees with blossoms, six months had been enough to clothe her in beauty. Her April had come.

Sometimes you see people who seem poor and insignificant suddenly wake up, move at once from poverty to luxury, spend freely on every kind of extravagance, and all at once become dazzling, lavish, magnificent. That happens because they have come into an income; a payment fell due yesterday. The young

girl had received her quarterly income.

And she was no longer the schoolgirl in her felt hat, her merino dress, her school shoes, and her red hands. Along with beauty, she had acquired taste. She was now well dressed, with a kind of rich, simple elegance and no affectation. She wore a black damask dress, a cape of the same material, and a white crape bonnet. Her white gloves showed the delicacy of the hand that played with the carved Chinese ivory handle of her parasol, and her silk shoe revealed how small her foot was. When you passed near her, her whole outfit seemed to give off a youthful, vivid perfume.

As for the man, he was just the same as ever.

The second time Marius came near her, the young girl lifted her eyes. They were a deep, heavenly blue, but behind that veiled azure there was still nothing but a child’s gaze. She looked at Marius with indifference, just as she might have looked at the little boy running under the sycamores or the marble vase casting its shadow on the bench. Marius, for his part, went on with his walk and thought of something else.

He passed the bench where the young girl sat five or six times, without even turning his eyes toward her.

Over the next few days, he went back to the Luxembourg, as he usually did. As usual, he found “the father and daughter” there, but he gave them no more attention. He thought no more about the girl now that she was beautiful than he had when she was plain. He walked very close to the bench where she sat, simply because that was his usual route.

CHAPTER III—THE EFFECT OF SPRING

One day, the air was warm, and the Luxembourg was flooded with shifting light and shadow. The sky was so clear it seemed as if the angels had washed it that morning. Deep in the chestnut trees, the sparrows were chirping softly. Marius had opened his whole soul to nature. He was thinking of nothing. He was simply alive, simply breathing. As he passed near the bench, the young girl lifted her eyes to him, and their glances met.

What was in the young girl’s look that day? Marius could not have said. It contained nothing, and it contained everything. It was a strange flash.

She lowered her eyes, and he went on.

What he had just seen was no longer the innocent, straightforward gaze of a child. It was a mysterious depth that had opened halfway, then suddenly closed again.

There comes a day when a young girl looks in that way. Woe to the man who happens to be there!

That first look from a soul that does not yet know itself is like dawn in the sky. It is the awakening of something radiant and strange. Nothing can convey the dangerous charm of that unexpected gleam, suddenly and dimly shining out of lovely shadows, made up of all the innocence of the present and all the passion of the future. It is a kind of uncertain tenderness

that reveals itself by chance and then waits. It is a trap an innocent girl sets without knowing it, and in it she catches hearts without wishing to or even realizing it. It is a virgin with the look of a woman.

It is rare for a deep reverie not to spring from that glance wherever it falls. Every purity and every candor meet in that heavenly and fatal gleam, which, more than all the carefully calculated tender looks of coquettes, has the magical power to make that dark flower suddenly bloom in the depths of the soul—the flower steeped in perfume and poison that is called love.

That evening, when Marius returned to his garret, he looked over his clothes and realized for the first time that he had been shockingly careless, improper, and unbelievably foolish enough to go walking in the Luxembourg in his “everyday clothes”: a hat crushed near the band, heavy carter’s boots, black trousers worn white at the knees, and a black coat faded at the elbows.

CHAPTER IV—THE BEGINNING OF A GREAT ILLNESS

The next day, at the usual hour, Marius took from his wardrobe his new coat, new trousers, new hat, and new boots. He dressed himself in this full outfit, put on his gloves—a tremendous luxury—and set out for the Luxembourg.

On the way there, he ran into Courfeyrac and pretended not to see him. When Courfeyrac got home, he said to his friends:

“I’ve just seen Marius’s new hat and new coat, with Marius inside them. No doubt he was on his way to take an examination. He looked completely ridiculous.”

When he arrived at the Luxembourg, Marius walked around the fountain basin and stared at the swans. Then he stood for a long time looking at a statue whose head was completely black with mold and one of whose hips was missing. Near the basin stood a middle-class man of forty, with a prominent stomach, holding a little street urchin of five by the hand and saying to him, “Avoid excess, my son; keep equally far from despotism and from anarchy.” Marius listened to this bourgeois. Then he walked around the basin once again. At last he turned toward “his alley,” slowly and almost reluctantly. It would have seemed that he was both compelled to go there and held back from it at the same time. He did not realize this himself, and thought he was doing exactly what he always did.

As he turned into the walk, he saw M. Leblanc and the young girl at the far end, “on their bench.” He buttoned his coat all the way to the top, pulled it down so there would be no wrinkles, glanced with a certain satisfaction at the glossy shine of his trousers, and advanced toward the bench. There was something of an attack in this advance, and certainly a wish to conquer. So I say that he advanced toward the bench just as I might say, “Hannibal marched on Rome.”

Still, all his movements were automatic, and nothing interrupted his usual thoughts or his work. At that moment he was thinking that the _Manuel du Baccalauréat_ was a stupid book, and that only complete idiots could have put it together in such a way that three tragedies by Racine and only one comedy by Molière were analyzed there as masterpieces of the human mind. A sharp whistling rang in his ears. As he came closer to the bench, he gripped the folds of his coat and fixed his eyes on the young girl. It seemed to him that she filled the whole end of the path with a dim blue light.

The nearer he came, the more his pace slowed. When he was still some distance from the bench, long before he had reached the end of the path, he stopped and could not have explained why he turned back. He did not even tell himself that he would not go all the way to the end. The young girl could hardly have noticed him from that distance or taken note of his handsome appearance in his new clothes. Even so, he stood very straight, in case someone was watching him from behind.

He reached the far end of the path, then came back. This time he went a little closer to the bench. He even came within three spaces between the trees, but there he felt an indescribable inability to go any farther, and he stopped. He thought he saw the young girl's face turn toward him. But with a forceful effort, he mastered his hesitation and walked straight on. A few seconds later, he strode past the bench, upright and rigid, blushing to the ears, not daring to look either right or left, with one hand tucked into his coat like a statesman. As he passed—under the battery of the place—he felt his heart pounding wildly. As on the day before, she wore her damask dress and her crape bonnet. He heard a voice beyond words, which had to be hers. She was speaking calmly. She was very beautiful. He knew it, though he did not try to look at her. "Still," he thought, "she could hardly fail to feel some esteem and respect for me, if she only knew that I am the true author of the dissertation on Marcos Obrégon de la Ronde, which M. François de Neufchâteau placed, as if it were his own, at the beginning of his edition of _Gil Blas_." He went past the bench to the end of the walk, which was very near, then turned sharply and passed in front of the lovely girl once again. This time he was very pale. In fact, all his feelings were painful. As he moved farther away from the bench and the young girl, with his back turned to her, he imagined that she was watching him, and that made him stumble.

He did not try to go near the bench again. He stopped near the middle of the path and, in something he never did, sat down. There he reflected, in the deepest and vaguest part of his mind, that it was hard, after all, for people whose white bonnet and

black dress he admired to be completely unmoved by his splendid trousers and his new coat.

After a quarter of an hour, he got up, as if he were about to begin once more his walk toward that bench surrounded by a kind of halo. But he remained standing there, motionless. For the first time in fifteen months, he told himself that the gentleman who sat there every day with his daughter must have noticed him too, and probably found his constant appearances rather strange.

For the first time, he also felt there was something almost disrespectful about calling that stranger, even in his own private thoughts, by the nickname M. Leblanc.

He stood there for several minutes, his head bowed, drawing shapes in the sand with the cane in his hand.

Then he suddenly turned away from the bench, from M. Leblanc and his daughter, and went home.

That day, he forgot to eat dinner. At eight o'clock that evening, he realized it, and since it was too late to go down to the Rue Saint-Jacques, he said, "Never mind," and ate a piece of bread.

He did not go to bed until he had brushed his coat and folded it carefully.

CHAPTER V—VARIOUS THUNDERCLAPS FALL ON MA'AM BOUGON

The next day, Ma'am Bougon—as Courfeyrac called the old portress, chief tenant, and housekeeper of the Gorbeau hovel—noticed with astonishment that M. Marius was going out again in his new coat. Ma'am Bougon's real name was Madame Burgon, as we have discovered, but that iconoclast, Courfeyrac, respected nothing.

He went to the Luxembourg again, but this time he went no farther than his bench halfway down the walk. He sat there, as he had the day before, watching from a distance and clearly making out the white bonnet, the black dress, and above all that blue light. He did not move from the spot, and he went home only when the Luxembourg gates closed. He did not see M. Leblanc and his daughter leave. He assumed they had gone out through the gate on the Rue de l'Ouest. Later, several weeks afterward, when he thought back on it, he could never remember where he had eaten dinner that evening.

The next day, the third, Ma'am Bougon was stunned. Marius went out in his new coat again. "Three days in a row!" she cried.

She tried to follow him, but Marius walked quickly, with enormous strides; it was like a hippopotamus trying to chase a chamois. She lost sight of him within two minutes and came back breathless, nearly choking with asthma, and furious. "If there is any sense in putting on one's best clothes every day

and making people run like this!" she grumbled.

Marius made his way to the Luxembourg.

The young girl was there with M. Leblanc. Marius came as close as he could, pretending to be absorbed in a book, but he stopped at a distance. Then he went back and sat down on his bench, where he spent four hours watching the house sparrows hopping along the path. He had the feeling that they were making fun of him.

This went on for a fortnight. Marius no longer went to the Luxembourg for a walk; he went only to sit in the same place every day, without even knowing why. Once he got there, he did not move. Every morning he put on his new coat so that he might not show himself, and the next day he began again.

She was unquestionably a marvelous beauty. The only criticism one might have made was that the contrast between her melancholy gaze and her cheerful smile gave her face a slightly wild look. At times, this made her sweet expression seem strange, though never less charming.

CHAPTER VI—TAKEN PRISONER

Late in the second week, Marius was sitting on his usual bench with an open book in his hand, though he had not turned a page in the last two hours. Suddenly he started. Something was happening at the far end of the path. Leblanc and his daughter had just risen from their seat. The daughter had taken her father's arm, and the two of them were walking slowly toward the middle of the alley, where Marius sat. Marius shut his book, then opened it again, and tried to force himself to read. He was trembling. The radiant vision was coming straight toward him. "Good heavens!" he thought. "I won't have time to compose myself." Still the white-haired man and the girl kept coming. It seemed to him to last a century and only a second at once. "Why are they coming this way?" he asked himself. "What! She is going to pass here? Her feet will touch this sand, this path, two steps from me?" He was completely shaken. He wished he were very handsome. He wished he had the cross. He could hear the soft, even sound of their footsteps drawing near. He imagined that M. Leblanc was shooting angry looks at him. "Is that gentleman going to speak to me?" he wondered. He lowered his head. When he lifted it again, they were very close. The young girl passed him, and as she did, she looked at him. She looked at him steadily, with a thoughtful sweetness that sent a thrill through Marius from head to foot. It seemed to him that she was reproaching him for waiting so long before coming nearer to her, and that she was saying: "I am coming myself."

Marius was dazzled by those eyes, full of light and depth.

He felt as if his brain were on fire. She had come to him—what happiness! And the way she had looked at him! She seemed more beautiful to him than ever before. Beautiful with a grace that was wholly feminine and angelic, with a perfect beauty that would have made Petrarch sing and Dante kneel. He felt as though he were floating freely in the blue heavens. At the same time, he was miserably annoyed that there was dust on his boots.

He was almost sure she had noticed his boots too.

He kept watching her until she was out of sight. Then he sprang up and wandered through the Luxembourg Gardens like a madman. At moments, he may even have laughed to himself and spoken out loud. He was so lost in his thoughts whenever he passed the children's nurses that each of them imagined he was in love with her.

He left the Luxembourg, hoping to find her again in the street.

He ran into Courfeyrac under the arcades of the Odéon and said, "Come have dinner with me." They went to Rousseau's and spent six francs. Marius ate like a giant. He tipped the waiter six sous. Over dessert, he said to Courfeyrac, "Have you read the paper? What a splendid speech Audry de Puyraveau gave!"

He was wildly in love.

After dinner, he said to Courfeyrac, "I'll treat you to the theater." They went to the Porte-Saint-Martin to see Frédérick in

l'Auberge des Adrets_. Marius enjoyed it immensely.

At the same time, his shyness came over him more strongly than ever. When they came out of the theater, he would not even look at the garter of a dressmaker stepping over a gutter, and Courfeyrac's remark—"I'd like to add that woman to my collection"—almost shocked him.

Courfeyrac invited him to breakfast at the Café Voltaire the next morning. Marius went and ate even more than he had the night before. He was deeply thoughtful and extremely cheerful. It was as though he seized every chance to burst into laughter. He warmly embraced some man from the provinces who was introduced to him. A group of students gathered around the table, and they talked about the nonsense, paid for by the State, that was spoken from the lectern at the Sorbonne; then the conversation turned to the errors and gaps in Guicherat's dictionaries and grammars. Marius broke into the discussion to exclaim, "Still, it is very pleasant to have the cross!"

"That's odd!" Courfeyrac whispered to Jean Prouvaire.

"No," Prouvaire replied, "it's serious."

It was serious. Marius had in fact reached that first fierce and enchanting moment with which great passions begin.

A single glance had done all this.

When the mine is loaded, when the fire is ready to break out, nothing could be simpler. A glance is a spark.

It was over for him. Marius was in love with a woman. His fate was moving into the unknown.

A woman’s glance is like certain arrangements of wheels: calm on the surface, yet dangerous. You pass near them every day, peacefully and unharmed, never suspecting anything. Then a moment comes when you forget they are there. You go about your life, dreaming, talking, laughing. And suddenly you feel yourself seized; it is all over. The wheels have you in their grip, the glance has trapped you. It catches you somehow, somewhere, by some wandering part of your thoughts, by some unguarded distraction. You are lost. Your whole being is drawn into it. A chain of mysterious forces takes hold of you. You struggle in vain; no human help can save you now. You keep falling from gear to gear, from agony to agony, from torment to torment—you, your mind, your fortune, your future, your soul. And depending on whether you have fallen into the power of a wicked woman or a noble heart, you will come out of this terrifying machine only in one of two ways: either marked by shame or transformed by passion.

CHAPTER VII—ADVENTURES OF THE LETTER U, HANDED OVER TO GUESSWORK

Isolation, separation from everything, pride, independence, a love of nature, the lack of ordinary practical activity, a life turned inward, the hidden struggles of chastity, and a kindly rapture toward all creation had prepared Marius for the force called passion. His devotion to his father had gradually become a religion, and like all religions, it had withdrawn into the depths of his soul. Something was needed in the foreground. Love arrived.

A whole month passed, and during that time Marius went to the Luxembourg every day. When the hour came, nothing could keep him away. “He is on duty,” said Courfeyrac. Marius lived in a state of happiness. And it is certain that the young girl did look at him.

At last he grew bold enough to come up to the bench. Even so, he no longer passed directly in front of it, obeying the shyness and caution that lovers naturally feel. He thought it best not to draw “the father’s attention.” With careful strategy, he moved between the trees and the pedestals of the statues so that the young girl could see him as much as possible, while the old gentleman saw him as little as possible. Sometimes he stood perfectly still for half an hour at a time in the shadow of a Leonidas or a Spartacus, holding a book in his hand. Over the top of it, his softly lifted eyes searched for the beautiful girl, and

she, for her part, turned her lovely profile toward him with a faint smile. While she talked in the calmest, most natural way in the world with the white-haired man, she directed all the dreams of her innocent and passionate gaze toward Marius. It was an ancient, time-honored maneuver, one Eve understood from the first day of the world, and every woman understands from the first day of her life: her mouth answered one man, and her eyes answered another.

M. Leblanc must finally have noticed something, because when Marius arrived, he often got up and began to walk. He gave up their usual place and chose the bench by the Gladiator, near the other end of the path, as if he wanted to see whether Marius would follow them there. Marius did not understand and made that mistake. “The father” also began to come less regularly and no longer brought “his daughter” every day. Sometimes he came alone. When that happened, Marius did not stay. That was another blunder.

Marius paid no attention to these signs. He had moved, by a natural and disastrous progression, from shyness into blindness. His love kept growing. He dreamed about it every night. Then something unexpectedly delightful happened to him, like oil poured on a fire, making the darkness over his eyes even deeper. One evening at dusk, he found a handkerchief on the bench that “M. Leblanc and his daughter” had just left. It was a very plain handkerchief, with no embroidery, but it was white and fine, and to him it seemed to give off an indescribable perfume. He snatched it up in delight. The handkerchief was marked with the letters U. F. Marius knew nothing about this

beautiful girl—not her family name, not her first name, not where she lived. These two letters were the first thing belonging to her that he had ever possessed, adorable initials on which he immediately began building all his fantasies. U was obviously the first name. “Ursule!” he thought. “What a lovely name!” He kissed the handkerchief, breathed in its scent, pressed it to his heart and against his skin during the day, and at night laid it beneath his lips so that he could fall asleep on it.

“I feel that her whole soul is in it!” he cried.

The handkerchief actually belonged to the old gentleman, who had simply dropped it from his pocket.

In the days after finding this treasure, he appeared at the Luxembourg only to kiss the handkerchief and press it to his heart. The beautiful girl understood none of this, and let him know so through barely noticeable signs.

“O modesty!” said Marius.

CHAPTER VIII—EVEN VETERANS CAN BE HAPPY

Since we have used the word modesty, and since we are hiding nothing, we should say that, once, in spite of all his raptures, “his Ursule” caused him very real sorrow. It happened on one of the days when she persuaded M. Leblanc to leave the bench and walk along the path. A lively May breeze was blowing and swaying the tops of the plane trees. The father and daughter, arm in arm, had just passed Marius’ bench. Marius had stood up behind them and was following them with his eyes, as befitted the desperate state of his soul.

Suddenly, a gust of wind, livelier than the others and seemingly sent on some errand of spring, came sweeping down from the nursery trees and rushed into the path. It wrapped the young girl in a delightful shiver, fit for Virgil’s nymphs and Theocritus’s fauns, and lifted her dress—the garment more sacred than that of Isis—almost to her garter. A beautifully shaped leg was revealed. Marius saw it, and he was outraged and furious.

The young girl quickly pulled her dress back down with a divinely flustered movement, but he was still angry. True, he was alone in the path. But someone might have been there. And if someone had been there—how could such a thing be allowed? What had just happened was dreadful! Alas, the poor child had done nothing at all; the only culprit was the wind. But Marius, in whom the Bartholo hidden inside Cherubin trembled to life, was determined to be offended, and he was jealous even of his own shadow. That is how the harsh, irrational jealousy of

the senses rises in the human heart and takes hold of it, even when it has no claim to do so. Besides, even apart from that jealousy, the sight of that lovely leg had given him no pleasure; the white stocking of the first woman he happened to meet would have pleased him more.

When “his Ursule,” after reaching the end of the path, turned back with M. Leblanc and passed in front of the bench where Marius had sat down again, Marius shot her a dark, savage look. The young girl responded with that slight straightening of the body, that backward tilt, and that lift of the eyelids which means: “Well, what is the matter?”

This was “their first quarrel.”

Marius had barely acted out this whole scene with his eyes when someone crossed the path. It was an old veteran, badly stooped, deeply wrinkled, and pale, wearing a uniform in the style of Louis XV. On his chest he bore the small oval red cloth badge with crossed swords, the soldier's cross of Saint-Louis. He was further marked by an empty coat sleeve, a silver chin, and a wooden leg. Marius thought the man looked extremely pleased with himself. It even seemed to him that, as the old cynic hobbled past, he gave him a warmly brotherly and cheerful wink, as if chance had created an understanding between them, and as if they had shared some stroke of good fortune. What did that relic of Mars mean by looking so satisfied? What had happened between that wooden leg and the other one? Marius was seized by a fit of jealousy. "Perhaps he was there!" he said to himself. "Perhaps he saw!" And he felt an urge to kill the veteran.

With time, everything loses its sharp edge. Marius' anger at "Ursule," justified and natural as it was, gradually faded. In the end he forgave her, though it cost him a great effort; he sulked for three days.

Still, in spite of all this, and because of it, his passion only deepened and grew into madness.

CHAPTER IX—ECLIPSE

The reader has just seen how Marius discovered, or believed he discovered, that _she_ was named Ursule.

Love only makes desire grow. Knowing that her name was Ursule was a great deal, and yet it was very little. In three or four weeks, Marius had exhausted that happiness. He wanted more. He wanted to know where she lived.

He had made his first mistake by falling into the trap of the bench by the Gladiator. He had made a second by not staying at the Luxembourg when M. Leblanc came there alone. Now he made a third, and a huge one. He followed “Ursule.”

She lived in the Rue de l’Ouest, in the quietest and least frequented part of the street, in a new three-story house with a modest appearance.

From that moment on, Marius added to the happiness of seeing her at the Luxembourg the happiness of following her home.

His longing kept growing. He knew her first name, at least—a lovely name, a truly feminine one. He knew where she lived. Now he wanted to know who she was.

One evening, after following them home and watching them disappear through the carriage gate, he went in after them and boldly said to the porter:

“Is that the gentleman who lives on the first floor, who has just come in?”

“No,” the porter replied. “He’s the gentleman on the third floor.”

That was one more step forward. The success gave Marius confidence.

“Facing the street?” he asked.

“Of course!” said the porter. “The house only faces the street.”

“And what does that gentleman do?” Marius asked again.

“He’s a man of private means, sir. A very kind man who helps people in need, though he isn’t rich himself.”

“What is his name?” Marius went on.

The porter lifted his head and said:

“Are you a police spy, sir?”

Marius went away embarrassed but delighted. He was making progress.

“Good,” he thought. “I know her name is Ursule, that she is the daughter of a gentleman living on his income, and that she lives there, on the third floor in the Rue de l’Ouest.”

The next day, M. Leblanc and his daughter stayed only a short time in the Luxembourg; they left while it was still fully daylight. As he had gotten into the habit of doing, Marius followed them to the Rue de l’Ouest. When they reached the carriage entrance, M. Leblanc let his daughter go in first, then paused before stepping over the threshold and looked hard at Marius.

The following day they did not come to the Luxembourg. Marius waited for them all day, but in vain.

At nightfall he went to the Rue de l'Ouest and saw a light in the third-floor windows.

He paced below the windows until the light went out.

The next day, no one came to the Luxembourg. Marius waited all day, then stood watch under their windows. He stayed there until ten o'clock that evening.

He barely noticed his meals. Fever feeds the sick man, and love feeds the lover.

He lived like this for a week. M. Leblanc no longer came to the Luxembourg.

Marius gave himself over to sad guesses. He did not dare watch the porte-cochère by day. Instead, he went there at night and stared at the red glow in the windows. Sometimes he saw shadows pass across them, and his heart would start pounding.

On the eighth day, when he came beneath the windows, there was no light at all.

"Hello!" he said. "The lamp isn't lit yet. But it's already dark. Could they have gone out?" He waited until ten o'clock. Then until midnight. Then until one in the morning. No light appeared in the third-floor windows, and no one entered the house.

He went away deeply dejected.

The next day—for he lived only from one day to the next; for him, there was really no such thing as today—the next day, he found no one at the Luxembourg. He had expected that. At dusk, he went to the house.

There was no light in the windows. The shades were drawn. The third floor was completely dark.

Marius knocked at the porte-cochère, went in, and said to the porter:

“The gentleman on the third floor?”

“Moved away,” the porter replied.

Marius staggered and said weakly:

“How long ago?”

“Yesterday.”

“Where is he living now?”

“I don’t know anything about that.”

“So he didn’t leave his new address?”

“No.”

Then the porter looked up and recognized Marius.

“Well, well! So it’s you!” he said. “Then you really are a spy?”

CHAPTER I—MINES AND MINERS

Every human society has what theater people call a "third lower floor." Beneath the surface of social life, the ground is always being tunneled out—sometimes for good, sometimes for harm. These workings lie one above another. There are higher mines and lower mines. In this dark underworld there is an upper level and a lower one, and at times it gives way beneath civilization, even while our indifference and carelessness walk over it. In the last century, the Encyclopedia was a mine almost open to the sky. The shadows—the dark incubators of early Christianity—waited only for the chance to set off an explosion beneath the Caesars and flood the human race with light. For hidden within sacred darkness, light lies dormant. Volcanoes are filled with a shadow that can suddenly blaze out. Every form begins in night. The catacombs, where the first mass was celebrated, were not merely the cellar of Rome; they were the vaults of the world.

Beneath the social order, that marvelously complex structure, there are excavations of every kind. There is a religious mine, a philosophical mine, an economic mine, a revolutionary mine. One person digs with the pickaxe of ideas, another with the pick of numbers, another with wrath. People call out and answer one another from one catacomb to the next. Utopias move underground through these channels. There they spread in every direction. Sometimes they meet there and join in fellowship. Jean-Jacques lends his pick to Diogenes, who lends

him his lantern. Sometimes they fight there instead. Calvin grabs Socinius by the hair. But nothing stops or breaks the strain of all these forces moving toward their goal, or the vast, simultaneous activity that goes and comes, rises, descends, and rises again in the darkness. This immense, unknown swarming slowly transforms what is above and below, within and without. Society barely suspects this digging, which leaves the surface untouched while changing its innermost depths. There are as many underground levels as there are different kinds of work, as there are different extractions. And what comes out of these deep excavations? The future.

The deeper you go, the more mysterious the laborers become. Their work is good, up to the point that social philosophies can recognize it as such. Beyond that, it grows uncertain and mixed. Deeper still, it becomes terrifying. At a certain depth, these excavations can no longer be reached by the spirit of civilization. The limit of what man can breathe has been passed, and the possibility of monsters begins.

This descending scale is a strange one. Each rung of the ladder marks a stage where philosophy can still find footing, and where one meets one of these workers, sometimes godlike, sometimes deformed. Below John Huss comes Luther; below Luther, Descartes; below Descartes, Voltaire; below Voltaire, Condorcet; below Condorcet, Robespierre; below Robespierre, Marat; below Marat, Babeuf. And it continues. Still lower, dimly, at the boundary where the indistinct meets the invisible, one catches sight of other dark figures who perhaps do not yet exist. The men of yesterday are specters; the men of tomorrow

are shapes. The mind's eye can make them out only faintly. The future's work, still in embryo, is one of philosophy's visions.

A world in limbo, still in the state of a fetus—what an unprecedented specter!

Saint-Simon, Owen, and Fourier are there as well, in side galleries.

Certainly, an unseen and divine chain, unknown even to themselves, binds all these underground pioneers together. They almost always believe they are alone, but they are not. Their works differ greatly, and the light of some stands in sharp contrast to the fiery glare of others. The first are paradisal; the last are tragic. Yet whatever the contrast, all these laborers, from the highest to the darkest, from the wisest to the most foolish, share one thing: selflessness. Marat forgets himself as Jesus does. They cast themselves aside. They leave themselves out. They do not think of themselves. They have a vision, and that vision seeks the absolute. The first has all heaven in his eyes; the last, however enigmatic he may be, still carries beneath his eyelids the pale ray of the infinite. Honor the man, whoever he may be, who bears this sign—the star-filled eye.

The shadowed eye is the other sign.

With that, evil begins. Pause and shudder when you are in the presence of someone whose eyes hold no look at all. Society has its dark miners.

There is a point where depth becomes burial, and where light goes out.

Beneath all the mines we have just described, beneath all those galleries, beneath that vast underground network of progress and utopia, far deeper in the earth—lower than Marat, lower than Babeuf, lower, much lower still, and entirely cut off from the upper levels—lies the final mine. It is a terrifying place. It is what we have called the _le troisième dessous_. It is the grave of shadows. It is the cellar of the blind. _Inferi_.

It opens onto the abyss.

CHAPTER II—THE LOWEST DEPTHS

There, selflessness disappears. The demon begins to take shape in the shadows; each person is for himself. The ⌊– in the eyes howls, searches, gropes, and gnaws. The social Ugolino is in this gulf.

The savage spectres wandering through this grave—half beasts, half phantoms—are not concerned with universal progress. They know neither the idea nor the word. They think of nothing except satisfying their own desires. They are barely conscious, and within them there is a kind of terrible erasure. They have two mothers, and both are cruel stepmothers: ignorance and misery. They have one guide: necessity. And for every form of fulfillment, they have only appetite. They are brutally ravenous—in other words, ferocious—not like a tyrant, but like a tiger. From suffering, these spectres pass into crime: a fatal descent, a dizzying creation, the logic of darkness. What crawls in the social third lower level is no longer complaint crushed by the absolute; it is matter itself in revolt. There, man becomes a dragon. Hunger and thirst are the starting point; becoming Satan is the end. It is from that vault that Lacenaire emerges.

In Book Fourth, we have just seen one section of the upper mine, that great political, revolutionary, and philosophical excavation. There, as we have said, everything is pure, noble, dignified, and honest. One may certainly be mistaken there; but even error is worthy of reverence, because it is so deeply

bound up with heroism. Taken as a whole, the work done there has one name: Progress.

The time has come to look into other depths—hideous depths. Beneath society, and we insist on this, there is and will remain, until ignorance is finally dispelled, a vast cavern of evil.

This cavern lies beneath everything and stands against everything. It is hatred, pure and simple. It knows nothing of philosophers; its dagger has never touched a pen. Its darkness has nothing to do with the noble darkness of an inkpot. The fingers of night that clutch beneath this suffocating ceiling have never turned the pages of a book or opened a newspaper. To Cartouche, Babeuf is a dreamer; to Schinderhannes, Marat is an aristocrat. This cavern seeks the destruction of everything.

Everything—including the higher mines above it, which it hates. In its hideous swarming, it does not merely eat away at the existing social order; it also attacks philosophy, human thought, civilization, revolution, and progress. Its true names are theft, prostitution, murder, and assassination. It is darkness, and it longs for chaos. Its roof is made of ignorance.

All the others, those above it, have only one aim: to wipe it out. That is where philosophy and progress are both directed, through every means they have, both by improving real conditions and by contemplating the absolute. Destroy the cavern of Ignorance, and you destroy the den of Crime.

Let us sum up part of what we have just said in a few words: the only social danger is darkness.

Humanity is one. All people are made of the same clay. Here below, at least, there is no difference in destiny. The same shadow lies ahead, the same flesh exists in the present, and the same ashes remain afterward. But when ignorance is mixed into human nature, it darkens it. That incurable darkness takes hold inside a person and turns there into evil.

CHAPTER III—BABET, GUEULEMER, CLAQUESOUS, AND MONTPARNASSE

From 1830 to 1835, a quartet of ruffians—Claquesous, Gueulemer, Babet, and Montparnasse—ruled the third underground level of Paris.

Gueulemer was a Hercules without any clear place in the world. His den was the sewer at the Arche-Marion. He stood six feet tall. His chest seemed carved from marble, his biceps from brass. His breath was like a cavern, his torso like that of a giant, and his head like a bird's. He looked like the Farnese Hercules dressed in duck trousers and a cotton-velvet waistcoat. Built in this almost sculpted way, Gueulemer might have conquered monsters; he had found it quicker to become one instead. He had a low forehead, broad temples, and though he was not yet forty, crow's-feet already marked his face. His hair was short and coarse, his cheeks were bristly, and his beard was like a wild boar's. The reader can picture him easily. His muscles were made for labor, but his stupidity wanted nothing to do with it. He was a great mass of strength gone idle. He killed with cold composure. People believed he was a creole. He had probably been involved in some way with Marshal Brune, having worked as a porter in Avignon in 1815. After that period, he became a ruffian.

Babet's thin, almost translucent look stood in sharp contrast to Gueulemer's bulk. Babet was lean and educated. You could

almost see daylight through his bones, yet his eyes revealed nothing. He claimed to be a chemist. In fact, he had done a bit of everything. He had performed in vaudeville at Saint-Mihiel. He was a man with plans, an excellent talker who gave extra emphasis to his smiles and made his gestures more dramatic. He made his living by selling plaster busts and portraits of "the head of the State" in the open air. On top of that, he pulled teeth. He had also exhibited curiosities at fairs, and once ran a booth with a trumpet and a sign that read: "Babet, Dental Artist, Member of the Academies, performs 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." That _Take advantage of this opportunity_ meant: have as many teeth pulled as possible. He had been married and had children. He did not know what had become of his wife and children. He had lost them the way one loses a handkerchief. Babet read the newspapers, a remarkable exception in the world he belonged to. One day, back when his family was still with him in his wagon-booth, he read in the _Messager_ that a woman had just given birth to a child who was healthy and had a calf's muzzle, and he cried out: "There's a fortune! my wife hasn't the wit to give me a child like that!"

Later, he gave it all up in order to "undertake Paris." That was his own expression.

Who was Claquesous? He was the night itself. He waited until the sky was smeared with black before he showed himself. At

dusk he came out of the hole he returned to before dawn. Where was this hole? No one knew. He spoke to his accomplices only in complete darkness, and always with his back to them. Was his name really Claquesous? Certainly not. If anyone brought in a candle, he put on a mask. He was a ventriloquist. Babet said, “Claquesous is a nocturne for two voices.” Claquesous was shadowy, terrifying, and always wandering. No one knew for certain whether he had a real name, since Claquesous was only a nickname. No one knew for certain whether he had a voice, because his stomach spoke more often than his mouth. No one knew for certain whether he had a face, because he was never seen without his mask. He disappeared as if he had dissolved into thin air; when he appeared, it was as if he had risen out of the ground.

Montparnasse was a grim creature. He was still a boy, not yet twenty, with a handsome face, cherry-red lips, beautiful black hair, and the bright light of spring in his eyes. He possessed every vice and aimed at every crime.

Once he had taken evil in, it only made him hunger for something worse. He was a street urchin turned pickpocket, and a pickpocket turned strangler. He was polished, delicate, graceful, strong, lazy, and savage. The brim of his hat was turned up on the left side to leave room for a lock of hair, in the style of 1829. He lived by violent robbery. His coat was expertly cut, but worn thin. Montparnasse was elegance in rags, devoted to murder. The source of all this young man’s crimes was his desire to dress well. The first grisette who said to him, “You are handsome!” had dropped a stain of darkness into his heart and

turned this Abel into a Cain. Once he realized he was handsome, he wanted to be stylish; and the highest form of style is idleness. For a poor man, idleness means crime. Few prowlers were as feared as Montparnasse. At eighteen, he already had many corpses behind him. More than one passer-by had ended up stretched out before this wretch, face down in a pool of blood. With curled and pomaded hair, a laced waist, the hips of a woman, the chest of a Prussian officer, the admiring whispers of the boulevard girls around him, his cravat tied with studied care, a club in his pocket, and a flower in his buttonhole—such was this dandy of the grave.

CHAPTER IV—WHO MADE UP THE TROUPE

These four thugs acted like a kind of Proteus, twisting like a snake through the police and trying to slip past Vidocq's prying eyes "under divers forms, tree, flame, fountain." They borrowed one another's names and snares, hid inside their own shadows, and used boxes with secret compartments and hideouts for one another. They shed their identities the way a man takes off a false nose at a masked ball. At times they simplified things until they seemed to be only one person; at other times they multiplied themselves so completely that even Coco-Latour took them for a whole crowd.

These four men were not really four separate men. They were like one mysterious robber with four heads, working across Paris on a grand scale. They were that monstrous polyp of evil that lives in the crypt of society.

Because of their far-reaching connections and the network behind their dealings, Babet, Gueulemer, Claquesous, and Montparnasse were put in charge of the Seine department's ambush operations as a whole. Men who dreamed up schemes of that kind, men with nocturnal imaginations, came to them to have those schemes carried out. The planners supplied the outline, and the four scoundrels took charge of preparing the scene. They handled the staging. They were always ready to provide whatever force was needed for any crime that required brute strength and promised enough profit. When a crime needed weapons, they subcontracted their accomplices. They

kept a whole troupe of actors of the shadows ready for every underground tragedy.

They usually gathered at nightfall—the hour when they woke—on the plains beside the Salpêtrière. There they held their conferences. Twelve dark hours lay before them, and they planned their work accordingly.

Patron-Minette—that was the name given, in the underground world, to the association formed by these four men. In that old, vivid popular slang, which is disappearing more every day, _Patron-Minette_ means morning, just as _entre chien et loup_—between dog and wolf—means evening. The name _Patron-Minette_ probably came from the hour when their work ended, since dawn is the moment when phantoms vanish and ruffians go their separate ways. These four men were known by that title. When the President of the Assizes visited Lacenaire in prison and questioned him about a crime that Lacenaire denied, "Who did it?" the President asked. Lacenaire gave this reply, mysterious to the magistrate but perfectly clear to the police: "Perhaps it was Patron-Minette."

Sometimes you can guess what a play is like just by hearing the names of the characters; in the same way, you can almost judge a gang by the list of ruffians who make it up. Here are the names by which the principal members of Patron-Minette were known—for those names have survived in specialized memoirs.

Panchaud, also known as Printanier, also known as Bigrenaille.

Brujon. [There was a whole Brujon dynasty; we cannot resist inserting that word.]

Boulatruelle, the road-mender already introduced.

Laveuve.

Finistère.

Homère-Hogu, a negro.

Mardisoir. (Tuesday evening.)

Dépêche. (Hurry up.)

Fauntleroy, also known as 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.

And so on, and so on.

We will pass over some of them, and not even the worst. These names come with faces attached. They stand not just for

individuals, but for whole types. Each name matches a different variety of those misshapen fungi that grow on the underside of civilization.

These people, who did not often show their faces, were not the sort of men you saw walking openly in the streets. Worn out by their savage nights, they disappeared by day to sleep—sometimes in lime kilns, sometimes in the abandoned quarries of Montmartre or Montrouge, sometimes in the sewers. They went to ground.

What became of these men? They still exist. They have always existed. Horace speaks of them: _Ambubaiarum collegia, pharmacopolæ, mendici, mimæ_; and as long as society remains what it is, they will remain what they are. Under the dark roof of their den, they are constantly born again out of the social slime. They return like spectres, always the same; only they no longer bear the same names, and they no longer wear the same bodies. The individuals are wiped out, but the tribe survives.

They always have the same abilities. From the vagrant to the tramp, the breed keeps itself pure. They can sense a purse in a pocket and sniff out a watch in a fob. Gold and silver have a scent for them. There are innocent bourgeois of whom one might say that they have a “stealable” look. These men follow such bourgeois with patient attention. They feel the same tremor a spider feels when a stranger passes by, or a man fresh from the country.

These men are terrifying when you meet them, or even catch sight of them, around midnight on a deserted boulevard. They do not seem like men at all, but shapes made of living mist. You would think they are usually one with the shadows, not separate from them in any way, as if they had no soul but darkness itself, and had broken away from the night only for a moment, only long enough to live a few minutes of monstrous life.

What is needed to make these spectres disappear? Light. Floods of light. Not a single bat can withstand the dawn. Bring light to society from below.

CHAPTER I—MARIUS, WHILE LOOKING FOR A GIRL IN A BONNET, MEETS A MAN IN A CAP

Summer passed, then autumn, and winter arrived. Neither M. Leblanc nor the young girl ever returned to the Luxembourg garden. From that point on, Marius had only one thought: to see that sweet, lovely face again. He searched constantly. He searched everywhere. He found nothing. He was no longer Marius the passionate dreamer, the steady, determined, fiery young man, the bold challenger of fate, the mind always building one future after another, the spirit crowded with plans, projects, pride, ideas, and desires. He was like a lost dog. He sank into a deep melancholy. Everything was over. Work repelled him. Walking exhausted him. The vast natural world, once so full of shapes, light, voices, guidance, vistas, horizons, and lessons, now seemed empty before him. It felt as though everything had vanished.

He thought constantly, because he could not help it, but his thoughts no longer gave him any pleasure. Whatever they suggested to him in a whisper, he answered from his darkness: “What is the use?”

He buried himself under a hundred reproaches. “Why did I follow her? I was so happy just seeing her! She looked at me; wasn’t that enough? She seemed to love me. Wasn’t that everything? What more did I want? There was nothing beyond

that. I have been absurd. It is my own fault," and so on. Courfeyrac, to whom he confessed nothing—that was his nature—but who guessed a little about everything—that was his nature too—had first congratulated him on being in love, though it surprised him. Then, when he saw Marius sink into this melancholy, he finally said to him: "I see you have simply been an idiot. Come on, let's go to the Chaumière."

Once, trusting in a beautiful September sun, Marius let Courfeyrac, Bossuet, and Grantaire take him to the ball at Sceaux, hoping—what a fantasy!—that he might perhaps find her there. Of course, he did not see the one he was looking for. "Still, this is the place where all lost women turn up," Grantaire muttered aside. Marius left his friends at the ball and walked home alone through the night, tired and feverish, his eyes sad and troubled. He was dazed by the noise and dust of the cheerful wagons packed with singing people returning from the festival, passing close beside him, while in his discouragement he breathed in the sharp scent of the walnut trees along the road, trying to clear his head.

He withdrew more and more into solitude, completely overwhelmed and wholly consumed by his inner torment. In his pain, he paced back and forth like a wolf caught in a trap, searching everywhere for the absent one, stunned by love.

On another occasion, he had an encounter that affected him in a strange way. In the narrow streets near the Boulevard des Invalides, he met a man dressed like a laborer, wearing a cap with a long visor that let a few locks of very white hair show beneath it. Marius was struck by the beauty of that white hair

and looked closely at the man, who was walking slowly, as if lost in painful thought. Oddly enough, Marius thought he recognized M. Leblanc. The hair was the same, and so was the profile, as far as the cap allowed him to see it. The bearing was the same as well, though more downcast. But why was he dressed in a workingman's clothes? What did it mean? Why this disguise? Marius was deeply astonished. When he came to himself, his first impulse was to follow the man. Perhaps at last he had found the clue he had been seeking. At any rate, he had to see the man up close and solve the mystery. But the thought came too late. The man was already gone. He had turned into some small side street, and Marius could not find him. The encounter stayed in his mind for three days, and then it faded. "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 anyone there.

At that time, to tell the truth, there were no other people living in the house except him and those Jondrettes whose rent he had once paid, though he had never spoken to the father, the mother, or the daughters. The other lodgers had moved away, died, or been put out for not paying.

One day that winter, the sun came out a little in the afternoon. But it was the 2nd of February, old Candlemas day, whose deceptive sunshine, said to foretell six more weeks of cold, inspired Mathieu Laensberg to write these two lines, which have justly remained famous:

Qu'il luise ou qu'il luiserne, L'ours rentre dans en sa caverne.26

Marius had just come out of his room. Night was falling. It was time for dinner, since he had been forced to start eating regular meals again—alas, the weaknesses of lofty passions!

He had just stepped over his threshold, where Ma'am Bougon was sweeping, when she delivered this memorable monologue:

"What is cheap these days? Everything costs too much. Nothing in the world is cheap except trouble; you can have that for free—all the trouble in the world!"

Marius slowly made his way up the boulevard toward the barrier so he could reach the Rue Saint-Jacques. He walked with his head bowed.

Suddenly, in the dusk, he felt someone bump his elbow. He turned and saw two young girls in rags, one tall and thin, the other a little shorter. They rushed past him, breathless, terrified, and clearly running away. They had been coming straight toward him, had not seen him, and had knocked into him as they passed. In the fading light, Marius could make out their pale faces, their frantic expressions, their tangled hair, their dreadful bonnets, their torn petticoats, and their bare feet. They were talking as they ran. The taller one said in a very low voice:

“The cops came. They almost grabbed me at the half-circle.” The other answered, “I saw them. I ran, ran, ran!”

Even through that ugly slang, Marius understood that gendarmes, or the police, had nearly caught the two girls and that they had managed to escape.

They darted among the boulevard trees behind him and, for a few moments, made a faint white blur in the darkness before disappearing.

Marius stopped for a moment.

He was about to go on when he noticed a small grayish bundle lying on the ground at his feet. He bent down and picked it up. It was a kind of envelope that seemed to contain papers.

“Good,” he said to himself. “Those poor girls dropped it.”

He went back the way he had come and called out, but he could not find them. Thinking they must already be far away, he put the packet in his pocket and went off to dinner.

On the way, in an alley off the Rue Mouffetard, he saw a child's coffin covered with a black cloth, resting on three chairs and lit by a candle. The two girls from the twilight came back to his mind.

"Poor mothers!" he thought. "There is one thing sadder than seeing one's children die: seeing them live a wicked life."

Then those passing shadows that had briefly deepened his sadness faded from his mind, and he returned once more to his usual thoughts. Again he thought about those six months of love and happiness in the open air and broad daylight, beneath the beautiful trees of the Luxembourg.

"How dark my life has become!" he said to himself. "Young girls are always appearing before me. Once they were angels; now they are ghouls."

CHAPTER III—QUADRIFRONS

That evening, as he was undressing to go to bed, his hand touched the packet in his coat pocket that he had picked up on the boulevard. He had forgotten all about it. He thought he should open it. If it really belonged to the young girls, it might contain their address; and in any case, it might provide the information needed to return it to whoever had lost it.

He opened the envelope.

It was unsealed and contained four letters, also unsealed.

All four had addresses on them.

All four gave off a horrible smell 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 would probably find the information he was looking for in it, and besides, since the letter was open, he could likely read it without doing anything improper.

It read as follows:—

Madame la Marquise: Clemency and piety are the virtues that bind society most closely together. In your Christian spirit, look with compassion on this unfortunate Spaniard, a victim of loyalty and devotion to the sacred cause of legitimacy. He has shed his blood, sacrificed his fortune—everything—to defend

that cause, and today he finds himself in the deepest misery. He does not doubt that your honorable person will grant him the help needed to preserve a life that is extremely painful for a military man of education and honor, covered with wounds. He already relies on the humanity that inspires you and on the concern Madame la Marquise feels for so unfortunate a nation. His prayer will not be in vain, and his gratitude will keep your charming memory alive.

With respectful sentiments, I have the honor to remain

Madame, DON ALVARÈS, Spanish Captain of Cavalry, a royalist who has taken refuge in France and is traveling on behalf of his country, but lacks the means to continue his journey.

No address was attached to the signature. Marius hoped to find one in the second letter, whose superscription read: _À Madame, Madame la Comtesse de Montvernet, Rue Cassette, No. 9_. This is what Marius read there:—

MADAME LA COMTESSE: I am an unfortunate mother of a family of six children, the youngest of whom is only eight months old. I have been ill since my last confinement, abandoned by my husband five months ago, and left without any resources in the world, in the most dreadful poverty.

Hoping in Madame la Comtesse, I have the honor to remain, Madame, with profound respect, MISTRESS BALIZARD.

Marius turned to the third letter, which was a petition like the others; he read:—

Monsieur PABOURGEOT, elector, wholesale stocking merchant, Rue Saint-Denis, at the corner of Rue aux Fers.

I am taking the liberty of writing to ask for the precious favor of your sympathy and to interest you in a man of letters who has just submitted a drama to the Théâtre-Français. The subject is historical, and the action is set in Auvergne during the time of the Empire. I believe the style is natural and concise, and may have some merit. There are songs in verse at four points. Comedy, seriousness, and surprise are woven together through a range of characters, with a light touch of romanticism spread across the whole intrigue, which unfolds mysteriously and ends, after striking reversals, amid many brilliant and beautiful scenes.

My main aim is to satisfy the desire that increasingly stirs the man of our century—that is to say, fashion, that capricious and bizarre weathervane that shifts with almost every new wind.

In spite of these qualities, I have reason to fear that jealousy and the selfishness of privileged authors may keep me out of the theatre, for I know well the humiliations with which newcomers are treated.

Monsieur Pabourgeot, your well-earned reputation as an enlightened protector of men of letters encourages me to send my daughter to you, and she will explain our desperate situation: in this winter season, we lack bread and fire. When I ask you to accept the dedication of my drama, and of all those I may write in the future, I mean to show how greatly I aspire to the honor of sheltering myself under your protection and

adorning my writings with your name. If you would kindly honor me with even the smallest gift, I shall immediately set to work on a piece of verse to offer you as a tribute of gratitude. I will do my utmost to make this piece as perfect as possible, and I will send it to you before it is placed at the beginning of the drama and delivered on the stage.

To Monsieur and Madame Pabourgeot, my most respectful compliments. GENFLOT, man of letters.

P.S. Even if it is only forty sous.

Please excuse me for sending my daughter instead of coming myself, but, alas, sad reasons connected with my clothing do not allow me to go out.

At last, Marius opened the fourth letter. It was addressed: _To the kind gentleman of the church of Saint-Jacques-du-haut-Pas_. It read:

KIND SIR: If you will come with my daughter, you will see a miserable calamity, and I will show you my certificates.

The sight of these papers will stir your generous heart to obvious compassion, for true philosophers are always deeply moved.

You must admit, compassionate sir, that one has to be in the cruelest need for this, and that it is very painful, just to get a little help, to have to get the authorities to certify one's condition, as if a person were not free to suffer and die of starvation while waiting for relief. Fate is terribly harsh to some, and far too lavish or too protective toward others.

I await your visit, or your gift, if you are willing to make one, and I beg you to accept the respectful sentiments with which I have the honor to remain,

truly magnanimous sir, your very humble and obedient servant, P. FABANTOU, dramatic artist.

After reading these four letters, Marius was not much wiser than before.

To begin with, not one of the writers gave an address.

They seemed to come from four different people—Don Alvarès, Mistress Balizard, the poet Genflot, and the dramatic artist Fabantou. But the strange thing was that all four letters were written in the same hand.

What conclusion could he draw from that, except that they all came from the same person?

And that guess seemed even more likely because all four were written on the same coarse yellow paper, all carried the same smell of tobacco, and although the writer had tried to vary the style, the same spelling mistakes appeared throughout with perfect calm. The man of letters, Genflot, was no more free of them than the Spanish captain.

It was pointless to try to solve this little mystery. If he had not found it by chance, it might almost have seemed like a deliberate trick. Marius was too unhappy to enjoy even an accidental joke, or to go along with this game the street pavement seemed to be playing on him. It felt to him as though he were the blindfolded player in blind man’s buff, while those

four letters were teasing him.

Still, nothing suggested that these letters belonged to the two young girls Marius had met on the boulevard. In any case, they were plainly papers of no value. Marius put them back in their envelope, tossed the whole thing into a corner, and went to bed. At about seven o'clock the next morning, he had just gotten up and eaten breakfast, and was trying to settle to his work, when he heard a soft knock at his door.

Since he owned nothing, he never locked his door, except now and then—very rarely—when he was busy with some urgent work. Even when he went out, he left the key in the lock. "You'll be robbed," Ma'am Bougon used to say. "Of what?" Marius would answer. In fact, one day he really had been robbed—of an old pair of boots—to Ma'am Bougon's great triumph.

There was a second knock, as soft as the first.

"Come in," said Marius.

The door opened.

"What do you want, Ma'am Bougon?" Marius asked, without lifting his eyes from the books and papers on his table.

A voice that was not Ma'am Bougon's answered:

"Excuse me, sir—"

It was a flat, broken, hoarse, choked voice—the voice of an old man, made rough by brandy and drink.

Marius turned quickly and saw a young girl.

CHAPTER IV—A ROSE IN MISERY

[Illustration: Rose in Misery]

A very young girl stood in the half-open doorway. The dormer window in the garret, directly opposite the door, cast a pale light over her. She was frail, gaunt, and thin. She wore only a chemise and a petticoat over her cold, trembling body. Her belt was just a piece of string, and the ribbon in her hair was string as well. Her sharp shoulders stuck out above her chemise. She had a pale, sickly blond complexion, dirt-colored collarbones, red hands, a half-open, degraded mouth with teeth missing, and dull, brazen, vulgar eyes. She had the body of a girl who had been robbed of her youth and the face of a corrupted old woman. Fifteen and fifty seemed mixed together in her. She was one of those creatures who are at once weak and horrifying, and who make people shudder even when they do not move them to pity.

Marius had risen and was staring at her in a kind of daze, as if she were one of those shadowy figures that pass through dreams.

The most heartbreaking thing was that this girl had not been born to be ugly. In early childhood she must even have been pretty. The grace of her age was still struggling against the hideous, premature ruin brought on by vice and poverty. What remained of her beauty was fading from that sixteen-year-old face like pale sunlight dying beneath ugly clouds at dawn on a

winter day.

Marius did not find the face entirely unfamiliar. He thought he had seen it somewhere before.

“What do you want, Mademoiselle?” he asked.

The young girl answered in a voice like that of a drunken convict:

“Here is a letter for you, Monsieur Marius.”

She called Marius by name, so he could not doubt that he was the person she meant to find. But who was this girl? How did she know his name?

Without waiting for permission, she came in. She entered boldly, looking around the whole room, and at the unmade bed, with a kind of confidence that was painful to see. Her feet were bare. Large holes in her petticoat revealed glimpses of her long legs and thin knees. She was shivering.

She held out a letter to Marius.

As Marius opened the letter, he noticed that the large wax seal was still damp. It could not have come from far away. He read:

MY KIND NEIGHBOR, YOUNG MAN: I have learned of your kindness to me, that you paid my rent six months ago. I bless you, young man. My eldest daughter will tell you that for two days we have not had a single morsel of bread, four people in all, and my wife is ill. If I am not mistaken in my judgment, I think I may hope that your generous heart will be moved by this account, and that you will feel inclined to look favorably on me

by granting me a small kindness.

I remain, with the high regard owed to the benefactors of humanity,—

Jondrette.

P.S. My eldest daughter will wait for your instructions, dear Monsieur Marius.

This letter arrived in the middle of the mysterious affair that had filled Marius' thoughts since the night before. It was like a candle in a cellar. Suddenly, everything was lit up.

This letter had come from the same source as the other four. It had the same handwriting, the same style, the same spelling, the same paper, and the same smell of tobacco.

There were five letters, five stories, five signatures, and only one person behind them all. The Spanish Captain Don Alvarès, the unfortunate Mistress Balizard, the dramatic poet Genflot, and the old actor Fabantou were all Jondrette—or rather, they were, if Jondrette himself was really named Jondrette.

Marius had lived in the house for quite a long time, and, as we have said, he had had very few chances to see, or even catch sight of, his wretched neighbors. His mind was elsewhere, and where the mind is, the eyes follow. More than once he had passed the Jondrettes in the corridor or on the stairs, but to him they were only shapes. He had paid them so little attention that, the evening before, he had bumped into the Jondrette girls on the boulevard without recognizing them, though it was clearly they. Even now, the girl who had just entered his room only stirred in him, through his disgust and pity, a vague sense that he had seen her somewhere before.

Pitiful creatures, with no real name, no sex, no age—people for whom neither good nor evil seems possible anymore, and who, barely out of childhood, already have nothing in this world: no freedom, no virtue, no responsibility. Souls that bloomed yesterday and are withered today, like flowers dropped in the street, smeared with every kind of filth as they wait for a wheel to crush them. And yet, while Marius watched her with painful astonishment, the young girl wandered back and forth through the garret with the boldness of a ghost. She kicked things around without caring about her nakedness. Now and then her torn, untied chemise slipped almost to her waist. She moved the chairs, disturbed the toilet articles on the commode, handled Marius's clothes, and rummaged through the corners to see what was there.

"Oh!" she said. "You have a mirror!"

And she hummed bits of vaudeville songs as if she were alone—playful little tunes that her hoarse, guttural voice made sound mournful.

Beneath all that boldness, you could still sense an indescribable strain, exhaustion, and humiliation. Shamelessness is a kind of degradation.

Nothing could have been sadder than watching her play about the room, fluttering, so to speak, like a bird frightened by daylight or one with a broken wing. You felt that, with a different upbringing and a different fate, this cheerful, overly uninhibited young girl might have become gentle and charming. Not even among animals does a creature born to be a dove turn into an

osprey. That happens only among human beings.

Marius thought it over and let her do as she pleased.

She went over to the table.

“Ah!” she said. “Books!”

A spark flashed in her dull eye. She went on, and her tone showed how pleased she was to boast of something no one is ever indifferent to:

“I can read, I can!”

She eagerly snatched up a book lying open on the table and read, with fair 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 stopped.

“Ah! Waterloo! I know about that. It was a battle a long time ago. My father was there. He served in the army. We’re true Bonapartists in our house, we are! Waterloo was against the English.”

She set the book down, snatched up a pen, and cried:

“And I can write, too!”

She dipped the pen in the ink and turned to Marius:

“Do you want to see? Look, I’m going to write a word to show you.”

Before he had time to answer, she wrote on a sheet of white paper lying in the middle of the table: “The bobbies are here.”

Then she threw down the pen:

“There aren’t any spelling mistakes. You can look. My sister and I were educated. We haven’t always been as we are now. We were not made—”

Here she stopped, fixed her dull eyes on Marius, and burst out laughing, with a tone that held every kind of misery smothered under every kind of cynicism:

“Bah!”

And she began to hum these words to a cheerful tune:

“J’ai faim, mon père.” Pas de fricot. J’ai froid, ma mère. Pas de tricot. Grelotte, Lolotte! Sanglote, Jacquot!”

I’m hungry, father. I have no food. I’m cold, mother. I have no clothes. Lolotte, shiver! Jacquot, sob!”

She had barely finished the couplet when she cried:

“Do you ever go to the theater, Monsieur Marius? I do. I have a little brother who’s friendly with the actors, and sometimes he gives me tickets. But I don’t like the gallery benches. You’re all cramped up and uncomfortable there. Sometimes there are coarse people there, and people who smell bad.”

Then she looked Marius over, put on a strange expression, and said:

“Do you know, Monsieur Marius, that you’re a very handsome young man?”

At that same moment, the same thought came to both of them. It made her smile and him blush. She stepped up to him and put her hand on his shoulder. “You don’t pay any attention to me, but I know who you are, Mr. Marius. I run into you here on the stairs, and I often see you going to a man called Father Mabeuf, who lives toward Austerlitz, sometimes when I’ve been walking in that neighborhood. Your hair looks very nice all tousled like that.”

She tried to soften her voice, but only made it much deeper. Some of her words seemed to get lost on the way from her throat to her lips, like a piano with missing notes.

Marius drew back gently.

“Mademoiselle,” he said with calm seriousness, “I have a packet here that I believe belongs to you. Allow me to return it.”

And he held out the envelope with the four letters inside.

She clapped her hands and cried out:

“We’ve been looking for that everywhere!”

Then she snatched up the packet eagerly and opened the envelope, saying as she did:

“Good God! My sister and I have searched everywhere for it! And you were the one who found it! On the boulevard, wasn’t it? It must have been on the boulevard. You see, we dropped it while we were running. It was that little fool of a sister of mine

who was so stupid. When we got home, we couldn't find it anywhere. Since we didn't want to be beaten—and that would have been useless, completely useless, absolutely useless—we said we had delivered the letters to the right people, and that they had told us, 'Nix.' So here they are, those poor letters! And how did you know they belonged to me? Ah, yes, the handwriting. So it was you we bumped into as we ran past 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.'"

Meanwhile, she had unfolded the petition addressed to "the benevolent gentleman of the church of Saint-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas."

"Here," she said, "this is for that old man who goes to mass. As it happens, this is the time he comes by. I'll go and take it to him. Maybe he'll give us something for breakfast."

Then she began to laugh again and added:

"Do you know what it will mean if we get breakfast today? It will mean we'll be eating the breakfast from the day before yesterday, yesterday's breakfast, and today's dinner all at once, this very morning. Come! Parbleu! if that doesn't satisfy you, dogs, then burst!"

This reminded Marius of the miserable girl's errand to him. He felt in his waistcoat pocket and found nothing.

The young girl kept talking, apparently unaware that Marius was there.

“I often go out in the evening. Sometimes I don’t come back at all. Last winter, before we came here, we lived under the arches of the bridges. We crowded together so we wouldn’t freeze. My little sister cried. How sad the water is! When I thought about drowning myself, I said to myself, ‘No, it’s too cold.’ I go out alone whenever I want, and sometimes I sleep in the ditches. Do you know, at night, when I walk along the boulevard, the trees look like forks to me. I see houses, all black and as big as Notre Dame. I imagine the white walls are the river, and I say to myself, ‘Why, there’s water there!’ The stars are like lamps in an illumination; you’d think they had smoked and the wind had blown them out. I get confused, as if horses were breathing in my ears. Even though it’s night, I hear hand-organs and spinning-machines and I don’t know what else. I think people are throwing stones at me. I run without knowing where I’m going. Everything spins and spins. You feel very strange when you haven’t eaten.”

Then she looked at him with a confused, bewildered expression.

After searching and turning out all his pockets, Marius finally managed to gather five francs and sixteen sous. For the moment, it was everything he had in the world. “At least,” he thought, “there is my dinner for today, and tomorrow we shall see.” He kept the sixteen sous and gave the five francs to the young girl.

She snatched up the coin.

“Good!” she said. “The sun is shining!”

And as though the sun had the power to melt the avalanche of slang in her mind, she went on:

“Five francs! A gold piece! a monarch! in this dump! Isn’t this splendid! You’re a fine thief! I’m your humble servant! Bravo for the good fellows! Two days of wine! and meat! and stew! we’ll have a royal feast! and eat till we’re full!”

She pulled her chemise up over her shoulders, gave Marius a slight bow, made a familiar gesture with her hand, and headed for the door, saying:

“Good morning, sir. It’s all right. I’ll go find my old man.”

As she went by, she noticed a dry crust of bread on the commode, growing moldy there in the dust. She threw herself at it and bit into it, muttering:

“This is good! It’s hard! It breaks my teeth!”

Then she left.

CHAPTER V—A PROVIDENTIAL PEEP-HOLE

Marius had lived in poverty for five years—in want, even in hardship—but now he realized that he had never truly known misery. He had only just caught sight of real misery. Its ghost had just passed before his eyes. In truth, anyone who has seen only the misery of a man has seen nothing; he must see the misery of a woman. And anyone who has seen only the misery of a woman has still seen nothing; he must see the misery of a child.

When a man reaches his last extremity, he reaches the end of his resources as well. Woe to the defenseless beings around him. Work, wages, bread, fire, courage, goodwill—all fail him at once. Daylight seems to go out outside, and the moral light within goes out too. In that darkness, a man comes upon the weakness of the woman and the child, and brutally forces them toward disgrace.

Then every horror becomes possible. Despair is hemmed in by fragile barriers, and every one of them opens onto either vice or crime.

Health, youth, honor—all the delicate reserves of the young body, the heart, virginity, modesty, that outer skin of the soul—are handled in sinister ways by the groping search for resources, a search that meets shame and then learns to live with it. Fathers, mothers, children, brothers, sisters, men, women, daughters—all cling together and become fused,

almost like a mineral deposit, in that dark confusion of sexes, relationships, ages, infamies, and innocence. They huddle there, back to back, in a kind of hut built by fate. They trade miserable glances. Oh, the poor wretches! How pale they are! How cold they are! It seems as though they live on a planet much farther from the sun than ours.

To Marius, this young girl seemed like a messenger from a world of sorrowful shadows. She showed him a dreadful side of the night.

Marius almost blamed himself for the dreamy thoughts and passionate feelings that had kept him from paying any real attention to his neighbors until then. Paying their rent had been a mechanical act, something anyone might have done. But he, Marius, ought to have done more. What! Only a wall separated him from those forsaken beings, living blindly in the dark beyond the bounds of the rest of the world. He was shoulder to shoulder with them. In a sense, he was the last link to humanity they still touched. He heard them living—or rather, gasping beside him in a kind of death struggle—and he paid no attention. Every day, every moment, he heard them moving on the other side of the wall. He heard them coming and going, speaking, living, and he did not even stop to listen. Yet there were groans in their words, and he never heard them, because his mind was elsewhere—lost in dreams, impossible brightness, airy loves, foolish fantasies. And all the while, human beings, his brothers in Jesus Christ, his brothers among the people, were suffering beside him in vain. He had even become part of their misfortune, and made it worse. If they had had another

neighbor, someone less lost in fantasies and more attentive, any ordinary kind-hearted man, then surely their poverty would have been noticed. Their cries for help would have been understood, and someone would have stepped in to save them. No doubt they seemed deeply corrupt, depraved, base, even hateful. But few people fall without being degraded. Besides, there is a point where the unfortunate and the infamous meet and are merged into a single fatal word: the miserable. Whose fault is that? And should charity not be all the deeper when the fall has been greater?

As he gave himself this moral lecture—for Marius, like all truly honest people, sometimes acted as his own teacher and blamed himself more harshly than he deserved—he kept staring at the wall that separated him from the Jondrettes. It was as if he thought his pitying gaze could pass through it and bring some warmth to those miserable people. The wall was only a thin layer of plaster stretched over laths and beams, and, as the reader has already learned, voices and even words could be heard through it quite clearly. Only someone as dreamy as Marius could have failed to notice that sooner. There was no wallpaper on either side, neither in the Jondrettes' room nor in Marius's; the rough structure stood bare and exposed. Almost without realizing it, Marius studied the partition. In moments of reverie, the mind can inspect, observe, and examine as closely as deliberate thought. Suddenly he jumped up. Near the top, close to the ceiling, he had just noticed a triangular hole formed by the gap between three laths. The plaster that should have filled it was gone, and anyone standing on the chest of drawers could look through the opening into the Jondrettes' attic.

Compassion has its curiosity, and rightly so. The hole made a kind of peephole. It is permissible to watch misfortune like a spy when the purpose is to help it.

“Let me get some idea of what these people are like,” thought Marius, “and what condition they are in.”

He climbed onto the chest of drawers, put his eye to the crack, and looked.

CHAPTER VI—THE WILD MAN IN HIS LAIR

Cities, like forests, have their caves, where the most wicked and dangerous creatures they contain hide themselves. But in cities, what hides there is fierce, filthy, and small—in other words, ugly. In forests, what hides there is fierce, wild, and magnificent—in other words, beautiful. If one compares the two kinds of lairs, the beast's is better than the man's. Caves are better than hovels.

What Marius now saw was a hovel.

Marius was poor, and his room showed it, but there was dignity in his poverty, and his garret was clean and orderly. The place before him now was something else entirely: wretched, filthy, foul-smelling, unhealthy, shabby, and squalid. Its only furniture was a straw chair, a rickety table, a few old pieces of crockery, and, in two corners, two miserable pallets that were hard to describe. The only light came from a four-paned dormer window hung with spider webs. Through that opening, just enough light entered to make a man's face look ghostly. The walls looked diseased, covered with cracks and scars like a face ruined by some terrible illness. A clammy dampness seeped from them. Crude obscene drawings, scrawled in charcoal, could be seen on the walls.

The room Marius lived in had a broken brick floor. This one had neither tiles nor boards; its occupants walked directly on the old plaster of the hovel, blackened by the long pressure of

countless feet. Across that uneven floor, where the dirt seemed baked in and where the broom alone had never touched, old shoes, socks, and disgusting rags lay scattered in random clusters. Still, the room had a fireplace, and for that reason it rented for forty francs a year. That fireplace held all kinds of things: a brazier, a pot, broken boards, rags hanging from nails, a birdcage, ashes, and even a small fire. Two pieces of wood were smoldering there sadly.

One thing made this garret even more dreadful: it was large. It was full of jutting corners, dark recesses, sloping rooflines, bays, and overhangs. All of this created horrible, bottomless-looking hiding places where it seemed as if spiders as big as a fist, wood lice as large as a foot, and perhaps even—who knows?—some monstrous human beings must be lurking.

One pallet was near the door, the other by the window. One end of each touched the fireplace and faced Marius. In a corner near the opening Marius was peering through, a colored print in a black frame hung from a nail in the wall. At the bottom, in large letters, was the caption: THE DREAM. It showed a sleeping woman with a child asleep on her lap, an eagle in a cloud with a crown in its beak, and the woman pushing the crown away from the child's head without waking the child. In the background was Napoleon in a radiant glow, leaning against a very blue column with a yellow capital bearing this inscription:

Maringo Austerlits Iena Wagramme Elot

Beneath this frame, a kind of wooden panel, as wide as it was long, stood on the floor, leaning at an angle against the wall. It looked like a picture turned face to the wall, perhaps a frame with some crude painting on the other side, or a pier glass taken down and left there, forgotten while it waited to be hung up again.

Near the table, on which Marius could make out a pen, ink, and paper, sat a man of about sixty, small, thin, pale, and worn-looking, with a sly, cruel, uneasy expression: a thoroughly repulsive villain.

If Lavater had studied that face, he would have seen a vulture mixed with a lawyer's clerk in it, the bird of prey and the petty legal trickster making each other even uglier and completing each other: the trickster making the bird of prey seem base, and the bird of prey making the trickster seem terrifying.

The man had a long gray beard. He wore a woman's chemise, which left his hairy chest and bare arms, bristling with gray hair, exposed. Under the chemise, muddy trousers and boots with his toes sticking out could be seen.

He had a pipe in his mouth and was smoking. There was no bread in the hovel, but there was still tobacco.

He was probably writing more letters like the ones Marius had read.

At the corner of the table lay an old, battered, reddish book, and its size—the old-fashioned duodecimo common in reading rooms—showed that it was a novel. Across the cover sprawled this title in large capital letters:

GOD; THE KING; HONOR AND THE LADIES; by DUCRAY DUMINIL, 1814.

As the man wrote, he spoke out loud, and Marius heard what he was saying:

“So there’s no equality, not even in death! Just look at Père-Lachaise. The great and the rich are up above, along the paved acacia walk. You can get there by carriage. But the little people, the poor, the miserable—what happens to them? They’re put down below, where the mud comes up to your knees, in the damp ground. They’re put there so they’ll rot faster. You can’t even go visit them without sinking into the earth.”

He stopped, struck the table with his fist, and added through clenched teeth:

“Oh! I could devour the whole world!”

A large woman, who might have been forty or a hundred, was crouching by the fireplace on her bare heels.

She too was dressed only in a chemise and a knitted petticoat patched with scraps of old cloth. A coarse linen apron covered half the petticoat. Although she was hunched over and bent in on herself, it was clear that she was very tall. Next to her husband, she looked like a kind of giant. Her hair was ugly, a

reddish blond turning gray, and from time to time she pushed it back with her huge, gleaming hands and their flat nails.

Beside her on the floor lay an open book, the same size as the other one, and probably another volume of the same novel.

On one of the pallets, Marius caught sight of a tall, pale young girl sitting half naked, her feet hanging down, seeming neither to hear nor see nor live.

No doubt she was the younger sister of the girl who had come to his room.

She seemed to be eleven or twelve. Looking more closely, it was clear that she was actually fourteen. She was the child who had said on the boulevard the evening before, “I bolted, bolted, bolted!”

She belonged to that stunted kind that stays undeveloped for a long time and then suddenly shoots up. Poverty produces these sad human plants. Such creatures have neither childhood nor youth. At fifteen they look twelve; at sixteen they look twenty. One day a little girl, the next a woman. You might say they rush through life, as if to be done with it as quickly as possible.

At that moment, the creature looked like a child.

There was no sign of work anywhere in that room: no craft, no spinning wheel, not a single tool. In one corner lay a few pieces of suspicious-looking ironware. It was the heavy numbness that comes after despair and just before the final agony of death.

Marius stared for a while at that dark interior, more frightening than the inside of a tomb, because you could still feel a human soul fluttering there, and life still beating there. The garret, the cellar, the muddy ditch where certain poor wretches crawl at the very bottom of society are not quite the grave, but only its waiting room. Yet just as the rich display their greatest splendor at the entrance to their palaces, death, which stands so close beside these people, seems to place its worst miseries in that vestibule.

The man said nothing, the woman said nothing, and the young girl hardly seemed to breathe. The scratching of the pen on the paper could be heard clearly.

The man muttered, without stopping his writing. “Canaille! canaille! everybody is canaille!”

This variation on Solomon’s exclamation drew a sigh from the woman.

“Calm yourself, my little friend,” she said. “Don’t strain yourself, my dear. You are too good to write to all those people, husband.”

In misery, as in cold, bodies press together, but hearts drift apart. This woman must once have loved this man, to all appearances, if one judged by how much love she had in her. But under the daily, mutual reproaches born of the terrible distress weighing on them all, that love had probably died out. Nothing remained in her now but the ashes of affection for her husband. Even so, the tender names had survived, as often happens. She still called him “my dear,” “my little friend,” “my

good man," and so on with her lips, while her heart stayed silent.

The man went back to his writing.

CHAPTER VII—STRATEGY AND TACTICS

Marius, with a heavy weight on his chest, was just about to climb down from the makeshift lookout he had set up when a sound caught his attention and made him stay where he was.

The attic door suddenly flew open. The older girl appeared in the doorway. She was wearing big, rough men's shoes, spattered with mud that had splashed all the way up to her red ankles, and she was wrapped in an old cloak hanging in rags. Marius had not seen her wearing it an hour earlier, but she had probably left it at his door so she would look more pitiful, then picked it up again on her way out. She came in, pushed the door shut behind her, stopped to catch her breath because she was completely out of breath, and then cried out with triumph and delight:

"He's coming!"

The father looked at her, the woman turned her head, and the little sister did not move.

"Who?" her father demanded.

"The gentleman!"

"The philanthropist?"

"Yes."

"From the church of Saint-Jacques?"

"Yes."

"That old man?"

"Yes."

"And he's coming?"

"He's right behind me."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure."

"So he really is coming?"

"He's coming in a fiacre."

"In a fiacre. He's Rothschild."

The father stood up.

"How do you know for sure? If he's coming in a fiacre, how did you get here before him? You gave him our address, at least? Did you tell him it was the last door at the end of the corridor, on the right? If only he doesn't make a mistake! So you found him at the church? Did he read my letter? What did he say to you?"

“Tut, tut, tut,” said the girl. “How you do go on, my good man! Look: I went into the church, he was in his usual place, I curtsied to him, and I gave him the letter. He read it and said to me, ‘Where do you live, my child?’ I said, ‘Monsieur, I can show you.’ He said, ‘No, just give me your address. My daughter has some shopping to do. I’ll take a carriage and get to your house at the same time as you.’ So I gave him the address. When I named the house, he looked surprised and hesitated for a moment,

then he said, ‘Never mind, I will come.’ When mass was over, I watched him leave the church with his daughter, and I saw them get into a carriage. And I definitely told him the last door in the corridor, on the right.”

“And what makes you think he’ll come?”

“I just saw the fiacre turn into the Rue Petit-Banquier. That’s why I ran so fast.”

“How do you know it was the same fiacre?”

“Because I noticed the number, that’s how!”

“What was the number?”

“440.”

“Good. You’re a clever girl.”

The girl looked her father boldly in the face and, pointing to the shoes on her feet, said:—

“A clever girl, maybe. But I’m telling you, I won’t put these shoes on again, and I mean it. First, for my health, and second, for cleanliness. I don’t know anything more annoying than shoes that squish and go $_{ghi'}$ ghi, ghi_ the whole time. I’d rather go barefoot.”

“You’re right,” said her father in a gentle tone that contrasted with the girl’s rudeness, “but then you won’t be allowed into churches, because poor people have to wear shoes for that. You can’t go barefoot before the good God,” he added bitterly.

Then, turning back to the subject that consumed him:—

“So you’re sure he’ll come?”

“He’s right behind me,” she said.

The man sprang up. A kind of light came over his face.

“Wife!” he cried. “You hear that? Here is the philanthropist. Put out the fire.”

The stunned mother did not move.

With an acrobat’s quickness, the father grabbed a chipped jug from the mantel and threw its water onto the burning coals.

Then he turned to his eldest daughter and said:

“You there! Pull the straw off that chair!”

His daughter did not understand.

He grabbed the chair and, with one kick, smashed out the seat. His leg went straight through it.

As he pulled his leg back out, he asked his daughter:

“Is it cold?”

“Very cold. It’s snowing.”

The father turned to the younger girl, who was sitting on the bed by the window, and shouted at her in a booming voice:

“Quick! Get off that bed, you lazy thing! Will you never do anything? Break a windowpane!”

The little girl jumped off the bed, shivering.

“Break a pane!” he repeated.

The child stood frozen, confused.

“Do you hear me?” her father repeated. “I’m telling you to break a pane!”

In frightened obedience, the child rose on tiptoe and struck a pane with her fist. The glass shattered and fell with a loud crash.

“Good,” said the father.

He was stern and abrupt. His eyes swept quickly over every corner of the garret. He looked like a general making his final preparations just before a battle begins.

The mother, who had not spoken until then, now got up and asked in a dull, slow, weary voice, as though the words were coming out half-frozen:

“What are you going to do, my dear?”

“Get into bed,” the man replied.

His tone allowed no argument. The mother obeyed and dropped heavily onto one of the pallets.

Meanwhile, the sound of sobbing came from one corner.

“What’s that?” the father cried.

The younger daughter held up her bleeding fist without leaving the corner where she was crouching. She had hurt herself breaking the window. Then she went over near her mother’s pallet and wept silently.

Now it was the mother’s turn to jump up and cry out:

“Just look at that! See what foolish things you do! She cut herself breaking that pane for you!”

“So much the better,” said the man. “I expected that.”

“What? So much the better?” his wife shot back.

“Quiet!” replied the father. “I’m abolishing freedom of the press.”

Then he tore the woman’s chemise he was wearing and made a strip of cloth, which he quickly wrapped around the little girl’s bleeding wrist.

When that was done, he looked at his torn chemise with satisfaction.

“And the chemise too,” he said. “That looks good.”

An icy wind whistled through the window and into the room. The fog outside drifted in and spread itself like a white sheet of cotton, vaguely laid there by invisible fingers. Through the broken pane, they could see the snow falling. The snow promised by the Candlemas sun the day before had indeed arrived.

The father glanced around as if to make sure he had forgotten nothing. He grabbed an old shovel and spread ashes over the damp embers until they were completely hidden.

Then he straightened up and leaned against the mantelpiece:

“Now,” he said, “we can receive the philanthropist.”

CHAPTER VIII—THE RAY OF LIGHT IN THE HOVEL

The older girl came over and put her hand in her father's.

"Feel how cold I am," she said.

"Bah!" replied the father. "I'm much colder than that."

The mother burst out:

"You always have to have something better than everyone else—even the bad things."

"Get down!" said the man.

The mother, after receiving a certain look, fell silent.

For a moment, silence filled the hovel. The older girl was casually scraping the mud from the hem of her cloak. Her younger sister kept sobbing. The mother had taken the younger child's head between her hands and was covering it with kisses, whispering to her all the while:

"My darling, please, it's nothing important. Don't cry—you'll upset your father."

"No!" the father cried. "Quite the opposite! Sob, sob—that's right."

Then he turned to the older child:

“There! He isn’t coming! What if he doesn’t come at all? I’ll have put out my fire, smashed my chair, torn my shirt, and broken my window for nothing.”

“And hurt the child,” the mother murmured.

“Do you know,” the father went on, “it’s brutally cold in this cursed garret! What if that man doesn’t come? Oh, look at that! He’s keeping us waiting! He says to himself, ‘Well, they can wait for me—that’s what they’re there for.’ Oh, how I hate them! With what joy, delight, enthusiasm, and satisfaction I could strangle all those rich people—all those rich people! Those men who pretend to be charitable, who put on airs, who go to mass, who give gifts to the clergy, preach and preach in their skullcaps, and think they’re above us. They come here just to humiliate us and bring us ‘clothes,’ as they call them—old rags not worth four sous! And bread! That’s not what I want, the pack of scoundrels—it’s money! Ah, money! But no, never! Because they say we’d only go drink it away, and that we’re drunkards and loafers! And they—what are they, then, and what have they been in their time? Thieves! They could never have become rich any other way! Oh, society ought to be grabbed by the four corners and flung into the air, all of it! It would probably all be smashed, but at least no one would have anything, and that would be something gained! But what is that idiot of a benevolent gentleman doing? Will he come? Perhaps the fool has forgotten the address! I’d wager that old brute—”

At that moment, there was a light knock at the door. The man rushed to it and opened it, exclaiming with deep bows and worshipful smiles:

“Come in, sir! Please come in, most honored benefactor—and your charming young lady as well.”

An older man and a young girl appeared in the doorway of the attic.

Marius had not left his place. What he felt at that moment was beyond words.

It was she!

Anyone who has ever been in love knows all the bright meaning held in those three letters of that word: She.

It was her, beyond any doubt. Marius could barely make her out through the bright haze that had suddenly filled his eyes. It was that gentle, distant being, that star that had shone on him for six months. It was those eyes, that forehead, that mouth, that lovely face whose disappearance had plunged everything into night. The vision had vanished; now it had returned.

It had returned there, in that darkness, in that garret, in that crooked attic, in the midst of all that horror.

Marius trembled with shock. What! It was her! His heart was beating so hard that he could hardly see. He felt he was on the verge of tears. What! At last he was seeing her again, after searching for her so long! It seemed to him that he had lost his soul and had just found it again.

She looked just as she always had, only a little paler. Her delicate face was framed by a violet velvet bonnet, and her figure was hidden beneath a black satin pelisse. Beneath her long dress, you could catch a glimpse of her tiny foot in a silk boot.

M. Leblanc was still with her.

She had stepped a little way into the room and set a fairly large parcel on the table.

The elder Jondrette girl had withdrawn behind the door and was staring darkly at that velvet bonnet, that silk cloak, and that charming, happy face.

CHAPTER IX—JONDRETTE ALMOST BREAKS INTO TEARS

The hovel was so dark that anyone coming in from outside felt as though they were stepping into a cellar. So the two newcomers moved forward hesitantly, barely able to make out the vague shapes around them, while the people in the garret, used to the dim light, could see them clearly and study them at leisure.

M. Leblanc came forward with his sad but kindly expression and said to Jondrette, the father:

“Monsieur, in this package you will find some new clothes, woollen stockings, and blankets.”

“Our angelic benefactor overwhelms us,” said Jondrette, bowing almost to the ground.

Then he bent down to his eldest daughter’s ear and, while the two visitors were busy looking over the miserable room, added quickly in a low voice:

“Eh? What did I say? Rags! No money! They’re all the same! By the way, what name was signed on the letter to that old fool?”

“Fabantou,” the girl replied.

“The dramatic artist—good!”

It was fortunate for Jondrette that this idea had come to him, because at that very moment M. Leblanc turned to him and said, with the air of someone trying to remember a name:

“I can see that you are greatly to be pitied, Monsieur—”

“Fabantou,” Jondrette answered quickly.

“Monsieur Fabantou, yes, that’s it. I remember now.”

“A dramatic artist, sir, and one who has had some success.”

Here Jondrette clearly decided that the moment was right to win over the “philanthropist.” He cried out in a tone that mixed the boastfulness of a fairground showman with the humility of a beggar by the roadside:

“A pupil of Talma, sir! I am a pupil of Talma! Fortune once smiled on me—alas, now it is misery’s turn. You can see for yourself, my benefactor: no bread, no fire. My poor children have no fire! My only chair has no seat! A broken windowpane! And in weather like this! My wife is in bed! Sick!”

“Poor woman!” said M. Leblanc.

“My child is wounded!” Jondrette added.

The child, distracted by the arrival of the strangers, had begun staring at “the young lady” and had stopped sobbing.

“Cry! Scream!” Jondrette said to her under his breath.

At the same time, he pinched her injured hand. He did it all with the skill of a conjurer.

The little girl let out piercing screams.

The lovely young girl, whom Marius in his heart called “his Ursule,” hurried over to her.

“Poor dear child!” she said.

“You see, my beautiful young lady,” Jondrette went on, “her wrist is bleeding! It happened in an accident while she was working at a machine to earn six sous a day. They may have to cut off her arm.”

“Really?” said the old gentleman in alarm.

The little girl took this seriously and began sobbing even harder than before.

“Alas, yes, my benefactor!” the father replied.

For several minutes, Jondrette had been studying “the benefactor” in a strange way. As he spoke, he kept watching the man closely, as if trying to recover some memory of him. Then, taking advantage of a moment when the newcomers were asking the child with concern about her injured hand, he moved near his wife, who lay in bed looking dull and defeated, and said to her quickly in a very low voice:

“Look at that man!”

Then he turned to M. Leblanc and went on with his lamentations:

“You see, sir! The only thing I have to wear is my wife’s chemise—and that’s torn too! In the dead of winter! I can’t go out because I have no coat. If I had any kind of coat, I would go and see Mademoiselle Mars. She knows me and is very fond of me. Doesn’t she still live in the Rue de la Tour-des-Dames? Do you know, sir? We acted together in the provinces. I shared in her triumphs. Célimène would come to Bélisaire’s aid, sir! Elmire would give alms to Bélisaire! But no—nothing! Not a sou in the house! My wife is ill, and not a sou! My daughter is badly injured, and not a sou! My wife has fits of suffocation. It comes from her age, and besides, her nerves are affected. She ought to have care, and my daughter too! But the doctor! The

apothecary! How am I supposed to pay them? I would kneel before a penny, sir! That is what the arts have been reduced to. And do you know, my charming young lady, and you, my generous protector—do you know, you who breathe virtue and goodness, and fill that church with your presence, where my daughter sees you every day when she says her prayers? For I have raised my children religiously, sir. I did not want them to go on the stage. Ah, the little hussies! If I catch them slipping! I am not joking, I assure you! I lecture them about honor, morality, virtue! Ask them! They have to walk straight. They are not like those miserable creatures who begin with no family and end by marrying the public. First one is Mademoiselle Nobody, and then one becomes Madame Everybody. Devil take it! Nothing of that sort in the Fabantou family! I mean to raise them properly. They shall be honest, pleasant, and believe in God, by the holy name! Well, sir, my worthy sir, do you know what will happen tomorrow? Tomorrow is the fourth of February, the fatal day, the last day of grace my landlord has allowed me. If I have not paid my rent by this evening, then tomorrow my eldest daughter, my wife with her fever, my child with her wound—we shall all four be put out and thrown into the street, onto the boulevard, without shelter, in the rain, in the snow. There, sir. I owe four quarters—a whole year! That is to say, sixty francs."

Jondrette was lying. Four quarters would have come to only forty francs, and he could not owe four of them, because not even six months had passed since Marius had paid two for him.

M. Leblanc took five francs from his pocket and tossed them onto the table.

Jondrette found a moment to mutter in his eldest daughter's ear:

"The scoundrel! What does he think I can do with his five francs? That won't even cover my chair and broken windowpane! That's what comes of having expenses!"

Meanwhile, M. Leblanc had taken off the large brown overcoat he was wearing over his blue coat and draped it over the back of the chair.

"Monsieur Fabantou," he said, "these five francs are all I have on me, but I will take my daughter home now and come back this evening—it is this evening that you must pay, isn't it?"

Jondrette's face lit up with a strange expression. He answered eagerly:

"Yes, respected sir. I must be at my landlord's at eight o'clock."

"I will be here at six, and I will bring you the sixty francs."

"My benefactor!" Jondrette cried, overcome. Then he added in a low voice, "Take a good look at him, wife!"

M. Leblanc took the young girl's arm again and turned toward the door.

"Goodbye until this evening, my friends!" he said.

"Six o'clock?" said Jondrette.

"Six o'clock exactly."

At that moment, the elder Jondrette girl noticed the overcoat lying on the chair.

"You're forgetting your coat, sir," she said.

Jondrette shot his daughter a devastating look, along with a fierce shrug of the shoulders.

M. Leblanc turned back and said with a smile:

“I haven’t forgotten it. I’m leaving it.”

“Oh, my protector!” said Jondrette. “My noble benefactor, I am moved to tears! Allow me to escort you to your carriage.”

“If you are going out,” M. Leblanc answered, “put on this coat. It really is very cold.”

Jondrette did not need to be told twice. He quickly put on the brown overcoat. Then all three went out, with Jondrette walking ahead of the two strangers.

CHAPTER X—THE RATE FOR LICENSED CABS: TWO FRANCS AN HOUR

Marius missed nothing that happened in the room, and yet, in truth, he saw nothing. His eyes stayed fixed on the young girl. From the moment she first stepped into that garret, his heart had, so to speak, taken hold of her and wrapped itself entirely around her. For the whole time she was there, he lived in that ecstatic state that blots out ordinary awareness and concentrates the whole soul on a single point. He was not looking at a girl, but at a radiance dressed in a satin pelisse and a velvet bonnet. Sirius itself could have entered the room, and he would not have been more dazzled.

While the young girl opened the package, unfolded the clothes and blankets, questioned the sick mother kindly, and spoke tenderly to the little injured girl, he watched her every movement and tried to catch every word she said. He knew her eyes, her brow, her beauty, her figure, her walk; but he did not know the sound of her voice. Once, at the Luxembourg, he had imagined that he heard a few words from her, but he was not completely sure. He would have given ten years of his life to hear her speak, so that he might carry a little of that music away in his soul. But everything was drowned out by Jondrette’s miserable cries and blustering outbursts. That put a note of real anger into Marius’s ecstasy. He drank her in with his eyes. He could not believe that this truly was the divine creature he saw among those vile people in that monstrous den. It seemed to

him like seeing a hummingbird among toads.

When she left, he had only one thought: to follow her, keep to her trail, and not leave her until he learned where she lived. Having found her again by such a miracle, he could not bear to lose her once more. He jumped down from the commode and snatched up his hat. But just as he put his hand on the door latch and was about to open it, a sudden thought stopped him. The corridor was long, the staircase steep, Jondrette talked endlessly, and M. Leblanc had probably not yet reached his carriage. If M. Leblanc turned around in the corridor or on the stairs and saw Marius there, in that house, he would obviously be alarmed and would find some way to escape him again—and this time for good. What should he do? Wait a little? But if he waited, the carriage might drive away. Marius hesitated. At last, he accepted the risk and left his room.

The corridor was empty. He hurried to the stairs. No one was on the staircase either. He ran down as fast as he could and reached the boulevard just in time to see a fiacre turning the corner of the Rue du Petit-Banquier on its way back to Paris.

Marius dashed after it. When he reached the corner of the boulevard, he saw the fiacre again, speeding down the Rue Mouffetard. But it was already far ahead, and there was no way to catch it. Run after it? Impossible. Besides, the people inside would certainly notice someone racing after a fiacre, and the father would recognize him. At that moment, by an extraordinary stroke of luck, Marius noticed an empty cab passing along the boulevard. There was only one thing to do: jump into it and follow the fiacre. It was the surest, most

effective, and safest plan.

Marius signaled the driver to stop and called out:

“By the hour?”

Marius had no cravat. He was wearing his work coat, which had no buttons, and his shirt was torn along one of the pleats in front.

The driver stopped, winked, and held out his left hand to Marius, gently rubbing his forefinger against his thumb.

“What is it?” said Marius.

“Pay in advance,” said the coachman.

Marius remembered that he had only sixteen sous on him.

“How much?” he asked.

“Forty sous.”

“I’ll pay when I come back.”

The driver answered only by whistling the tune of La Palisse and snapping his whip to urge on his horse.

Marius stared after the cabriolet in confusion. For want of twenty-four sous, he was losing his joy, his happiness, his love. He had seen again, and now he was going blind once more. Bitterly—and, it must be admitted, with deep regret—he thought of the five francs he had given that wretched girl that very morning. If he had still had those five francs, he would have been saved. He would have come back to life. He would have stepped out of limbo and darkness. He would have escaped his

isolation and gloom, his lonely, widowed state. He might have tied the black thread of his fate once more to that beautiful golden thread that had just drifted before his eyes and snapped again in the same instant. In despair, he went back to his hovel.

He might have reminded himself that M. Leblanc had promised to return that evening, and that all he needed to do was handle things more skillfully so he could follow him then. But so lost was he in his thoughts that it is doubtful he had even heard this.

As he was about to go up the stairs, he noticed Jondrette on the far side of the boulevard, near the deserted wall along the Rue De la Barrière-des-Gobelins. Wrapped in the “philanthropist’s” overcoat, Jondrette was talking with one of those unsettling men commonly known as prowlers of the barriers—men with dubious faces and suspicious mutterings, who look as though they harbor bad intentions and generally sleep by day, which naturally suggests that they work by night.

The two men stood there motionless, talking in the swirling snow. They made the sort of sight a policeman would certainly have noticed, but Marius barely paid them any attention.

Even so, despite his gloomy thoughts, he could not help telling himself that this man who haunted the city gates and was now talking with Jondrette looked very much like a certain Panchaud, also known as Printanier, also known as Bigrenaille, whom Courfeyrac had once pointed out to him as a highly dangerous night wanderer. The reader has already encountered that name in the previous book. This Panchaud, alias Printanier, alias Bigrenaille, later appeared in many criminal trials and

became a notorious villain. At that time, he was only a famous one. Today he survives as a legend among thugs and murderers. Toward the end of the last reign, he led a whole school of criminals. In the evening, at dusk, at the hour when groups gathered and spoke in whispers, people talked about him at La Force, in the Fosse-aux-Lions. In that prison, at the very spot where the sewer runs beneath the culvert—the same sewer that made possible the extraordinary daylight escape of thirty prisoners in 1843—one could read his name, PANCHAUD, boldly carved by his own hand into the wall during one of his escape attempts. In 1832, the police were already watching him, though he had not yet truly begun his career.

CHAPTER XI—MISERY OFFERS ITS SERVICES TO WRETCHEDNESS

Marius climbed the stairs of the hovel slowly. Just as he was about to go back into his room, he noticed the elder Jondrette girl following him down the corridor. The sight of her alone disgusted him. She was the one who had his five francs, and it was now too late to ask for them back. The cab was gone; the fiacre was far away. Besides, she would not have returned them anyway. As for asking her where the people who had just been there lived, that would have been useless. She clearly 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 went into his room and pulled the door nearly shut behind him.

It would not close. He turned and saw a hand holding the door half open.

"What is it?" he asked. "Who is there?"

It was the Jondrette girl.

"You?" Marius said again, almost sharply. "You still? What do you want with me?"

She seemed lost in thought and did not look at him. The confidence she had shown that morning was gone. She did not

come in, but stayed back in the dark hallway, where Marius could see her through the half-open door.

"Come, answer me," cried Marius. "What do you want with me?"

She lifted her dull eyes, where a faint glimmer seemed to flicker, and said:

"Monsieur Marius, you look sad. What is wrong?"

"Wrong with me!" said Marius.

"Yes, with you."

"There is nothing wrong with me."

"Yes, there is!"

"No."

"I tell you there is!"

"Leave me alone!"

Marius pushed the door again, but she kept hold of it.

"Wait," she said. "You are mistaken. You may not be rich, but you were kind this morning. Be kind again now. You gave me something to eat; now tell me what is troubling you. You are unhappy—that is obvious. I do not want you to be unhappy. What can be done about it? Can I help? Use me. I am not asking for your secrets; you do not have to tell me them. But I may still be useful. I may be able to help you, just as I help my father. When letters have to be delivered, when someone has to go to houses, ask from door to door, find an address, or follow

someone, I am useful. So you can certainly tell me what is the matter, and I will go and speak to the people. Sometimes it is enough for someone to speak to them; that is all it takes to make them understand, and then everything turns out right. Make use of me."

An idea flashed through Marius' mind. When a man feels himself falling, what branch does he refuse to grab?

He stepped closer to the Jondrette girl.

"Listen—" he said to her.

She cut him off, her eyes lighting up with joy.

"Oh yes, do call me thou! I like that much better."

"Well," he went on, "thou brought that old gentleman and his daughter here!"

"Yes."

"Do you know their address?"

"No."

“Find her for me.”

Jondrette’s daughter’s dull eyes had lit up with joy, and now they darkened again.

“Is that what you want?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Do you know them?”

“No.”

“In other words,” she went on quickly, “you don’t know her, but you want to.”

There was something deeply telling and bitter in the way _them_ had become _her_.

“Well, can you do it?” said Marius.

“You’ll have the beautiful lady’s address.”

There was still something in the words “the beautiful lady” that unsettled Marius. He went on:

“No matter—what I want, after all, is the address of the father and daughter. Their address, that’s it!”

She stared at him.

“What will you give me?”

“Anything you want.”

“Anything I want?”

“Yes.”

“Then you shall have the address.”

She lowered her head. Then, with a sudden movement, she pulled the door shut behind her.

Marius was alone.

He sank into a chair, resting his head and both elbows on the bed, lost in thoughts he could not make sense of, as if he were dizzy. Everything that had happened since morning filled his

mind in a blur: the angel's appearance, her disappearance, what that creature had just said to him, and a glimmer of hope drifting through vast despair.

Suddenly, he was jolted out of his reverie.

He heard Jondrette's shrill, harsh voice say words that instantly seized his attention:

"I'm telling you, I'm sure of it—I recognized him."

Who was Jondrette talking about? Who had he recognized? M. Leblanc? The father of "his Ursule"? What! Did Jondrette know him? Was Marius about to learn, in this sudden and unexpected way, everything he had been missing, everything that had left his life in darkness? Was he finally going to find out who the girl he loved was? Who her father was? Was the thick shadow surrounding them about to lift? Was the veil about to be torn away? Ah! Good heavens!

He sprang onto his chest of drawers rather than climbed it, and took up his position again by the tiny peephole in the partition.

Once more, he looked into the inside of Jondrette's hovel.

CHAPTER XII—HOW M. LEBLANC'S FIVE-FRANC PIECE WAS USED

Nothing about the family's appearance had changed, except that the wife and daughters had opened the bundle and put on wool stockings and jackets. Two new blankets had been spread over the two beds.

Jondrette had clearly just come back. He still had the breathless look of someone fresh in from outside. His daughters were sitting on the floor by the fireplace, and the older one was bandaging the younger one's injured hand. His wife had sunk back onto the bed near the fire, her face full of astonishment. Jondrette was striding back and forth across the garret. His eyes looked strange.

The woman, who seemed timid and stunned in her husband's presence, turned and said:

"What, really? You're sure?"

"Sure! Eight years have gone by! But I know him! Ah! I know him. I recognized him at once! What! Didn't you see it immediately?"

"No."

"But I told you, 'Look closely!' Why, it's his build, it's his face, only older—though some people never seem to age, I don't know how they do it—it's the very sound of his voice. He's better dressed, that's all! Ah, you mysterious old devil, I've got

you now, I truly have!”

He stopped and said to his daughters:

“You two, get out of here!—It’s strange that you didn’t notice it!”

They got up to obey.

The mother stammered:

“With her hand injured like that.”

“The air will do it good,” said Jondrette. “Off with you.”

It was obvious that this was the kind of man no one dared answer. The two girls left.

Just as they were about to go through the door, the father caught the older one by the arm and said in a peculiar tone:

“You will be here at exactly five o’clock. Both of you. I shall need you.”

Marius listened even more intently.

Once he was alone with his wife, Jondrette began pacing the room again, circling it two or three times in silence. Then he spent several minutes tucking the bottom of the woman’s chemise he was wearing into his trousers.

Suddenly he turned to Madame Jondrette, folded his arms, and cried:

“Would you like me to tell you something? The young lady—”

“Well? What about the young lady?” his wife shot back.

Marius had no doubt that they were talking about her. He listened with burning anxiety. His whole life seemed to hang on what he heard.

But Jondrette bent down and whispered in his wife's ear. Then he straightened up and said aloud:

"It is she!"

"That one?" said his wife.

"That very one," said her husband.

No words could capture the force of the mother's reply. Surprise, rage, hatred, and fury all blended into one monstrous tone. Just a few words—no doubt the name her husband had whispered in her ear—were enough to rouse this huge, sluggish woman, and in an instant she changed from merely repulsive to terrifying.

"It's impossible!" she cried. "When I think that my daughters go barefoot and do not have a dress to wear! What! A satin pelisse, a velvet bonnet, boots, everything—more than two hundred francs' worth of clothes! Enough to make anyone think she was a lady! No, you are mistaken! Why, to begin with, the other one was hideous, and this one is not so bad-looking! She really is not bad-looking! It can't be her!"

"I tell you, it is she. You'll see."

At that blunt declaration, Madame Jondrette lifted her broad, flushed, fair-haired face and stared at the ceiling with a dreadful expression. In that moment, Marius found her even more frightening than her husband. She was like a sow with the eyes

of a tigress.

“What!” she went on. “That horrible, beautiful young lady, the one who looked at my daughters with pity—that’s that beggar brat! Oh, I’d like to kick her in the stomach!”

She jumped off the bed and stood there for a moment, her hair disheveled, her nostrils flaring, her mouth half open, her fists clenched and drawn back. Then she dropped onto the bed again. The man kept pacing back and forth and paid no attention to his wife.

After several minutes of silence, he went over to Madame Jondrette and stopped in front of her with his arms folded, just as he had a moment earlier:

“And shall I tell you something else?”

“What is it?” she asked.

He answered in a low, clipped voice:

“My fortune is made.”

The woman stared at him with the look that says, “Is the man talking to me about to go mad?”

He went on:

“Good God! Not so very long ago, I belonged to the parish of die of hunger if you have a fire, die of cold if you have bread! I’ve had enough of misery—my share and everyone else’s too! I’m not joking anymore. I don’t find it funny anymore. I’ve had enough of wordplay, good Lord! No more farces, Eternal Father! I want to eat until I’m full. I want to drink my fill, to gorge myself,

to sleep, to do nothing! I want my turn now, I do—before I die! I want to be a bit of a millionaire!"

He took another turn around the hovel and added:

"Like everyone else."

"What do you mean by that?" the woman asked.

He shook his head, winked, narrowed one eye, and raised his voice like a medical professor about to give a demonstration:

"What do I mean by that? Listen!"

"Hush!" muttered the woman. "Not so loud! These are things that mustn't be overheard."

"Bah! Who's there? Our neighbor? I saw him go out a little while ago. Besides, he never listens, the big idiot. And I'm telling you, I saw him leave."

Even so, some instinct made Jondrette lower his voice, though not enough to keep Marius from hearing him. One thing helped Marius catch every word: the falling snow muffled the sound of the carriages on the boulevard.

This is what Marius heard:

"Listen carefully. The Croesus is trapped—or as good as trapped! That part is settled. Everything is ready. I've seen some people. He'll come here this evening at six o'clock. To bring sixty francs, the fool! Did you see how I worked him over with my sixty francs, my landlord, my fourth of February? I don't even owe a full quarter! What an idiot he is! So he'll come at six o'clock. That's when our neighbor goes out to dinner. Mother

Bougon will be away in the city washing dishes. There won't be a soul in the house. The neighbor never gets back before eleven. The children will keep watch. You'll help us. He'll give in."

"And if he doesn't give in?" his wife asked.

Jondrette made a sinister gesture and said:

"We'll take care of him."

Then he burst out laughing.

It was the first time Marius had ever seen him laugh. The laugh was cold and smooth, and it sent a shiver through him.

Jondrette opened a cupboard near the fireplace and took out an old cap, which he brushed with his sleeve before putting it on.

"Now," he said, "I'm going out. There are a few more people I need to see. Good ones. You'll see how well this whole thing will work. I won't be gone long. It's a fine piece of business. You watch the house."

Then, with both fists shoved into his trouser pockets, he stood thinking for a moment before exclaiming:

"You know, it's a mighty lucky thing he didn't recognize me! If he had recognized me, he never would have come back. He would have slipped right through our fingers! It was my beard that saved us—my romantic beard! my dear little romantic beard!"

And once again he broke into laughter.

He went to the window. Snow was still falling, streaking the gray sky.

“What horrible weather!” he said.

Then he wrapped his overcoat across his chest:

“This coat is too big for me. Never mind,” he added. “The old scoundrel did me a devilish good turn by leaving it here! If he hadn’t, I couldn’t have gone out, and everything would have been ruined. It’s strange how much can depend on such small things!”

Then he pulled his cap down over his eyes and left the room.

He had barely taken half a dozen steps from the door when it opened again, and his fierce but intelligent face appeared once more in the doorway.

“I nearly forgot,” he said. “Have a charcoal brazier ready.”

And he tossed the five-franc piece the “philanthropist” had left him into his wife’s apron.

“A charcoal brazier?” his wife asked.

“Yes.”

“How many bushels?”

“Two full ones.”

“That will cost thirty sous. With what’s left, I’ll buy something for dinner.”

“No, devil take it.”

“Why?”

“Don’t go spending the hundred-sou piece.”

“Why?”

“Because I’ll need to buy something too.”

“What?”

“Something.”

“How much will you need?”

“Where is there an ironmonger’s shop nearby?”

“On Rue Mouffetard.”

“Ah, yes, at the corner of a street. I can picture the shop.”

“But tell me, how much will you need for what you have to buy?”

“Fifty sous—three francs.”

“There won’t be much left for dinner.”

“Food isn’t the point today. There’s something better to do.”

“That’s enough, my dear.”

At those words from his wife, Jondrette shut the door again, and this time Marius heard his footsteps fade down the hovel’s corridor and then hurry down the stairs.

At that moment, the church of Saint-Médard struck one o’clock.

CHAPTER XIII—ALONE TOGETHER, IN A SECLUDED PLACE, THEY WILL NOT BE THINKING OF SAYING THE LORD'S PRAYER

Marius, dreamy as he was, was, as we have said, naturally firm and strong-willed. His habit of thinking in solitude had deepened his sympathy and compassion and had perhaps made him less quick to anger, but it had not weakened his capacity for righteous indignation. He had the gentleness of a brahmin and the sternness of a judge. He would feel pity for a toad, but he would crush a viper. And it was into a den of vipers that he had just looked; before his eyes was a nest of monsters.

"These wretches must be crushed," he said.

Not one of the mysteries he had hoped to see cleared up had been explained. If anything, they had only grown darker. He knew no more about the beautiful girl from the Luxembourg or the man he called M. Leblanc, except that Jondrette knew them. Through the obscure words that had been spoken, only one thing stood out clearly to him: an ambush was being prepared, a dark but terrible trap. Both of them were in great danger—she probably, her father certainly. They had to be saved. The vile schemes of the Jondrettes had to be stopped, and this spider's web had to be torn apart.

He watched the female Jondrette for a moment. She had dragged an old sheet-iron stove out of a corner and was rummaging through the pile of scrap iron.

He climbed down from the commode as quietly as he could, careful not to make the slightest sound. In the midst of his fear about what was being planned, and the horror the Jondrettes inspired in him, he felt a kind of joy at the thought that he might perhaps be able to help the woman he loved.

But how could it be done? How could he warn the people in danger? He did not know their address. They had appeared before him for a moment and then vanished again into the vast depths of Paris. Should he wait for M. Leblanc at the door that evening at six o'clock, when he arrived, and warn him about the trap? But Jondrette and his men would see him standing watch. The place was deserted, they were stronger than he was, and they would find some way to seize him or drive him off. Then the man Marius wanted to save would be lost. One o'clock had just struck. The trap was to be set at six. Marius had five hours.

There was only one thing to do.

He put on his good coat, tied a silk handkerchief around his neck, took his hat, and went out, making no more sound than if he had been walking barefoot on moss.

Meanwhile, Jondrette's wife went on rummaging through her scrap iron.

Once outside the house, he headed for the Rue du Petit-Banquier.

He had almost reached the middle of the street, near a very low wall that a man could easily climb over in places, bordering a vacant lot. He was walking slowly, lost in thought, and the snow muffled his footsteps. Suddenly he heard voices speaking very close by. He turned his head. The street was empty; there was not a soul in sight. It was broad daylight, and yet he could clearly hear voices.

He thought to look over the wall he was walking beside.

There, in fact, were two men sitting flat on the snow with their backs against the wall, talking quietly together.

He did not know either of them. One was a bearded man in a workman's blouse, and the other was a long-haired man in rags. The bearded man wore a fez; the other had no hat, and snow had collected in his hair.

By leaning his head over the wall, Marius could hear what they were saying.

The shaggy-haired man nudged the other with his elbow and said:

"With Patron-Minette helping, it can't fail."

"You think so?" said the bearded man.

And the long-haired man went on:

"It's practically a guarantee for each of them—five hundred balls apiece—and the worst they can get is five years, six years, ten at the very most!"

The other man answered hesitantly, shivering under his fez:

“That’s the real thing. You can’t fight something like that.”

“I’m telling you, the job can’t fail,” the long-haired man went on. “Father What’s-his-name’s carriage will already be hitched up.”

Then they started talking about a melodrama they had seen the night before at the Gaîté Theatre.

Marius continued on his way.

It seemed clear to him that the mysterious words of those men, hidden so strangely behind that wall and crouching in the snow, had to be connected to Jondrette’s vile plans. This had to be the affair.

He headed toward the faubourg Saint-Marceau and, at the first shop he came to, asked where he could find a police commissary.

They directed him to No. 14, Rue de Pontoise.

Marius went there at once.

As he passed a baker’s shop, he bought a two-penny roll and ate it, knowing he would not be having dinner.

As he walked, he gave Providence its due. He reflected that if he had not given his five francs to the Jondrette girl that morning, he would have followed M. Leblanc's fiacre and would therefore have known nothing of what was happening. Nothing would have stood in the way of the Jondrettes' trap, and M. Leblanc would have been ruined—his daughter as well, no doubt.

CHAPTER XIV—IN WHICH A POLICE AGENT GIVES A LAWYER TWO FISTFULS

When he reached No. 14, Rue de Pontoise, he went up to the first floor and asked for the police commissary.

“The police commissary isn’t here,” said a clerk, “but there’s an inspector acting in his place. Would you like to speak to him? Is it urgent?”

“Yes,” said Marius.

The clerk showed him into the commissary’s office. A tall man stood there behind a grating, leaning against a stove and holding up the tails of an enormous topcoat with three collars in both hands. He had a square face, a thin, firm mouth, thick gray whiskers that looked fiercely threatening, and a stare that seemed enough to turn your pockets inside out. It would be more accurate to say that his look did not pierce so much as search.

This man looked almost as fierce and frightening as Jondrette; at times, meeting a dog can be no less terrifying than meeting a wolf.

“What do you want?” he said to Marius, without adding “monsieur.”

“Is this Monsieur le Commissaire de Police?”

“He is away. I am here in his place.”

“This is a very private matter.”

“Then speak.”

“And it requires great haste.”

“Then speak quickly.”

This calm, blunt man was frightening and reassuring at the same time. He inspired both fear and trust. Marius told him what had happened: that a man he knew only by sight was going to be lured into a trap that very evening; that, because he occupied the room next to the den, he, Marius Pontmercy, a lawyer, had overheard the entire plot through the partition; that the scoundrel who had arranged the trap was a man named Jondrette; that there would be accomplices, probably some loafers from the barriers, including a certain Panchaud, also known as Printanier, also known as Bigrenaille; that Jondrette’s daughters were to lie in wait; that there was no way to warn the man in danger, since he did not even know his name; and finally, that all of this was to take place at six o’clock that evening, at the loneliest part of the Boulevard de l’Hôpital, in house No. 50-52.

At the sound of that number, the inspector lifted his head and said coolly:

“So it is the room at the end of the corridor?”

“Exactly,” Marius answered, then added, “Do you know that house?”

The inspector was silent for a moment, then replied as he warmed the heel of his boot against the stove door:

“Apparently.”

He went on, muttering under his breath and speaking less to Marius than to his own cravat:

“Patron-Minette must be behind this.”

The word hit Marius at once.

“Patron-Minette,” he said. “I really did hear that word.”

And he repeated to the inspector the conversation between the long-haired man and the bearded man in the snow behind the wall on the Rue du Petit-Banquier.

The inspector muttered:

“The long-haired man must have been Brujon, and the bearded one Demi-Liard, also called Deux-Milliards.”

He lowered his eyelids again and sank into thought.

“As for Father What’s-his-name, I think I know who he is. Here, I’ve scorched my coat. They always keep these damned stoves too hot. Number 50-52. Former Gorbeau property.”

Then he looked at Marius.

“You saw only that bearded man and that long-haired man?”

“And Panchaud.”

“You didn’t see a little dandy of a rascal hanging around the place?”

“No.”

“Or a huge mass of a man, like the elephant in the Jardin des Plantes?”

“No.”

“Or a scoundrel who looks like an old red tail?”

“No.”

“As for the fourth one, no one sees him, not even his aides, clerks, or employees. So it’s no surprise that you didn’t see him.”

“No. Who are all those people?” Marius asked.

The inspector replied:

“Besides, this isn’t the time for them.”

He fell silent again, then went on:

“50-52. I know that shack. There’s no way to hide inside it without the artists spotting us, and then they’ll slip away simply by calling off the vaudeville. They’re so modest! An audience makes them shy. No, none of that. I want to hear them sing and make them dance.”

When he had finished this monologue, he turned to Marius and asked, staring hard at him:

“Are you afraid?”

“Of what?” said Marius.

“Those men?”

“No more than you are!” Marius shot back rudely; he had begun to notice that this police agent still had not addressed him as “monsieur.”

The inspector fixed Marius with an even sharper stare and went on with grave, moralizing solemnity:

“There, now you speak like a brave man and an honest one. Courage is not afraid of crime, and honesty is not afraid of authority.”

Marius cut him off:

“Fine, but what do you mean to do?”

The inspector merely said:

“The lodgers have pass-keys so they can get in at night. You must have one.”

“Yes,” said Marius.

“Do you have it with you?”

“Yes.”

“Give it to me,” said the inspector.

Marius took the key from his waistcoat pocket, handed it to the inspector, and added:

“If you want my advice, you should come with reinforcements.”

The inspector gave Marius a look like the one Voltaire might have given some provincial scholar who dared suggest a rhyme to him. In a single motion, he thrust his huge hands into the two vast pockets of his overcoat and pulled out two small steel

pistols, the kind known as “knock-me-downs.” Then he handed them to Marius and said quickly, in a sharp tone:

“Take these. Go home. Hide in your room, so they will think you have gone out. They are loaded. Each has two balls in it. Keep watch; there is a hole in the wall, as you told me. These men will come. Let them go on for a while. When you think things have reached a crisis, and it is time to stop them, fire a shot. Not too soon. I will take care of the rest. Fire into the ceiling, into the air, anywhere. Above all, not too soon. Wait until they begin to carry out their plan; you are a lawyer, you know the right moment.” Marius took the pistols and slipped them into the side pocket of his coat.

“That makes a bulge you can see,” said the inspector. “Put them in your trousers pockets.”

Marius hid the pistols in his trousers pockets.

“Now,” the inspector went on, “not another minute can be wasted by anyone. What time is it? Half past two. Seven o’clock is the time?”

“Six o’clock,” Marius answered.

“I have plenty of time,” said the inspector, “but only just enough. Don’t forget anything I’ve told you. Bang—a pistol shot.”

“Don’t worry,” said Marius.

As Marius put his hand on the doorknob to leave, the inspector called after him:

“By the way, if you need my help before then, come here or send someone. Ask for Inspector Javert.”

CHAPTER XV—JONDRETTE GOES SHOPPING

A few moments later, around three o'clock, Courfeyrac happened to be walking along the Rue Mouffetard with Bossuet. The snowfall had grown heavier and filled the air. Bossuet was just saying to Courfeyrac:

"Seeing all these snowflakes falling, you'd think heaven had a plague of white butterflies." Just then Bossuet caught sight of Marius coming up the street toward the barrier with a strange look about him.

"Wait," said Bossuet. "There's Marius."

"I saw him," said Courfeyrac. "Let's not speak to him."

"Why?"

"He's occupied."

"With what?"

"Can't you tell by the way he looks?"

"What do you mean, the way he looks?"

"He looks like a man following someone."

"That's true," said Bossuet.

"Just look at his eyes!" said Courfeyrac.

"But who the devil is he following?"

"Some pretty girl in a flowered bonnet! He's in love."

“But,” Bossuet remarked, “I don’t see any girl or any flowered bonnet in the street. There isn’t a woman anywhere around.”

Courfeyrac looked around and exclaimed:

“He’s following a man!”

It was a man indeed, wearing a gray cap, with a gray beard visible even though they could only see him from behind, walking about twenty paces ahead of Marius.

The man was wearing a brand-new greatcoat that was far too big for him, along with a dreadful pair of trousers hanging in tatters and caked with mud.

Bossuet burst out laughing.

“Who is that man?”

“Him?” Courfeyrac shot back. “He’s a poet. Poets are very fond of wearing the trousers of rabbit-skin dealers and the overcoats of peers of France.”

“Let’s see where Marius is going,” said Bossuet. “Let’s see where that man is going. Let’s follow them, eh?”

“Bossuet!” cried Courfeyrac. “Eagle of Meaux! You are an astonishing brute. Follow a man who is following another man—really!”

They turned back.

Marius had in fact seen Jondrette walking along the Rue Mouffetard, and he was keeping watch on what he did.

Jondrette walked straight on, with no idea that someone was already watching him.

He left the Rue Mouffetard, and Marius saw him go into one of the most dreadful hovels in the Rue Gracieuse. He stayed there for about a quarter of an hour, then came back to the Rue Mouffetard. He stopped at an ironmonger's shop that then stood on the corner of the Rue Pierre-Lombard, and a few minutes later Marius saw him come out holding a huge cold chisel with a white wooden handle, which he hid under his greatcoat. At the top of the Rue Petit-Gentilly he turned left and went quickly toward the Rue du Petit-Banquier. The day was fading. The snow, which had stopped for a moment, had just begun again. Marius took up a position to watch from the very corner of the Rue du Petit-Banquier, which was deserted as usual, and did not follow Jondrette into it. It was fortunate that he did not, because when Jondrette reached the wall near the place where Marius had heard the long-haired man and the bearded man talking, he turned around and made sure no one was following him. He did not see Marius. Then he sprang over the wall and disappeared.

The vacant lot along this wall connected with the back yard of a disreputable former livery-stable keeper who had gone bankrupt and still kept a few old single-seat berlins under his sheds.

Marius thought it would be wise to take advantage of Jondrette's absence and go back home. Besides, it was getting late. Every evening, when Ma'am Bougon left for her dishwashing work in town, she locked the door, which was

always shut by dusk. Marius had given his key to the police inspector, so it was important for him to hurry.

Evening had come, and night was almost fully fallen. Across the horizon and the vast sky, only one place still held the sun's light: the moon.

It was rising in a reddish glow behind the low dome of the Salpêtrière.

Marius went back to No. 50-52 in long strides. The door was still open when he arrived. He went up the stairs on tiptoe and slipped along the corridor wall to his room. As the reader will remember, attics lined both sides of this corridor, and for the moment they were all empty and available to rent. Ma'am Bougon usually left all the doors open. As he passed one of these attics, Marius thought he saw, in the deserted little room, the motionless heads of four men, faintly lit by the last of the daylight coming through a dormer window.

Marius did not try to look more closely, since he did not want to be seen himself. He managed to reach his room without being noticed and without making a sound. It was just in time. A moment later, he heard Ma'am Bougon leave, locking the house door behind her.

CHAPTER XVI—CONTAINING THE WORDS TO AN ENGLISH SONG THAT WAS POPULAR IN 1832

Marius sat down on his bed. It may have been half past five. Only half an hour stood between him and what was about to happen. He could hear his pulse beating the way one hears a watch ticking in the dark. He thought about the two movements taking place at that very moment in the darkness: crime advancing from one side, justice approaching from the other. He was not afraid, but he could not think of what was coming without shuddering. As happens to anyone suddenly caught up in an unexpected adventure, the whole day felt like a dream to him, and to convince himself that he was not trapped in a nightmare, he had to touch the cold steel barrels of the pistols in his trouser pockets.

It had stopped snowing. The moon was coming more and more clearly out of the mist, and its light, mixed with the white glow reflected from the fallen snow, gave the room a kind of twilight look.

There was a light in the Jondrette den. Marius saw the hole in the wall glowing red, and to him it looked almost like blood.

Marius quietly took off his boots and pushed them under the bed.

Several minutes passed. Marius heard the downstairs door swing on its hinges. A heavy tread came up the stairs and hurried down the corridor. Then the latch of the hovel was lifted with a loud noise: Jondrette had returned.

At once, several voices broke out. The whole family was in the garret. But while the master had been away, they had kept silent, like wolf cubs when the wolf is gone.

“It’s me,” he said.

“Good evening, daddy,” the girls yelped.

“Well?” said the mother.

“Everything’s going splendidly,” Jondrette replied, “but my feet are freezing. Good! You’ve dressed up. That was the right thing to do. You have to inspire confidence.”

“We’re all ready to go out.”

“Don’t forget what I told you. You’ll do everything, won’t you?”

“Don’t worry.”

“Because—” said Jondrette. And he left the sentence unfinished.

Marius heard him set something heavy down on the table, probably the chisel he had bought.

“By the way,” said Jondrette, “have you eaten here?”

“Yes,” said the mother. “I got three big potatoes and some salt. Since the fire was going, I took the chance to cook them.”

“Good,” said Jondrette. “Tomorrow I’ll take you out to dine with me. We’ll have duck and all the trimmings. You’ll dine like Charles the Tenth. Everything is going well!”

Then he added:

“The mousetrap is open. The cats are there.”

He lowered his voice even more and said:

“Put this in the fire.”

Marius heard the sound of charcoal being stirred with tongs or some other iron tool, and Jondrette went on:

“Did you grease the door hinges so they won’t squeak?”

“Yes,” the mother replied.

“What time is it?”

“Almost six. Saint-Médard struck the half-hour a little while ago.”

“Damn!” Jondrette burst out. “The children must go keep watch. You there, come here and listen.”

They whispered together.

Then Jondrette’s voice could be heard again:

“Has old Bougon gone out?”

“Yes,” said the mother.

“Are you sure there’s no one in our neighbor’s room?”

“He hasn’t been in all day, and you know perfectly well this is his dinner hour.”

“Are you certain?”

“Certain.”

“Even so,” said Jondrette, “it won’t hurt to check whether he’s there. Here, girl, take the candle and go look.”

Marius dropped to his hands and knees and silently crawled under his bed.

He had barely hidden himself when he saw a light through the crack in his door.

“Papa,” a voice cried, “he isn’t in here.”

He recognized the voice of the older daughter.

“Did you go in?” her father demanded.

“No,” the girl replied, “but since his key is in the door, he must be out.”

The father exclaimed:

“Go in anyway.”

The door opened, and Marius saw the tall Jondrette girl come in with a candle in her hand. She looked just as she had that morning, only even more repulsive in this light.

She walked straight to the bed. Marius went through a moment of unbearable anxiety. But a mirror was nailed to the wall beside the bed, and that was where she was headed. She rose onto her tiptoes and looked at herself in it. In the next room, he could

hear iron objects being moved around.

She smoothed her hair with the palm of her hand and smiled at herself in the mirror, humming in her cracked, grave-like voice:

Our love lasted only a week, but moments of happiness pass so quickly! Was it really worth it to adore each other for just eight days? The time of love ought to last forever! It ought to last forever! It ought to last forever!28

Meanwhile, Marius was trembling. He could not believe she might not hear him breathing.

She went to the window and looked out in her usual half-silly way.

"How ugly Paris looks when it puts on a white chemise!" she said.

She went back to the mirror and once again began posing in front of it, studying herself first straight on and then in three-quarter view.

"Well!" her father cried. "What are you doing there?"

"I'm looking under the bed and the furniture," she replied, still fixing her hair. "There's no one here."

"You idiot!" her father shouted. "Come here this instant! And don't dawdle!"

"Coming! Coming!" she said. "There's never time for anything in this dump!"

She hummed:

Vous me quittez pour aller à la gloire; Mon triste cœur suivra partout.29

She gave the mirror one last glance, then went out and shut the door behind her.

A moment later, Marius heard the sound of the two girls' bare feet in the corridor, and Jondrette shouting to them:

"Listen carefully! One of you on the barrier side, the other at the corner of the Rue du Petit-Banquier. Don't take your eyes off the door of this house for a single moment, and the instant you see anything, run back here at once! As fast as you can! You have a key to get in."

The older girl grumbled:

"Standing watch in the snow barefoot—what an idea!"

"Tomorrow you'll have pretty little green silk boots!" said the father.

They ran downstairs, and a few seconds later the slam of the outer door told him they were outside.

That left only Marius, the Jondrettes, and probably also the mysterious people Marius had glimpsed at twilight behind the door of the unused attic, still in the house.

CHAPTER XVII—HOW MARIUS' FIVE-FRANC PIECE WAS USED

Marius decided that the time had come to return to his post at the lookout. In an instant, with all the quickness of youth, he was back at the hole in the partition.

He looked.

The inside of the Jondrette room had a strange appearance, and Marius at once understood the odd light he had noticed. A candle burned in a candlestick green with corrosion, but it was not the candle that truly lit the room. The whole hovel was illuminated by the glow of a fairly large sheet-iron brazier standing in the fireplace and filled with burning charcoal—the brazier the Jondrette woman had prepared that morning. The charcoal was blazing, the brazier was red-hot, and a blue flame trembled over it. In that light he could make out the chisel Jondrette had bought in the Rue Pierre-Lombard, where it had been thrust into the brazier to heat. In one corner, near the door, and as if set there for a particular purpose, lay two piles: one seemed to be old iron, the other rope. To anyone who did not know what was being prepared, all this might have suggested something either very sinister or perfectly ordinary. Lit in this way, the den looked more like a forge than the mouth of hell; but in that light Jondrette looked far more like a demon than a blacksmith.

The brazier gave off such intense heat that the candle on the table was melting on the side nearest it and sagging over. An

old dark copper lantern, fit for a Diogenes turned Cartouche, stood on the mantelpiece.

The brazier stood inside the fireplace beside the nearly dead embers, sending its fumes up the chimney and giving off no smell.

The moon shone through the four windowpanes and cast its pale light into the red, blazing garret. To Marius, whose mind remained poetic and dreamy even in the middle of action, it seemed like a touch of heaven mixed with the distorted dreams of earth.

A current of air coming through the open pane helped disperse the charcoal fumes and hide the presence of the brazier.

The Jondrette hideout was, as the reader may remember from what we said about the Gorbeau house, perfectly suited to be the setting for a dark, violent act and to conceal a crime. It was the most secluded room in the most isolated house on the most deserted boulevard in Paris. If ambushes and traps had not already been invented, they would have been there.

The full depth of the house, along with many empty rooms, separated this den from the boulevard, and its only window looked out onto wasteland enclosed by walls and fences.

Jondrette had lit his pipe, sat down on the chair without a seat, and was smoking. His wife was speaking to him in a low voice.

If Marius had been Courfeyrac—that is, one of those men who find something to laugh at in every situation—he would have burst out laughing at the sight of Madame Jondrette. She wore a

black bonnet with plumes, rather like the hats worn by the heralds at the coronation of Charles X.; an enormous tartan shawl over her knitted petticoat; and the man's shoes her daughter had refused that morning. It was this outfit that had drawn from Jondrette the exclamation: "Good! You've dressed up. You did well. You must inspire confidence!"

As for Jondrette, he had kept on the new surtout, which was too large for him and which M. Leblanc had given him, and his clothes still showed that contrast between coat and trousers which, in Courfeyrac's eyes, was a poet's ideal.

All at once, Jondrette raised his voice:

"By the way! Now that I think of it, in this weather he'll come in a carriage. Light the lantern, take it, and go downstairs. Stand behind the outer door. The moment you hear the carriage stop, open the door at once. He'll come up. Light the staircase and the corridor, and when he comes in here, go back downstairs as quickly as you can, pay the coachman, and send the fiacre away."

"And the money?" the woman asked.

Jondrette felt around in his trouser pocket and handed her five francs.

"What's this?" she cried.

Jondrette replied with dignity:

"That's the sovereign our neighbor gave us this morning."

Then he added:

“You know what? We’ll need two chairs in here.”

“What for?”

“To sit on.”

At that calm reply from Jondrette, Marius felt a cold shiver run through him.

“By God! I’ll go get one of our neighbor’s.”

With a quick movement, she opened the door of the den and went out into the corridor.

Marius had absolutely no time to climb down from the chest of drawers, get to his bed, and hide under it.

“Take the candle,” cried Jondrette.

“No,” she said, “it would just get in my way. I have two chairs to carry. There’s moonlight.”

Marius heard Mother Jondrette’s heavy hand groping at his lock in the dark. The door opened. He stood frozen in place, stunned and horrified.

Jondrette’s wife came in.

The dormer window let in a strip of moonlight between two masses of shadow. One of those shadows completely covered the wall Marius was pressed against, so he vanished into it.

Mother Jondrette lifted her eyes, did not see Marius, took the two chairs—the only ones Marius owned—and went out again, letting the door slam heavily behind her.

She went back into the lair.

“Here are the two chairs.”

“And here’s the lantern. Go downstairs as fast as you can.”

She obeyed at once, and Jondrette was left alone.

He set the two chairs on opposite sides of the table. He turned the chisel in the brazier, placed an old screen in front of the fireplace to hide the chafing-dish, then went to the corner where the pile of rope lay and bent down as if to inspect something. Marius then realized that what he had taken for a shapeless heap was actually a well-made rope ladder, with wooden rungs and two hooks for fastening it.

This ladder, along with several large tools—true lumps of iron mixed in with the scrap metal piled behind the door—had not been in the Jondrette hovel that morning. They had clearly been brought there that afternoon, while Marius was away.

"Those are an edge-tool maker’s tools," Marius thought.

If Marius had known a little more about such things, he would have recognized that what he took for an edge-tool maker’s equipment included certain tools for forcing or picking locks, and others for cutting and slashing—the two kinds of instruments burglars call _cadets_ and _fauchants_.

The fireplace and the two chairs stood directly opposite Marius. With the brazier hidden, the candle was now the room’s only light, and the smallest piece of crockery on the table or mantel cast a huge shadow. The room had a calm that was somehow threatening and horrible. You could feel that something terrible

was about to happen there.

Jondrette had let his pipe go out, a sure sign that something weighed on his mind, and had sat down again. In the candlelight, the harsh, sharp lines of his face stood out. He kept scowling and suddenly opening his right hand, as if answering the final urgings of some dark inner voice. In the middle of one of these silent exchanges with himself, he quickly pulled the table drawer toward him, took out a long kitchen knife hidden inside, and tested the blade on his nail. Then he put the knife back in the drawer and closed it.

Marius, for his part, gripped the pistol in his right pocket, pulled it out, and cocked it.

As he cocked it, the pistol gave a sharp, clear click.

Jondrette started, half rose, listened for 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 FACE EACH OTHER

Suddenly, the distant, mournful vibration of a clock rattled the windowpanes. Saint-Médard was striking six.

Jondrette marked each stroke with a toss of his head. When the clock struck six, he pinched out the candle with his fingers.

Then he began pacing the room. He stopped to listen at the corridor, started walking again, and then listened once more.

"If only he comes!" he muttered, then went back to his chair.

He had barely sat down again when the door opened.

Mother Jondrette had opened it and now stood in the corridor, wearing a horrible, ingratiating grin that was lit from below by one of the openings in the dark lantern.

"Come in, sir," she said.

"Come in, my benefactor," Jondrette repeated, springing quickly to his feet.

M. Leblanc appeared.

He had such a calm manner that he seemed strikingly venerable.

He placed four louis on the table.

“Monsieur Fabantou,” he said, “this is for your rent and your most urgent needs. We will deal with the rest later.”

“May God repay you for it, my generous benefactor!” said Jondrette.

Then he hurried over to his wife:

“Send the carriage away!”

She slipped out while her husband showered bows on M. Leblanc and offered him a chair. A moment later she came back and whispered in his ear:

“It’s done.”

The snow had been falling without pause since morning, and it was so deep that they had not heard the fiacre arrive; now they did not hear it leave either.

Meanwhile, M. Leblanc had taken his seat.

Jondrette sat down in the other chair, facing M. Leblanc.

To picture the scene that follows, imagine a cold night: the lonely grounds of the Salpêtrière buried in snow, white in the moonlight like shrouds; the thin streetlamps burning here and there with a reddish glow along those grim boulevards; and long

rows of black elms. There is not a passerby for perhaps a quarter of a league in any direction. The Gorbeau hovel is at its deepest point of silence, horror, and darkness. In that building, in the middle of all that emptiness and gloom, the huge Jondrette garret is lit by a single candle. In that den, two men sit at a table: M. Leblanc, calm; Jondrette, smiling and terrifying; the Jondrette woman, a she-wolf, crouched in one corner; and behind the partition, Marius, unseen, standing rigid, missing not a word and not a movement, his eye on the watch and a pistol in his hand.

Marius felt horror, but not fear. He gripped the pistol firmly and felt reassured. “I can stop that wretch whenever I choose,” he thought.

He knew the police were somewhere nearby in hiding, waiting for the agreed signal and ready to step in.

Besides, he hoped this violent confrontation between Jondrette and M. Leblanc would shed light on everything he wanted to understand.

CHAPTER XIX—BUSYING ONESELF WITH OBSCURE DEPTHS

As soon as M. Leblanc sat down, he looked toward the pallets, which were empty.

“How is the poor little wounded girl?” he asked.

“Badly,” Jondrette replied with a broken-hearted, grateful smile. “Very badly, my worthy sir. Her elder sister has taken her to the Bourbe to have the wound dressed. You will see them soon; they will be back at once.”

“Madame Fabantou seems to me to be better,” M. Leblanc went on, glancing at the Jondrette woman’s strange clothing. She stood between him and the door, as if already guarding the way out, staring at him with a threatening look, almost ready to fight.

“She is dying,” said Jondrette. “But what can you expect, sir? That woman has such courage! She’s not a woman, she’s an ox.”

Jondrette, pleased by the compliment, brushed it aside with the theatrical manner of someone vainly pretending to be modest.

“You are always too kind to me, Monsieur Jondrette!”

“Jondrette!” said M. Leblanc. “I thought your name was Fabantou?”

“Fabantou, also known as Jondrette!” the husband replied quickly. “An artistic nickname!”

Then, throwing his wife a shrug that M. Leblanc did not notice, he went on in a voice that was both emphatic and ingratiating:

“Ah! my poor darling and I have had a happy life together! What would we have left if we did not at least have that? We are so miserable, my worthy sir! We have arms, but no work! We are willing, but there is no work! I do not know how the government manages these things, but on my word of honor, sir, I am no Jacobin, sir, I am no bousingot. I wish them no harm, but if I were one of the ministers, on my sacred word, things would be different. Take this, for example: I wanted to have my girls taught the trade of making paper boxes. You will say to me, ‘What! a trade?’ Yes, a trade! A simple trade! A way to earn bread! What a comedown, my benefactor! What a humiliation, when one has once been what we have been! Alas! Nothing remains to us from our prosperous days! Only one thing: a picture, which I value greatly, but which I am willing to part with, because I must live! After all, one must live!”

While Jondrette spoke in this seemingly rambling way, which did nothing to lessen the shrewd, calculating look on his face, Marius lifted his eyes and noticed someone at the far end of the room whom he had not seen before. A man had just come in so quietly that the door had made no sound on its hinges. He wore a violet knitted vest, old, worn, stained, torn, and hanging open at every seam; wide cotton-velvet trousers; and wooden shoes. He had no shirt. His neck was bare, his arms were bare and tattooed, and his face was smeared with black. He had sat

down silently on the nearest bed, and because he was behind Jondrette, he could only be seen indistinctly.

By that kind of instinct that makes the eye turn of its own accord, M. Leblanc looked around almost at the same moment as Marius. He could not help making a gesture of surprise, and Jondrette noticed it at once.

“Ah! I see!” Jondrette cried, buttoning his coat with a pleased air. “You’re looking at your overcoat? It fits me! Upon my word, it fits me!”

“Who is that man?” said M. Leblanc.

“Him?” Jondrette blurted out. “He’s a neighbor of mine. Don’t pay any attention to him.”

The neighbor was a strange-looking man. Still, chemical factories were common in the Faubourg Saint-Marceau, and many of the workers might have blackened faces. Besides, M. Leblanc’s whole manner showed open, fearless confidence.

He went on:

“Excuse me; what were you saying, M. Fabantou?”

“I was telling you, sir, my dear protector,” Jondrette replied, resting his elbows on the table and gazing steadily and tenderly at M. Leblanc with eyes not unlike a boa constrictor’s, “I was telling you that I have a picture to sell.”

A faint sound came from the door. A second man had just entered and sat down on the bed behind Jondrette.

Like the first man, his arms were bare, and his face was covered with ink or lampblack.

Although he had literally slipped into the room, this man had not managed to keep M. Leblanc from noticing him.

“Don’t mind them,” said Jondrette. “They belong in the house. As I was saying, I still have a valuable picture in my possession. But wait, sir, have a look at it.”

He got up, went to the wall where the panel we have already mentioned was standing, and turned it around, still leaving it propped against the wall. It really was something like a picture, and the candle gave it a little light. Marius could make nothing of it, because Jondrette stood between him and the picture. He saw only a rough daub and what seemed to be a main figure painted with the harsh crudity of foreign canvases and screen paintings.

“What is that?” asked M. Leblanc.

Jondrette cried:

“A painting by a master, a picture of great value, my benefactor! I am as attached to it as I am to my two daughters; it brings back memories for me! But I have told you, and I will not take it back, that I am so miserable that I will part with it.”

Whether by chance or because a growing uneasiness had begun to stir in him, M. Leblanc looked back toward the far end of the room while he examined the picture.

There were now four men there. Three sat on the bed, and one stood by the doorpost. All four were still, with bare arms and faces smeared black. One of the men on the bed was leaning against the wall with his eyes closed, and he might have been taken for asleep. He was old, and his white hair against his blackened face created a dreadful effect. The other two looked young; one had a beard, and the other wore his hair long. None of them had shoes. Those without socks were barefoot.

Jondrette noticed that M. Leblanc was staring at the men.

“They’re friends. They’re neighbors,” he said. “Their faces are black because they work with charcoal. They build chimneys. Don’t concern yourself with them, my benefactor. Buy my picture instead. Take pity on my misery. I won’t ask much for it. What do you think it’s worth?”

“Well,” said M. Leblanc, looking Jondrette straight in the eye with the air of a man on his guard, “it’s some tavern sign, and it’s worth about three francs.”

Jondrette replied gently:

“Do you have your pocketbook with you? I would be satisfied with a thousand crowns.”

M. Leblanc sprang to his feet, put his back against the wall, and swept the room with a quick glance. Jondrette was on his left, by the window. On his right, by the door, were Madame Jondrette and the four men. The four men did not move and did not even seem to be watching.

Jondrette began speaking again in a plaintive voice, with such a vacant look and such a pitiful tone that M. Leblanc might have thought he was simply facing a man driven mad by misery.

“If you don’t buy my picture, my dear benefactor,” said Jondrette, “I’ll have nothing left. The only thing left for me will be to throw myself into the river. Just think—I wanted to have my two girls trained in the paper-box trade, the kind of boxes made for New Year’s gifts! But look at what it takes: a table with a raised edge so the glasses don’t fall off, a special stove, a pot with three compartments for different strengths of paste depending on whether it’s for wood, paper, or cloth, a trimming knife to cut the cardboard, a mould to shape it, a hammer to fasten the metal pieces, pincers—how the devil should I know what else? And all that just to earn four sous a day! You have to work fourteen hours a day! Every box passes through the worker’s hands thirteen times! You can’t wet the paper! You mustn’t stain anything! And you have to keep the paste hot. It’s the devil’s own work, I tell you! Four sous a day! How is a man supposed to live on that?”

As he spoke, Jondrette did not look at M. Leblanc, though M. Leblanc was watching him closely. M. Leblanc kept his eyes on Jondrette, while Jondrette kept his on the door. Marius, tense with attention, shifted his gaze from one to the other. M. Leblanc seemed to be wondering, “Is this man mad?” Jondrette repeated two or three times, very clearly, each time in a different whining, pleading tone: “There is nothing left for me but to throw myself into the river! The other day I went down three steps beside the bridge of Austerlitz to do it.”

Suddenly his dull eyes flared with a horrible light. The little man straightened up and became terrifying. He stepped toward M. Leblanc and shouted in a voice like thunder: “That has nothing to do with it! Do you know me?”

CHAPTER XX—THE TRAP

The garret door suddenly flew open, revealing three men in blue linen blouses, their faces covered with black paper masks. The first was thin and carried a long cudgel tipped with iron. The second, a kind of giant, held a butcher's pole-axe used for slaughtering cattle, gripping it in the middle of the handle with the blade hanging downward. The third, a broad-shouldered man, less thin than the first, held an enormous key that had been stolen from the door of some prison.

It was clear that Jondrette had been waiting for these men to arrive. A quick exchange followed between him and the thin man with the club.

"Is everything ready?" Jondrette asked.

"Yes," the thin man replied.

"Where is Montparnasse?"

"The young leading man stopped to talk with your daughter."

"Which one?"

"The older one."

"Is there a carriage at the door?"

"Yes."

"Are the horses hitched?"

"Yes."

“Two good horses?”

“Excellent ones.”

“Is it waiting where I told you to put it?”

“Yes.”

“Good,” said Jondrette.

M. Leblanc had gone very pale. He was carefully taking in everything around him in that den, like a man who understood exactly what he had walked into. He turned his head slowly from one face to another with a look of startled attention, but there was nothing about him that suggested fear. He had quickly made a barricade out of the table, and the man who, only a moment earlier, had seemed like nothing more than a kind old gentleman had suddenly become almost athletic. He set his powerful fist on the back of his chair with a startling, threatening force.

This old man, so steady and brave in the face of such danger, seemed to be one of those people whose courage is as natural and simple as their kindness. The father of the woman we love is never a stranger to us. Marius felt proud of that unknown man.

Three of the men Jondrette had described as “chimney-builders” had armed themselves from the heap of scrap iron. One took a heavy pair of shears, another a pair of weighing tongs, and the third a hammer. Without saying a word, they stationed themselves across the doorway. The old man stayed on the bed and merely opened his eyes. Madame

Jondrette sat down beside him.

Marius decided that in a few more seconds the moment to step in would come, and he raised his right hand toward the ceiling, in the direction of the corridor, ready to fire his pistol.

After finishing his exchange with the man carrying the cudgel, Jondrette turned back to M. Leblanc and asked his question again, with the low, restrained, terrifying laugh that was peculiar to him:

“So, you still do not recognize me?”

M. Leblanc looked him straight in the face and replied:

“No.”

Then Jondrette stepped up to the table. Leaning over the candle with his arms crossed, he brought his harsh, savage face close to M. Leblanc’s calm one, coming as near as he could without making M. Leblanc draw back. In that pose, like a wild beast about to bite, he cried out:

“My name is not Fabantou. My name is not Jondrette. My name is Thénardier. I am the innkeeper of Montfermeil! Do you understand? Thénardier! Do you know me now?”

A nearly imperceptible flush passed over M. Leblanc’s forehead, and he answered in a voice that neither shook nor rose above its usual level, with his customary calm:

“No more than I did before.”

Marius did not hear the reply. Anyone who had seen him then, through the darkness, would have noticed that he looked gaunt, stunned, and shattered. The moment Jondrette said, “My name is Thénardier,” Marius trembled from head to foot and leaned against the wall, as if a blade of ice had gone through his heart. His right arm, ready to fire the signal shot, slowly dropped. And when Jondrette repeated, “Thénardier, do you understand?” Marius’s shaking fingers nearly let the pistol fall. Jondrette’s revelation had not disturbed M. Leblanc, but it had completely undone Marius. M. Leblanc seemed not to recognize the name

Thénardier, but Marius knew it very well. The reader will remember what that name meant to him. He had carried it in his heart, written there by his father's will. It lived in the deepest part of his memory, in that sacred command: "A certain Thénardier saved my life. If my son ever meets him, he must do everything in his power to help him." As the reader knows, that name had become almost holy to Marius; in his reverence, he linked it with his father's own. What! This man was that Thénardier, that innkeeper of Montfermeil whom he had searched for so long and so hopelessly? At last he had found him—but in what way? His father's savior was a villain. The man Marius had longed to serve was a monster. The rescuer of Colonel Pontmercy was about to commit a crime whose full extent Marius still did not clearly understand, but which looked very much like murder. And against whom? Great God! What cruel fate, what bitter irony! From the depths of his grave, his father had ordered him to do all the good he could for this Thénardier. For four years Marius had thought of little else but paying that debt. And now, just as he was about to have a criminal caught in the act and handed over to justice, destiny cried out to him: "This is Thénardier!" At last he had the chance to repay the man who had saved his father's life amid the storm of grapeshot on the heroic field of Waterloo—and repay him with the scaffold. He had promised himself that if he ever found Thénardier, he would do nothing but throw himself at his feet. And now he had found him only to hand him over to the executioner. His father had said to him, "Help Thénardier!" And his answer to that beloved, sacred voice would be to crush Thénardier. He was about to offer his father in the grave the

sight of the man who had snatched him from death at the risk of his own life being executed on the Place Saint-Jacques through the actions of his own son, that same Marius to whom he had entrusted the man in his will. And what a terrible mockery—that he had carried on his breast for so long his father's last instructions, written in his own hand, only to act in a way so horribly opposed to them. But on the other hand, could he look at this trap and do nothing? Could he abandon the victim and spare the murderer? Did anyone owe gratitude to such a wretched creature? In one instant, all the beliefs Marius had lived by for the last four years were torn through by this unexpected blow.

He shuddered. Everything depended on him. Without realizing it, all those people moving before his eyes were in his hands. If he fired his pistol, M. Leblanc would be saved and Thénardier ruined. If he did not fire, M. Leblanc would be sacrificed, and who knew? Thénardier might escape. Should he strike one down or let the other perish? Either way, remorse was waiting for him.

What was he supposed to do? What could he choose? Should he betray the strongest memories he had, all those solemn promises he had made to himself, his most sacred duty, the most revered words he knew? Should he disregard his father's last wish, or allow a crime to be carried out? On one side, it seemed to him that he could hear "his Ursule" begging for her father's life; on the other, he heard the colonel entrusting Thénardier to his care. He felt himself going mad. His knees buckled under him. And he did not even have time to think, so

furiously was the scene before his eyes rushing toward disaster. It was like a whirlwind he had imagined he controlled, but that was now carrying him away. He was on the verge of fainting.

Meanwhile, Thénardier, as we shall call him from this point on and by no other name, was pacing in front of the table in a state of frenzy and savage triumph.

He grabbed the candle in his fist and slammed it down on the mantelpiece so hard that the wick nearly went out and tallow splashed the wall.

Then he turned to M. Leblanc with a dreadful look and spat out these words:

“Finished! Trapped! Done for! Cooked!”

Then he started pacing back and forth again, erupting with rage.

“Ah!” he cried. “So I’ve finally found you again, Mister Philanthropist! Mister ragged millionaire! Mister giver of dolls! You old fool! 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 took Fantine’s child away from me! The Lark! It wasn’t you in the yellow overcoat! No! And not with a bundle of clothes in your hand, like you had here this morning! Look, wife, it seems he has a mania for carrying packages of woolen stockings into people’s houses! Old do-gooder, get out of here! Are you a hosier, Mister Millionaire? Do you hand out your merchandise to the poor, holy man? What nonsense! What a clown! Ah, and you don’t

recognize me? Well, I recognize you, I can tell you that! I knew you the moment you stuck your nose in here. Ah, you're about to learn that it's not all roses when you push your way into people's houses like that, pretending they're taverns, dressed in rags, looking like a beggar someone would toss a sou to, deceiving people, playing the generous man, taking away their livelihood, and making threats in the woods. And you can't settle everything afterward, when people are ruined, by bringing a coat that's too big and two miserable hospital blankets, you old scoundrel, you child-stealer!"

He stopped and seemed to talk to himself for a moment. It was as if his anger had dropped into some deep hole, like the Rhone. Then, as though he were saying out loud the things he had just been muttering under his breath, he slammed his fist on the table and shouted:

"And with that sanctimonious air of his!"

Then, turning directly to M. Leblanc, he said:

"Parbleu! You made a fool of me before! You're the reason for all my bad luck! For fifteen hundred francs, you took a girl I had—a girl who clearly came from rich people, who had already brought in a lot of money, and from whom I could have squeezed enough to live on for the rest of my life! A girl who would have repaid me for everything I lost in that filthy cook-shop, where there was nothing but constant fighting, and where, like an idiot, I spent my last farthing! Oh, I wish all the wine people drank in my house had been poison to everyone who drank it! Well, never mind! Tell me this! You must have

thought I looked ridiculous when you ran off with the Lark! You had your club in the forest. You were the stronger one. Revenge. Today I'm the one holding the winning cards! You're in a bad way now, my good fellow! Oh, how I can laugh! I really am laughing! Didn't he walk right into the trap! I told him I was an actor, that my name was Fabantou, that I had performed comedy with Mamselle Mars, with Mamselle Muche, that my landlord demanded payment tomorrow, the 4th of February—and he didn't even notice that rent comes due on the 8th of January, not the 4th of February! Idiot! And the four miserable Philippes he brought me! Scoundrel! He didn't even have the nerve to go as high as a hundred francs! And the way he swallowed all my empty talk! That really amused me. I said to myself: 'Blockhead! There, I've got you! This morning I lick your paws, but tonight I'll gnaw your heart!'"

Thénardier stopped. He was out of breath. His small, narrow chest heaved like a blacksmith's bellows. His eyes shone with the vile delight of a weak, cruel, cowardly man who has finally found a chance to torment what he once feared and insult what he once flattered—the joy of a dwarf with his heel on Goliath's head, the joy of a jackal beginning to tear at a sick bull, so close to death that it can no longer defend itself, yet still alive enough to suffer.

M. Leblanc did not interrupt him, but when Thénardier paused, he said:

“I do not know what you mean. You are mistaken about me. I am a very poor man, anything but a millionaire. I do not know you. You are taking me for someone else.”

“Ah!” Thénardier roared hoarsely. “A fine lie! So you’re still keeping that up, are you! You’re floundering now, my old buck! Ah! You don’t remember! You don’t recognize who I am?”

“Excuse me, sir,” said M. Leblanc in a tone of politeness that, at that moment, felt strangely forceful, “but I can see that you are a scoundrel.”

Who has not noticed that hateful people have their own kind of sensitivity, that even monsters can be touchy? At the word “scoundrel,” Madame Thénardier leaped out of bed, and Thénardier seized his chair as if he meant to crush it in his hands. “Don’t move!” he shouted to his wife; then he turned to M. Leblanc:

“A scoundrel! Yes, I know that’s what you rich gentlemen call us! Fine! It’s true that I went bankrupt, that I’m in hiding, that I have no bread, that I don’t have a single sou, so that makes me a scoundrel! I haven’t eaten in three days, so I’m a scoundrel! Ah, you people sit warming your feet, you wear Sakoski boots, you have padded overcoats like archbishops, you live on the first floor of buildings with porters, you eat truffles, you eat

asparagus at forty francs a bunch in January, and green peas, you stuff yourselves, and when you want to know whether it's cold, you look in the newspaper to see what engineer Chevalier's thermometer says. We are the thermometers. We don't need to go out to the quay at the corner of the Tour de l'Horologe to find out how many degrees of cold there are; we feel our blood freezing in our veins and the ice forming around our hearts, and we say, 'There is no God!' And then you come into our caves—yes, our caves—to call us scoundrels! But we'll devour you! We'll devour you, you poor little creatures! Look here, Mister Millionaire: I have been a respectable man, I have held a license, I have been a voter, I am a bourgeois, I am! And it's quite possible that you are not!"

Here Thénardier took a step toward the men standing near the door and added with a shiver:

"Just think—he actually dared to come here and speak to me as if I were some common cobbler!"

Then he turned to M. Leblanc again in a fresh burst of rage:

"And listen to this too, Mister Philanthropist! I'm not some shady character, not at all! I'm not one of those nameless men who show up and kidnap children from their homes! I'm an old French soldier. I should have been decorated! I was at Waterloo, I was! In that battle I saved a general, a Count of I-don't-know-what. He told me his name, but his cursed voice was so weak I couldn't make it out. All I heard was Merci [thanks]. I'd rather have had his name than his thanks. That would have helped me find him again. The picture you see here,

painted by David at Bruqueselles—do you know what it shows? It shows me. David wanted to make that brave deed immortal. I've got that general on my back, and I'm carrying him through the grape-shot. That's the story! That general never did a single thing for me; he was no better than the others! But even so, I saved his life at the risk of my own, and I've got the certificate of it in my pocket! I'm a soldier of Waterloo, by all the furies! And now that I've been good enough to tell you all this, let's have done with it. I want money. I want a great deal of money. I must have an enormous amount of money, or I'll wipe you out, by the thunder of the good God!"

Marius had recovered a little control over his anguish and was listening. The last possible doubt had just disappeared. This was certainly the Thénardier mentioned in the will. Marius shuddered at hearing that accusation of ingratitude aimed at his father—an accusation he was on the verge of confirming in the worst possible way. His confusion only deepened.

And beyond that, in everything Thénardier said—in his voice, his gestures, and the look in his eyes that seemed to flash fire with every word—there was something terrible. In that outburst of a wicked nature laying itself completely bare; in that mix of swagger and degradation, pride and meanness, fury and madness; in that chaos of real suffering and false feeling; in that brazen display of a malicious man savoring the dark pleasure of violence; in that shameless nakedness of a revolting soul; in that blaze of every pain joined with every hatred—there was something as hideous as evil itself, and as heartbreaking as truth.

The master's portrait—the painting he had suggested M. Leblanc should buy—was, as the reader has probably guessed, nothing more than his tavern sign, painted by his own hand. It was the only thing he had saved from the disaster at Montfermeil.

Now that he was no longer blocking Marius's view, Marius could study the thing. And in that crude painting, he really did make out a battle, a smoky background, and one man carrying another. It was Pontmercy and Thénardier: the sergeant rescuing the colonel. Marius felt almost drunk. The picture seemed to bring his father back to life. It was no longer the signboard from the wine-shop at Montfermeil; it was a resurrection. It was as though a tomb had opened and a ghost had risen from it. Marius could hear his heart pounding in his temples. The cannon of Waterloo roared in his ears. The image of his wounded father, dimly painted on that sinister panel, filled him with terror, and it seemed to him that the distorted specter was staring straight at him.

When Thénardier had caught his breath again, he fixed his bloodshot eyes on M. Leblanc and said in a low, clipped voice:

"What do you have to say before we put the handcuffs on you?"

M. Leblanc said nothing.

In the middle of that silence, a harsh voice hurled this grim joke from the corridor:

"If there's any wood to chop, I'm ready!"

It was the man with the axe, amusing himself.

At that same moment, a huge bristling face, smeared with clay, appeared in the doorway, wearing a hideous grin that showed not teeth but fangs.

It was the face of the man with the butcher's axe.

"Why did you take off your mask?" Thénardier shouted furiously.

"For fun," the man shot back.

For the past few minutes, M. Leblanc had seemed to be watching and tracking Thénardier's every move. Thénardier, blinded and dazzled by his own rage, paced back and forth through the den, completely confident that the door was guarded. He believed he had an unarmed man trapped while he himself was armed, and that they were nine against one—counting Madame Thénardier as only one man.

While speaking to the man with the pole-axe, he had turned his back on M. Leblanc.

M. Leblanc seized the moment. He kicked over the chair, slammed the table aside with his fist, and with a single astonishing leap reached the window before Thénardier could

even turn around. Opening it, climbing onto the frame, and swinging himself across it took only a second. He was halfway out when six strong hands grabbed him and yanked him violently back into the hovel. It was the three "chimney-builders" who had thrown themselves on him. At the same moment, Madame Thénardier tangled her hands in his hair.

At the sound of the struggle and pounding feet, the other ruffians came rushing in from the corridor. The old man on the bed, who seemed drunk, climbed down from the pallet and staggered forward with a stone-breaker's hammer in his hand.

One of the "chimney-builders," his smeared face lit by the candle, was someone Marius recognized despite the grime: Panchaud, also known as Printanier, also known as Bigrenaille. He raised over M. Leblanc's head a kind of club made of an iron bar with a lead ball at each end.

Marius could not bear the sight any longer. "My father," he thought, "forgive me!"

His finger moved to the trigger of his pistol.

The shot was just about to go off when Thénardier shouted:

"Don't hurt him!"

This desperate attempt by the victim, instead of enraging Thénardier, calmed him. There were two men in him: the savage man and the cunning man. Until then, in the rush of triumph at having his prey trapped and motionless before him, the savage man had been in control. But the moment the victim struggled

and tried to fight back, the cunning man returned and took over.

“Don’t hurt him!” he repeated. Without realizing it, his first success was that he stopped the pistol just as it was about to fire and froze Marius, who now felt the immediate urgency had passed. Faced with this new turn of events, Marius saw no harm in waiting a little longer.

Who knew whether some chance might not appear that would spare him the horrible choice between letting Ursule’s father die and killing the colonel’s savior?

A brutal struggle had begun. With one hard blow to the chest, M. Leblanc sent the old man crashing down and rolling into the middle of the room. Then, with two backward sweeps of his hands, he knocked down two more attackers and pinned one beneath each knee. The wretches were choking under the pressure, as if trapped beneath a granite millstone. But the other four had grabbed the formidable old man by both arms and the back of the neck, forcing him doubled over the two “chimney-builders” on the floor.

So he was overpowering some while being overpowered by the rest—crushing the men beneath him while nearly suffocating under the weight of those on top of him. He struggled in vain to throw off the force pressing in on him from every side. M. Leblanc vanished beneath the horrible mass of ruffians like a wild boar buried under a howling pack of dogs and hounds.

At last they managed to throw him onto the bed nearest the window, and there they kept him pinned down. Mme. Thénardier still had a fistful of his hair.

“Don’t get involved in this,” said Thénardier. “You’ll tear your shawl.”

Mme. Thénardier obeyed with a growl, the way a she-wolf obeys the male wolf.

“Now,” said Thénardier, “you others, search him!”

M. Leblanc seemed to have given up resisting.

They searched him.

He had nothing on him except a leather purse with six francs in it and his handkerchief.

Thénardier slipped the handkerchief into his own pocket.

“What! No pocketbook?” he demanded.

“No, and no watch either,” replied one of the “chimney-builders.”

“Never mind,” muttered the masked man with the large key, in a ventriloquist’s voice. “He’s a tough old fellow.”

Thénardier went to the corner by the door, picked up a bundle of ropes, and threw them to the men.

“Tie him to the bedpost,” he said.

Then he noticed the old man whom M. Leblanc’s punch had flung across the room and who still was not moving, and he added:

“Is Boulatruelle dead?”

“No,” replied Bigrenaille. “He’s drunk.”

“Push him into a corner,” said Thénardier.

Two of the “chimney-builders” shoved the drunken man into the corner by the pile of old iron, using their feet.

“Babet,” Thénardier said quietly to the man with the cudgel, “why did you bring so many? We didn’t need them.”

“What could I do?” the man with the cudgel replied. “They all wanted in on it. It’s a bad season. There’s no work.”

The pallet they had thrown M. Leblanc onto was a kind of hospital bed, raised on four rough wooden legs that had been crudely cut.

M. Leblanc let them do as they pleased.

The ruffians tied him tightly in an upright position, with his feet on the floor at the head of the bed—the end farthest from the window and closest to the fireplace.

When they had tied the last knot, Thénardier took a chair and sat down almost directly in front of M. Leblanc.

Thénardier no longer looked like himself. In just a few moments, his face had changed from wild violence to a calm, crafty sweetness.

Marius could hardly recognize, in that smooth smile of a man who looked like an official, the almost animal mouth that had been foaming only a moment earlier. He stared in amazement at the strange and terrifying transformation, and felt as a man might who saw a tiger turn into a lawyer.

“Monsieur—” said Thénardier.

Then, with a gesture, he dismissed the ruffians who still had their hands on M. Leblanc:

“Step back a little, and let me speak with the gentleman.”

They all moved back toward the door.

He went on:

“Monsieur, you were wrong to try to jump out the window. You might have broken your leg. Now, if you don’t mind, let us talk calmly. First of all, I should tell you something I’ve noticed: you

have not uttered the slightest cry."

Thénardier was right; on that point, he was correct, though Marius had missed it in his agitation. M. Leblanc had spoken only a few words, and he had not raised his voice. Even while struggling with the six ruffians by the window, he had kept an unusually deep and striking silence.

Thénardier went on:

"My God! You could at least have shouted 'stop thief,' and I would not have found that improper. 'Murder!' People say that too from time to time, and for my part I would not have taken offense. It is only natural to make a bit of noise when you find yourself among people who do not inspire much confidence. You could have done that, and no one would have bothered you for it. You would not even have been gagged. And I will tell you why. This room is very secluded. That is its only merit, but it does have that advantage. You could fire a mortar here, and it would make about as much impression at the nearest police station as the snores of a drunk. Here a cannon would go boom, and thunder would go poof. It is a convenient place to stay. But in any case, you did not shout, and that is all for the better. I congratulate you, and I will tell you what I conclude from it: my dear sir, when a man shouts, who comes? The police. And after the police? The courts. Well then! You did not cry out because you do not want the police and the law involved any more than we do. It is because—I have suspected it for a long time—you have something to hide. We have the same interest on our side. So we can come to an understanding."

As he spoke, Thénardier kept his eyes fixed on M. Leblanc, as though he were trying to drive the sharp glints from his pupils straight into his prisoner's conscience. His manner of speaking carried a restrained, muted insolence, sly and calculating. His language was careful and almost refined, and in this scoundrel, who only a short while earlier had seemed nothing but a robber, one could now sense "the man who had studied for the priesthood."

The prisoner's silence, that precaution carried so far that he seemed to forget all concern for his own life, that resistance to the first instinct of nature, which is to cry out—all this, now that Marius had noticed it, disturbed him and filled him with painful astonishment.

Thénardier's well-founded remark only made the deep mystery surrounding that grave and unusual man—whom Courfeyrac had nicknamed Monsieur Leblanc—even harder for Marius to understand.

But whoever he was, tied up with ropes, surrounded by executioners, half sunk, so to speak, into a grave that was closing over him more and more with every passing moment, facing Thénardier's anger as he had faced his gentleness, the man remained unmoved; and at such a moment Marius could not help admiring that magnificently melancholy face.

Clearly, this was a soul fear could not reach, a man who did not know what despair meant. He was one of those people who inspire amazement in desperate situations. However extreme the crisis, however certain the catastrophe, there was nothing

here of the drowning man's agony, of the man who opens his horror-stricken eyes beneath the water.

Thénardier got up casually, went to the fireplace, pushed the screen aside, and leaned it against the nearby pallet. In this way he revealed the brazier full of glowing coals, where the prisoner could clearly see the chisel, white-hot and speckled here and there with tiny scarlet stars.

Then Thénardier came back and sat down beside M. Leblanc.

"Let me go on," he said. "We can reach an agreement. Let's settle this in a friendly way. I was wrong to lose my temper just now. I don't know what came over me. I went much too far and said outrageous things. For instance, because you're a millionaire, I told you I was demanding money from you—a lot of money, a great deal of money. That wouldn't be reasonable. My God, rich as you are, you have your own expenses—who doesn't? I don't want to ruin you. I'm not a greedy man, after all. I'm not one of those people who, just because they have the upper hand, make fools of themselves by taking advantage of it. Why, I'm considering your situation and making a sacrifice on my side. I only want two hundred thousand francs."

M. Leblanc did not say a word.

Thénardier went on:

“You can see I’m watering down my wine quite a bit; I’m being very moderate. I don’t know the exact state of your fortune, but I do know you’re not stingy with money, and a generous man like you can certainly give two hundred thousand francs to an unlucky father with a family. Of course, you’re a sensible man as well; you can’t have imagined that I would go to all the trouble I’ve taken today, and arrange this whole business tonight—which these gentlemen will agree was effort well spent—only to end by asking you for enough to drink cheap red wine at fifteen sous and eat veal at Desnoyer’s. Two hundred thousand francs—surely it’s worth that much. Once this little sum is out of your pocket, I guarantee that the matter is finished, and you’ll have nothing more to fear from me. You may say to me, ‘But I don’t have two hundred thousand francs on me.’ Oh, I’m not unreasonable. I’m not asking that. I ask only one thing of you. Be so good as to write what I’m about to dictate.”

Here Thénardier paused. Then he added, stressing each word and smiling toward the brazier:

“I warn you, I will not accept it if you claim you don’t know how to write.”

Even a grand inquisitor might have envied that smile.

Thénardier shoved the table up close to M. Leblanc and took an inkstand, a pen, and a sheet of paper from the drawer, which he left half open. Inside, the long blade of the knife glinted.

He set the sheet of paper in front of M. Leblanc.

“Write,” he said.

At last, the prisoner spoke.

“How do you expect me to write? I’m tied up.”

“That’s true—pardon me!” Thénardier exclaimed. “You’re absolutely right.”

Then he turned to Bigrenaille:

“Untie the gentleman’s right arm.”

Panchaud, also known as Printanier, also known as Bigrenaille, carried out Thénardier’s order.

Once the prisoner’s right arm was free, Thénardier dipped the pen in the ink and handed it to him.

“Understand this clearly, sir: you are in our hands, entirely at our mercy. No one can get you out of this, and we would truly regret being forced to take unpleasant measures. I know neither your name nor your address, but I warn you that you will remain tied up until the person carrying the letter you are about to write has returned. Now, if you please, write.”

“What?” the prisoner asked.

“I’ll dictate.”

M. Leblanc took the pen.

Thénardier began to dictate:

“My daughter—”

The prisoner shuddered and looked up at Thénardier.

“Write, ‘My dear daughter’—” said Thénardier.

M. Leblanc obeyed.

Thénardier went on:

“Come at once—”

He stopped.

“You use thou– when you speak to her, don’t you?”

“Who?” asked M. Leblanc.

“Parbleu!” cried Thénardier. “The little one, the Lark.”

M. Leblanc replied without showing the slightest emotion:

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“Go on anyway,” Thénardier exclaimed, and continued dictating:

“Come at once, I am in desperate need of thee. The person who delivers this note to thee has been instructed to bring thee to me. I am waiting for thee. Come without fear.”

M. Leblanc wrote all of it.

Thénardier continued:

“Ah! take out ‘come with confidence’; that might make her think something is wrong, and that there is reason to be suspicious.”

M. Leblanc crossed out the three words.

“Now,” Thénardier went on, “sign it. What’s your name?”

The prisoner set down the pen and asked:

“Who is this letter for?”

“You know very well,” Thénardier shot back. “For the little one. I just told you.”

It was clear that Thénardier was careful not to say the young girl’s name. He called her “the Lark,” he called her “the little one,” but he never spoke her name aloud—the precaution of a shrewd man keeping his secret even from his accomplices. To name her would have been to put the whole “business” into their hands and tell them more than they needed to know.

He continued:

“Sign it. What is your name?”

“Urbain Fabre,” said the prisoner.

With a catlike movement, Thénardier thrust his hand into his pocket and pulled out the handkerchief taken from M. Leblanc. He searched for the initials on it and held it up close to the candle.

“U. F. That’s right. Urbain Fabre. Good—sign it U. F.”

The prisoner signed.

“It takes two hands to fold the letter. Give it to me; I’ll fold it.”

When that was done, Thénardier went on:

“Address it to ‘Mademoiselle Fabre,’ at your house. I know you live a long way from here, near Saint-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas, because you go to mass there every day, but I don’t know which street. I can see you understand your position. Since you haven’t lied about your name, you won’t lie about your address. Write it yourself.”

The prisoner stopped to think for a moment, then took the pen and wrote:

“Mademoiselle Fabre, at M. Urbain Fabre’s, Rue Saint-Dominique-D’Enfer, No. 17.”

Thénardier snatched up the letter with a kind of feverish jerk.

“Wife!” he cried.

Madame Thénardier hurried over to him.

“Here’s the letter. You know what to do. There’s a carriage at the door. Leave at once, and come straight back.”

Then he turned to the man with the meat cleaver:

“Now that you’ve taken off your nose mask, go with the mistress. Ride behind the fiacre. You know where you left the team?”

“Yes,” said the man.

He set his axe in a corner and followed Madame Thénardier.

As they left, Thénardier stuck his head through the half-open door and shouted down the corridor:

“Above all, don’t lose the letter! Remember, you’re carrying two hundred thousand francs with you!”

Madame Thénardier’s hoarse voice answered:

“Don’t worry. I’ve got it tucked inside my bodice.”

Less than a minute later, they heard the crack of a whip, quickly fading as it moved away.

“Good!” Thénardier growled. “They’re moving fast. At that pace, the bourgeoise will be back within three-quarters of an hour.”

He pulled a chair up to the fireplace, folded his arms, and stretched his muddy boots toward the brazier.

“My feet are cold!” he said.

Only five ruffians now remained in the den with Thénardier and the prisoner.

Behind the black masks or dark paste covering their faces—which could make them look, depending on what fear imagined, like charcoal burners, negroes, or demons—these men had a dull, grim expression. You could feel that they committed crime as if it were just another job, calmly, without anger or pity, and with a kind of boredom. Huddled together in one corner like beasts, they said nothing.

Thénardier warmed his feet.

The prisoner had fallen back into silence. A dark calm had replaced the wild uproar that had filled the attic only moments before.

The candle, with a large mushroom of carbon on the wick, gave off only a dim light in the vast hovel. The brazier had burned low, and all those monstrous heads threw distorted shadows across the walls and ceiling.

The only sound was the soft breathing of the old drunken man, fast asleep.

Marius waited in growing anxiety, sharpened by every little thing. The mystery was more impenetrable than ever.

Who was this “little one” Thénardier had called the Lark? Was she his “Ursule”? The prisoner had not seemed disturbed by the word “the Lark” and had answered in the most natural way, “I do not know what you mean.” On the other hand, the two letters U. F. had been explained: they stood for Urbain Fabre, and Ursule was no longer called Ursule. This was the point Marius understood most clearly of all.

A kind of dreadful fascination kept him rooted where he stood, watching and overseeing the whole scene. He remained there, almost unable to move or think, as if the horrible things happening so close to him had numbed him completely. He waited, hoping for some new development, whatever it might be, because he could not gather his thoughts and did not know what course to take.

“In any case,” he said to himself, “if she is the Lark, I shall see her, because Thénardier’s wife is to bring her here. Then it will be over, and I will give my life and my blood if necessary, but I will save her! Nothing shall stop me.”

Nearly half an hour passed like this. Thénardier seemed lost in dark thoughts, and the prisoner did not move. Still, Marius thought that from time to time, especially in the last few moments, he had heard a faint, muffled sound coming from the prisoner’s direction.

Suddenly, Thénardier spoke to the prisoner:

“By the way, Monsieur Fabre, I may as well tell you at once.”

These few words seemed to begin an explanation. Marius listened intently.

“My wife will be back soon, so don’t get impatient. I really do think the Lark is your daughter, and it seems only natural to me that you should keep her. But listen to me for a moment. My wife will go and find her with your letter. I told my wife to dress the way she did so your young lady would have no hesitation about going with her. They’ll both get into the carriage, with my companion riding behind. Somewhere outside the barrier, a trap with two very good horses is waiting. Your young lady will be taken there. She’ll get out of the fiacre. My companion will get into the other vehicle with her, and my wife will come back here and tell us, ‘It’s done.’ As for the young lady, no harm will come to her. The trap will take her to a place where she’ll be kept quiet, and as soon as you hand over those two hundred thousand francs, she’ll be returned to you. If you have me

arrested, my companion will give the Lark a twist of his thumb, that's all."

The prisoner did not say a word. After a pause, Thénardier went on:

"It's all very simple, as you can see. No harm will be done unless you want harm done. I'm telling you exactly how things stand. I'm warning you so you'll know what to expect."

He stopped. The prisoner still said nothing, and Thénardier continued:

"As soon as my wife comes back and says to me, 'The Lark is on the way,' we'll let you go, and you'll be free to go home and sleep in your own bed. You can see that we mean no evil."

Terrible thoughts rushed through Marius' mind. What! The young girl they were carrying off was not going to be brought back? One of those monsters was going to take her away into the darkness? Where? And what if it was she!"

It was clear that it was she. Marius felt his heart stop.

What was he supposed to do? Fire the pistol? Hand all those villains over to justice? But the horrible man with the meat-axe would still be beyond reach with the young girl, and Marius thought again of Thénardier's words, now understanding their bloody meaning: "If you have me arrested, my companion will give the Lark a twist of his thumb."

Now it was not only the colonel's testament holding him back. His own love held him back as well, and the danger threatening the one he loved.

This terrifying situation had already gone on for more than half an hour, and it was changing by the minute.

Marius had enough self-control to think through, one after another, every most heartbreaking possibility, searching for hope and finding none.

The chaos in his mind stood in sharp contrast to the funeral silence of the den.

In the middle of that silence, they heard the door at the bottom of the staircase open and then shut again.

The prisoner stirred in his bonds.

"Here's the wife," said Thénardier.

He had barely spoken when Thénardier's wife burst into the room, flushed, panting, breathless, her eyes blazing, and cried out as she slapped her huge hands against her thighs:

"False address!"

The ruffian who had gone with her appeared behind her and picked up his axe again.

She went on:

"Nobody there! Rue Saint-Dominique, No. 17—no Monsieur Urbain Fabre! They don't know what I'm talking about!"

She stopped, choking for breath, then continued:

“Monsieur Thénardier! That old fellow tricked you! You’re too soft, that’s the trouble! If it had been me, I’d have chopped the brute into four pieces from the start! And if he’d put up a fight, I’d have boiled him alive! He would have had to talk and tell us where the girl is and where he keeps his money! That’s how I’d have handled it! People are absolutely right when they say men are a lot stupider than women! Nobody at No. 17. It’s nothing but a big carriage gate! No Monsieur Fabre in Rue Saint-Dominique! And after all that running, and the coachman’s fare, too! I spoke to both the porter and the portress—a big, stout woman—and they know nothing about him!”

Marius could breathe freely again.

She—Ursule, or the Lark; he no longer knew what to call her—was safe.

While his furious wife shouted, Thénardier had sat down on the table.

For several minutes he said nothing. He only swung his dangling right foot and stared at the brazier with a look of savage brooding.

At last, he said to the prisoner in a slow, strangely savage voice:

“A false address? What did you hope to gain by that?”

“To gain time!” the prisoner shouted in a voice like thunder. At that same moment, he threw off his restraints; they had been cut through. Now only one of his legs was still fastened to the bed.

Before the seven men could recover their wits and rush at him, he had already bent over the fireplace, reached out to the brazier, and straightened up again. Thénardier, Madame Thénardier, and the ruffians, crowded together in astonishment at the far end of the hovel, stared at him in shock. Nearly free and standing in a terrifying pose, he waved above his head a red-hot chisel that gave off a menacing glow.

The judicial investigation that later grew out of the ambush in the Gorbeau house established that, when the police raided the garret, they found a large sou that had been cut and worked in a peculiar way. This piece was one of those marvels of prison craftsmanship, created by the patience of galley convicts in darkness and for dark purposes—marvels that are really nothing more than tools for escape. These ugly yet delicate products of extraordinary skill stand to a jeweler's work as the metaphors of slang stand to poetry. There are Benvenuto Cellinis in the galleys, just as there are Villons in language. A desperate man who longs for freedom can sometimes, without tools, or sometimes with nothing more than an ordinary knife with a wooden handle, saw a sou into two thin plates, hollow them out without damaging the stamped design, and cut a groove around the edge so that the two plates can be joined again. It can be screwed together and unscrewed whenever needed; it is a box. Inside this box he hides a watch spring, and that watch spring, used properly, can cut through heavy chains and iron bars. The unfortunate convict appears to possess only a sou; in fact, he possesses liberty. It was a large sou of this kind that the police found under the bed near the window during their later search. They also found a tiny blue-steel saw that fit inside the sou.

The prisoner had probably still had that sou piece on him when the ruffians searched him. He must have managed to hide it in his hand, and later, once his right hand was free, unscrewed it and used it like a saw to cut the cords that bound him. That would explain the faint sound and the barely noticeable movements Marius had seen.

Because he could not bend down without giving himself away, he had not cut the bonds around his left leg.

The ruffians had recovered from their first shock.

“Don’t worry,” Bigrenaille said to Thénardier. “He’s still caught by one leg, and he can’t get away. I’ll answer for that. I tied that paw myself.”

Meanwhile, the prisoner began to speak:

“You are wretches, but my life is not worth defending. If you think you can force me to speak, make me write what I do not choose to write, or make me say what I do not choose to say—”

He rolled up his left sleeve and added:

“Look here.”

At the same moment, he stretched out his arm and pressed the glowing chisel, which he held in his left hand by the wooden handle, against his bare flesh.

The flesh could be heard crackling as it burned, and the smell peculiar to torture chambers filled the hovel.

[Illustration: Red Hot Chisel]

Marius staggered back in utter horror. Even the ruffians shuddered. Yet hardly a muscle in the old man’s face moved, and while the red-hot iron sank into the smoking wound, he kept his beautiful gaze fixed on Thénardier. There was no hatred in it. His suffering seemed to disappear into a calm, almost majestic serenity.

In great and noble natures, when the body and the senses revolt under physical pain, the soul bursts forth and shows itself on the brow, just as mutiny among soldiers forces the captain to appear.

“Wretches!” he said. “Be no more afraid of me than I am of you!”

Then he tore the chisel from the wound and hurled it through the open window. The horrible glowing tool vanished into the night, spinning as it flew, and landed far away on the snow.

The prisoner went on:

“Do whatever you want with me.” He was disarmed.

“Grab him!” said Thénardier.

Two of the thugs put their hands on his shoulders, and the masked man with the ventriloquist’s voice stationed himself in front of him, ready to crush his skull at the slightest movement.

At the same moment, Marius heard, below him at the foot of the partition and so close that he could not see who was speaking, this whispered exchange:

“There’s only one thing left to do.”

“Cut his throat.”

“That’s right.”

It was husband and wife consulting together.

Thénardier walked slowly to the table, opened the drawer, and took out the knife. Marius gripped the handle of his pistol in torment. Never had he been so torn. For the past hour, two

voices had been speaking in his conscience: one ordering him to honor his father's last wishes, the other urging him to save the prisoner. Those two voices kept up the struggle without pause, and it tortured him unbearably. Until then, he had clung to a vague hope that he might find some way to reconcile those two duties, but no possible solution had appeared.

But the danger was immediate, and there was no more time to delay. Thénardier stood a few steps from the prisoner, thinking.

Marius cast a frantic glance around him, making that last automatic search for some desperate way out. Suddenly, a shiver ran through him.

At his feet, on the table, a bright beam of full moonlight lit up what seemed to be a sheet of paper, as if pointing it out to him. On it he read the following line, written that very morning in large letters by the elder of the Thénardier girls:

“The Bobbies Are Here.”

An idea flashed through Marius’ mind. This was the device he had been searching for, the answer to the terrible problem that had been tormenting him: to spare the murderer and save the victim.

He knelt on his commode, stretched out his arm, grabbed the sheet of paper, quietly chipped off a piece of plaster from the wall, wrapped the paper around it, and threw the whole thing through the crack into the middle of the den.

Not a moment too soon. Thénardier had overcome his last fear—or his last hesitation—and was moving toward the prisoner.

“Something’s falling!” cried Thénardier’s wife.

“What is it?” her husband asked.

The woman sprang forward, picked up the piece of plaster, and handed it to her husband.

“Where did this come from?” Thénardier demanded.

“Good heavens!” his wife exclaimed. “Where do you think it came from? Through the window, of course.”

“I saw it go by,” said Bigrenaille.

Thénardier quickly unfolded the paper and held it up to the candle.

“It’s in Éponine’s handwriting. Damn!”

He signaled to his wife, who hurried over, showed her the line written on the sheet of paper, and then added in a low voice:

“Quick! The ladder! Let’s leave the bait in the trap and get out of here!”

“Without cutting that man’s throat?” Thénardier’s wife asked.

“There’s no time.”

“By what way?” Bigrenaille asked.

“Through the window,” Thénardier replied. “Since Ponine threw the stone through the window, that means the house isn’t being watched on that side.”

The masked man with the ventriloquist’s voice set his huge key down on the floor, lifted both arms into the air, and opened and closed his fists three times in quick succession without saying a word.

It was a signal, like the order to clear the decks for action on a ship.

The ruffians holding the prisoner let him go. In an instant, the rope ladder was unrolled outside the window and firmly hooked to the sill with two iron hooks.

The prisoner paid no attention to what was happening around him. He seemed to be dreaming, or praying.

As soon as the ladder was in place, Thénardier cried:

“Come on! The bourgeoise first!”

He lunged straight for the window.

But just as he was about to swing a leg over the sill, Bigrenaille grabbed him roughly by the collar.

"No such luck—come on, you old cur, after us!"

"After us!" the ruffians shouted.

"You're children," said Thénardier. "We're wasting time. The police are right behind us."

"Fine," said the ruffians, "let's draw lots to see who goes down first."

Thénardier cried out:

"Are you mad? Are you crazy? What a bunch of fools! You want to waste time? Draw lots? With a wet finger, with a short straw, with names written down and tossed into a hat—"

"Would you like my hat?" a voice cried from the doorway.

They all spun around. It was Javert.

He stood there with his hat in his hand, holding it out to them with a smile.

CHAPTER XXI—ONE SHOULD ALWAYS BEGIN BY ARRESTING THE VICTIMS

At nightfall, Javert had stationed his men and hidden himself among the trees on the Rue de la Barrière-des-Gobelins facing the Gorbeau house, on the far side of the boulevard. He had begun by "opening his pockets" and stuffing into them the two young girls assigned to watch the approaches to the den. But he had managed to "cage" only Azelma. Éponine was not at her post; she had vanished, and he had not been able to catch her. Then Javert fixed his position and waited, listening for the agreed signal. The coming and going of the fiacres had greatly unsettled him. At last he grew impatient, and, sure there was a nest there, sure he was in luck, having recognized many of the ruffians who had gone in, he finally decided to go upstairs without waiting for the pistol shot.

You will remember that he had Marius' passkey.

He had arrived at exactly the right moment.

The terrified thugs threw themselves at the weapons they had dropped in every corner when they fled. In less than a second, the seven men, dreadful to look at, had formed a defensive group: one with a meat cleaver, another with a key, another with a club, and the rest with shears, pincers, and hammers. Thénardier gripped his knife. Madame Thénardier seized an enormous paving stone from the corner by the window, where her daughters had been using it as a footstool.

[Illustration: She Snatched Up a Paving Stone]

Javert put his hat back on and stepped a couple of paces into the room, his arms folded, his cane tucked under one arm, and his sword still sheathed.

“Stop there,” he said. “You won’t be going out the window. You’ll go through the door. It’s healthier that way. There are seven of you and fifteen of us. Let’s not start grappling like men from Auvergne.”

Bigrenaille pulled out a pistol he had hidden under his blouse and placed it in Thénardier’s hand, whispering in his ear:

“It’s Javert. I don’t dare shoot at that man. Do you?”

“Of course!” Thénardier replied.

“Then shoot.”

Thénardier took the pistol and aimed it at Javert.

Javert, who stood only three paces away, fixed his eyes on him and merely said:

“Go on, don’t shoot. It will misfire.”

Thénardier pulled the trigger. The pistol misfired.

“Didn’t I tell you!” Javert exclaimed.

Bigrenaille threw his club down at Javert’s feet.

“You’re the emperor of devils! I surrender.”

“And the rest of you?” Javert asked the other thugs.

They answered:

“We surrender too.”

Javert spoke again calmly:

“Good. Very good. I told you so. You’re fine fellows.”

“I ask only one thing,” said Bigrenaille. “Don’t refuse me tobacco while I’m in prison.”

“Granted,” said Javert.

Then he turned and called out behind him:

“Come in now!”

At Javert’s call, a squad of policemen with swords drawn and officers armed with clubs and cudgels rushed in. They seized the ruffians and pinned their arms.

This crowd of men, lit only by a single candle, filled the den with shifting shadows.

“Put handcuffs on all of them!” shouted Javert.

“Come on!” cried a voice that was not a man’s, though no one would have called it a woman’s voice either.

Madame Thénardier had planted herself in one corner of the window, and it was she who had just let out that roar.

The policemen and officers drew back.

She had flung off her shawl but kept on her bonnet. Her husband was crouching behind her, almost hidden under the shawl she had thrown aside. She shielded him with her body while raising a paving stone over her head, like a giantess about to hurl a rock.

“Watch out!” she shouted.

Everyone fell back toward the corridor. A wide empty space opened up in the middle of the garret.

Madame Thénardier glanced at the ruffians who had let themselves be tied up and muttered in a hoarse, guttural voice:

“Cowards!”

Javert smiled and stepped into the open space that Madame Thénardier was glaring at hungrily.

“Don’t come near me,” she cried, “or I’ll crush you.”

“What a grenadier!” Javert exclaimed. “You’ve got a beard like a man, mother, but I’ve got claws like a woman.”

And he kept moving forward.

Madame Thénardier, wild-haired and terrifying, planted her feet wide apart, leaned back, and hurled the paving stone at Javert’s

head. Javert ducked. The stone flew over him, smashed into the wall behind him, knocked off a huge chunk of plaster, then bounced from corner to corner around the hovel, now luckily almost empty, before coming to rest at Javert's feet.

At that same moment, Javert reached the Thénardier couple. One of his large hands came down on the woman's shoulder, the other on her husband's head.

"The handcuffs!" he shouted.

The policemen came in all at once, and within seconds Javert's order had been carried out.

Thénardier's wife, stunned, stared at her bound hands and at her husband, who had fallen to the floor, and cried out through her tears:

"My daughters!"

"They're in the jug," said Javert.

Meanwhile, the officers had spotted the drunken man asleep behind the door and were shaking him awake:

He woke up, stammering:

"Is it all over, Jondrette?"

"Yes," Javert replied.

The six bound ruffians were on their feet, still wearing the same ghostly look; three were smeared with black, and three still had their masks on.

"Keep your masks on," said Javert.

Then, looking them over like a Frederick II reviewing a parade at Potsdam, he said to the three “chimney-builders”:

“Good day, Bigrenaille! Good day, Brujon! Good day, Deuxmilliards!”

Then he turned to the three masked men and said to the one 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 noticed the ruffians’ prisoner, who had not said a word since the police came in and had kept his head bowed.

“Untie the gentleman,” said Javert, “and don’t let anyone leave!”

With that, he sat down with regal composure at the table, where the candle and writing materials still lay, took a stamped sheet from his pocket, and began writing his report.

After writing the opening lines—the standard formulas that never change—he looked up:

“Let the gentleman whom these gentlemen tied up step forward.”

The policemen looked around.

“Well,” said Javert, “where is he?”

The ruffians’ prisoner, M. Leblanc, M. Urbain Fabre, the father of Ursule or the Lark, had vanished.

The door was under guard, but the window was not. As soon as he got free of his bonds, and while Javert was writing his report, he took advantage of the confusion, the crowd, the darkness, and a moment when no one was watching him to leap out the window.

One of the officers rushed to the window and looked out. He saw no one below.

The rope ladder was still swaying.

“Damn!” Javert muttered through his teeth. “He must have been the most important one of them all.”

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

The day after these events in the house on the Boulevard de l'Hôpital, a child who seemed to be coming from the direction of the Austerlitz bridge was making his way up the alley on the right toward the Barrière de Fontainebleau.

Night had fallen completely.

The boy was pale and thin, dressed in rags, wearing linen trousers in the middle of February, and singing at the top of his lungs.

At the corner of the Rue du Petit-Banquier, a bent old woman was picking through a pile of trash by the light of a streetlamp. As the child passed, he bumped into her, then jumped back and cried out:

"Hey! I thought it was a huge, huge dog!"

He said the word _huge_ the second time with a mocking rise in his voice that could fairly be shown in capitals: "a huge, HUGE dog."

The old woman straightened up in a rage.

"You filthy brat!" she grumbled. "If I hadn't been bent over, I know exactly where I'd have planted my foot on you."

The boy was already far off.

“Kisss! kisss!” he shouted. “After that, I don’t think I was wrong!”

The old woman, almost choking with anger, now stood fully upright, and the red glow of the lantern lit her deathly face, carved into sharp lines and wrinkles, with crow’s-feet running down to the corners of her mouth.

Her body disappeared into the darkness, and only her head could be seen. She looked like a mask of old age carved by a beam of light out of the night.

The boy looked her over.

“Madame,” he said, “does not have the kind of beauty that appeals to me.”

Then he went on his way and picked up his song again:

“Le roi Coupdesabot S’en allait à la chasse, À la chasse aux corbeaux—”

After these three lines, he stopped. He had reached No. 50-52, and when he found the door locked, he began hammering at it with loud, heroic kicks that suggested more about the man’s shoes he was wearing than the child’s feet he actually had.

Meanwhile, the very old woman he had met at the corner of the Rue du Petit-Banquier came hurrying up behind him, shouting noisily and waving her arms with wild exaggeration.

“What’s going on? What’s going on? Good Lord! He’s smashing the door in! He’s bringing the whole house down!”

The kicking went on.

The old woman shouted at the top of her lungs.

“Is this how people treat buildings nowadays?”

Suddenly she stopped.

She had recognized the gamin.

“What! So it’s that little wretch!”

“Why, it’s the old lady,” said the boy. “Good day, Bougonmuche. I’ve come to see my ancestors.”

The old woman answered with a twisted grimace and an astonishing burst of hatred, made all the harsher by her weakness and ugliness, though unfortunately it was wasted in the dark:

“There’s no one here.”

“Bah!” the boy shot back. “Where’s my father?”

“At La Force.”

“Really now! And my mother?”

“At Saint-Lazare.”

“Fine! And my sisters?”

“At the Madelonettes.”

The boy scratched his head behind one ear, stared at Ma’am Bougon, and said:

“Ah!”

Then he spun around on his heel. A moment later, the old woman, still standing on the doorstep, heard him singing in his clear young voice as he disappeared beneath the black elm trees in the winter 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

Volume IV—Saint-Denis

[Illustration: Frontispiece, Volume Four]

[Illustration: Title Page, Volume Four]

THE IDYLL IN THE RUE PLUMET AND THE EPIC IN THE RUE SAINT-DENIS

CHAPTER I—WELL CUT

The years 1831 and 1832, directly linked to the July Revolution, make up one of the strangest and most striking moments in history. They stand like two mountains between the ranges that came before and after. They possess a revolutionary grandeur. You can make out precipices there. The social masses, the very foundations of civilization, the solid structure of layered and interlocking interests, the age-old outlines of old France—all of these appear and vanish from one moment to the next through the storm clouds of systems, passions, and theories. These appearances and disappearances have been called movement and resistance. And at times, truth—the daylight of the human soul—can be seen shining through.

This remarkable period is clearly bounded, and it is now far enough behind us that even today we can make out its main lines.

We shall try to do so.

The Restoration was one of those in-between periods that are hard to define, full of weariness, buzzing, murmuring, sleep, and uproar, and amounting to nothing more than a great nation reaching a stopping place.

These periods have a character of their own, and they mislead politicians who want to turn them to their advantage. At first, the nation asks only for rest. It longs for one thing only: peace. It has just one ambition: to be small—that is, to remain quiet. We have had more than enough of great events, great risks, great

adventures, and great men; thank God, we have seen them piled above our heads. We would trade Caesar for Prusias, and Napoleon for the King of Yvetot. “What a good little king he was!” We have been marching since daybreak, and now we have reached evening after a long, exhausting day. We made our first stop with Mirabeau, the second with Robespierre, the third with Bonaparte. We are worn out. Everyone asks for a bed.

When devotion grows tired, heroism grows old, ambition is satisfied, and fortunes are secured, what do they seek, ask for, beg for, and plead for? A refuge. And they find it. They settle into peace, calm, and leisure, and they are content. But at the same time, certain facts emerge, demand to be acknowledged, and knock at the door as well. These facts are the results of revolutions and wars. They are real, they exist, they have the right to take their place in society, and they do take that place. Most of the time, facts are the household stewards and quartermasters who do nothing but prepare lodging for principles.

This, then, is what philosophical politicians see:

At the very moment when weary men ask for rest, accomplished facts ask for guarantees. Guarantees are to facts what rest is to men.

This is what England demanded from the Stuarts after the Protectorate; this is what France demanded from the Bourbons after the Empire.

These guarantees are a necessity of the age. They must be granted. Princes may seem to "grant" them, but in reality it is

the force of circumstances that gives them. This is a profound truth, and a useful one to understand—a truth the Stuarts did not grasp in 1662, and the Bourbons did not even glimpse in 1814.

The destined family that returned to France when Napoleon fell had the fatal simplicity to believe that it was giving these rights itself, and that whatever it gave it could take back. It believed that the House of Bourbon possessed divine right, that France possessed nothing, and that the political rights granted in Louis XVIII's charter were merely one branch of that divine right, detached by the House of Bourbon and graciously handed to the people until the day the King might choose to reclaim them. Yet the House of Bourbon should have understood, from the resentment stirred up by this so-called gift, that it had not truly come from them.

This house treated the nineteenth century with bad grace. It reacted sourly to every sign of the nation's growth. To use a simple word—a popular word, and a true one—it looked sullen. The people saw it.

It believed it was strong because the Empire had been swept away before it like a piece of stage scenery. It did not see that it had been brought in the same way. It did not understand that it, too, was in the hand that had removed Napoleon.

It believed it had roots because it belonged to the past. It was wrong. It was part of the past, but France itself was the whole past. The roots of French society were not planted in the Bourbons, but in the nation. Those hidden, living roots made up

not the right of one family, but the history of a people. They were everywhere except beneath the throne.

For France, the House of Bourbon was the illustrious and blood-stained knot in her history, but it was no longer the main force in her destiny or the necessary foundation of her politics. France could do without the Bourbons; she had already done without them for twenty-two years. Continuity had been broken, and they did not realize it. How could they have realized it, when they imagined that Louis XVII was reigning on the 9th of Thermidor, and that Louis XVIII was reigning at the battle of Marengo? Never, since history began, had princes been so blind in the face of facts and of the share of divine authority that facts contain and proclaim. Never had that earthly claim called the right of kings denied so completely the higher right from above.

This fatal mistake led that family to lay its hand once again on the guarantees “granted” in 1814, on the concessions, as it called them. A sad thing, indeed. What it called its concessions were our victories; what it called our encroachments were our rights.

When it believed its moment had come, the Restoration, thinking itself victorious over Bonaparte and firmly rooted in the country—in other words, believing itself strong and secure—suddenly chose its course and made its move. One morning it stood before France and, raising its voice, challenged the nation's collective claim and each citizen's individual right to sovereignty and liberty. In other words, it denied the nation what made it a nation, and the citizen what made him a citizen.

This was the basis of those famous measures known as the ordinances of July. The Restoration fell.

It fell deservedly. Still, we admit that it was not completely opposed to every kind of progress. Great things were accomplished with it still in place.

Under the Restoration, the nation became used to calm public debate, something it had lacked under the Republic, and to dignity in peace, which had been missing under the Empire. A France that was free and strong offered an encouraging sight to the other peoples of Europe. Under Robespierre, the Revolution had spoken; under Bonaparte, the cannon had spoken; under Louis XVIII and Charles X, it was intelligence that had its turn to speak. The wind died down, and the torch was lit again. On the highest heights, the clear light of the mind could be seen shining. It was a magnificent, useful, and delightful sight. For fifteen years, those great principles—so old to the thinker and so new to the statesman—could be seen working in complete peace in the public square: equality before the law, liberty of conscience, liberty of speech, liberty of the press, and the opening of all offices to all talents. So it continued until 1830.

The Bourbons were an instrument of civilization that broke in the hands of Providence.

The fall of the Bourbons had a kind of grandeur, though not on their side—on the nation's. They left the throne with dignity, but without real authority. Their descent into darkness was not one of those solemn vanishings that leave a deep shadow across history. It had neither the ghostly calm of Charles I nor Napoleon's eagle-like cry. They left, and that was all. They gave up the crown and kept no halo around it. They were respectable, but they were not majestic. To some extent, they lacked the grandeur that misfortune can give. During the voyage from Cherbourg, Charles X had a round table cut into a square one, and seemed more concerned with endangered court etiquette than with the monarchy collapsing around him. That loss of stature saddened loyal men who loved them personally, and serious men who honored their line. The people, meanwhile, were admirable. One morning the nation was attacked with weapons in what was almost a royal uprising, yet it felt its own strength so fully that it did not give way to fury. It defended itself, kept its self-control, put things back in their proper order, restored government to the rule of law, sent the Bourbons into exile—alas!—and then stopped. It lifted the old king, Charles X, from beneath the canopy that had sheltered Louis XIV and gently set him on the ground. It touched the royal figures only with sadness and care. It was not one man, or a handful of men; it was France—France entire, France victorious and exhilarated by victory—yet seeming at the same time to recover its senses, and to put into action 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 used to skimming the favors of the great, and to leaping like a bird from branch to branch, from a fallen fortune to a flourishing one, to show themselves harsh toward their Prince in adversity; but as for me, the fate of my Kings, and especially of my afflicted Kings, will always be worthy of reverence.”

The Bourbons took respect with them, but not regret. As we have just said, their misfortune was greater than they were. They slowly faded into the horizon.

The July Revolution immediately found both supporters and opponents across the world. Its friends rushed toward it with joy and excitement; its enemies turned away, each following his own nature. At first, the princes of Europe—the owls startled by this dawn—shut their eyes, hurt and stunned, and opened them again only to threaten. Their fear is understandable, and their anger can be forgiven. This strange revolution had barely caused a shock. It had not even granted defeated royalty the honor of treating it like an enemy and shedding its blood. In the eyes of despotic governments, which always benefit when liberty discredits itself, the July Revolution made the mistake of being powerful while remaining humane. Yet nothing was attempted or plotted against it. Even those who were most dissatisfied, most angered, and most afraid saluted it. Whatever our selfishness or bitterness may be, a mysterious respect arises before events in which we sense the hand of someone working above mankind.

The July Revolution is the triumph of right over mere fact. That is something full of splendor.

Right overthrowing fact—that is the brilliance of the Revolution of 1830, and also the reason for its gentleness. When right triumphs, it does not need violence.

Right is what is just and true.

The nature of right is to remain forever beautiful and pure. Fact, even when it seems absolutely necessary, even when its contemporaries fully accept it, if it exists only as fact and contains too little right—or none at all—is certain, over time, to become distorted, impure, perhaps even monstrous. If anyone wants to see at a glance how ugly fact can become when viewed from centuries away, let him look at Machiavelli. Machiavelli is not an evil genius, or a demon, or a petty and cowardly writer; he is simply fact. And he is not only the Italian fact; he is the European fact, the fact of the sixteenth century. He appears hideous, and he is, when set before the moral idea of the nineteenth century.

This conflict between right and fact has existed since society began. To end this duel, to unite pure idea with human reality, to let right peacefully enter fact and fact enter right—that is the task of sages.

CHAPTER II—POORLY STITCHED

But the work of wise men is one thing, and the work of clever men is another. The Revolution of 1830 came to an abrupt stop.

As soon as a revolution reaches shore, the skilful hurry to arrange the shipwreck.

In our century, the skilful have given themselves the title of statesmen, so that the word _statesmen_ has gradually become almost a slang term. In fact, we must remember that wherever there is nothing but skill, there is bound to be pettiness. To say “the skilful” is much the same as saying “the mediocre.”

In the same way, to say “statesmen” is sometimes almost the same as saying “traitors.” If we are to believe the skilful, revolutions like the Revolution of July are like severed arteries and must be tied off at once. The right that has just been proclaimed so grandly is already in danger. So, once right has been firmly established, they say the state must be strengthened. Once liberty has been secured, attention must turn to power.

At this point, the wise have not yet broken with the skilful, but they are beginning to grow suspicious. Power—very well. But first, what is power? Second, where does it come from? The skilful seem not to hear this quiet objection, and they go on with their maneuvers.

According to politicians, who are adept at disguising useful fictions as necessities, the first need of a people after a revolution—when that people belongs to a monarchical continent—is to secure a dynasty for itself. In this way, they say, peace can follow a revolution—that is, time to bind our wounds and repair the house. The dynasty hides the scaffolding and screens the ambulance. But it is not always easy to obtain a dynasty.

If it is absolutely necessary, the first man of genius—or even the first man of fortune—who happens to appear is enough to manufacture a king. In the first case, you have Napoleon; in the second, Iturbide.

But the first family that comes along is not enough to create a dynasty. A line must have at least some measure of antiquity, and the wrinkles of centuries cannot be improvised.

If we adopt the statesmen's point of view, while making every necessary allowance, what qualities does a king gain after a revolution? He may be a revolutionary, and it is useful for him to be one. In other words, he should personally have taken part in the revolution. He should have helped it along. He should either have compromised himself in it or distinguished himself through it. He should have touched the axe or wielded the sword in it.

What qualities should a dynasty have? It should be national; that is, revolutionary from a distance, not because of acts it has committed, but because of the ideas it has accepted. It should be made of the past and therefore be historic. It should also be made of the future and therefore be sympathetic.

All this explains why the early revolutions were satisfied with finding a man, such as Cromwell or Napoleon, and why the second revolution insisted on finding a family, such as the House of Brunswick or the House of Orleans.

Royal houses are like those Indian fig-trees whose branches bend down to the earth, take root, and become fig-trees themselves. Each branch can become a dynasty, on one condition only: it must bend down to the people.

Such is the theory of the skilful.

This, then, is the great art: to make success sound a little like catastrophe, so that even those who profit from it will tremble at it as well; to mix fear into every step forward; to widen the curve of transition until progress is slowed; to dim that dawn; to denounce and cut back the harsh force of enthusiasm; to smooth every angle and clip every nail; to pad triumph; to muffle right; to wrap the giant people in flannel and put it to bed as quickly as possible; to prescribe a diet for that excess of health; to treat Hercules like a convalescent; to water down the event with expedients; to offer spirits thirsting for the ideal a nectar diluted with medicine; to guard against too much success; to cast a shadow over the revolution.

In 1830, this theory was put into practice, just as it had already been in England in 1688.

1830 was a revolution stopped halfway. It was half progress, a kind of half-right. But logic does not recognize the “almost,” any more than the sun recognizes the candle.

Who stops revolutions halfway? The bourgeoisie?

Why?

The bourgeoisie is interest that has been satisfied. Yesterday it was desire; today it is abundance; tomorrow it will be overfull and weary of itself.

What happened in 1814 after Napoleon happened again in 1830 after Charles X.

People have tried, wrongly, to turn the bourgeoisie into a separate class. The bourgeoisie is simply the satisfied part of the people. The bourgeois is the man who now has time to sit down. A chair is not a caste.

But if people want to sit down too soon, they can stop the very progress of the human race. This has often been the bourgeoisie's failing.

A mistake does not make someone a class. Selfishness is not one of society's official divisions.

We should also be fair to selfishness. After the shock of 1830, the condition that the part of the nation called the bourgeoisie longed for was not inertia mixed with indifference and laziness, with a touch of shame. It was not sleep, which implies a temporary forgetting open to dreams. It was a halt.

The word halt carries a strange double meaning, almost a contradiction: troops still on the march—that is, movement—and yet a stop—that is, rest.

A halt is a chance to recover strength. It is rest, but armed and watchful. It is an achieved position that sets sentries and stays on guard.

A halt assumes there was a battle yesterday and that there will be another tomorrow.

It was the dividing line between 1830 and 1848.

What we are calling combat could also be called progress.

So the bourgeoisie, like the statesmen, needed a man who could express this idea of Halt. An Although-Because. A mixed figure who meant both revolution and stability—in other words, someone who could strengthen the present by clearly showing that the past and the future were compatible.

That man had "already been found." His name was Louis Philippe d'Orleans.

The 221 made Louis Philippe king. Lafayette took charge of the coronation.

He called it _the best of republics_. Paris City Hall took the place of the Cathedral of Rheims.

This replacement of a full throne with a half-throne was "the work of 1830."

Once the clever men had finished, the enormous flaw in their solution became clear. They had done all this outside the limits of absolute right. Absolute right cried out, "I protest!" Then, terrible as it is to say, it withdrew into the darkness.

CHAPTER III—LOUIS PHILIPPE

Revolutions have a terrible arm and a fortunate hand: they strike hard and choose well. Even when they are incomplete, corrupted, misused, and reduced to the status of a lesser revolution, like the Revolution of 1830, they almost always keep enough providential clarity to avoid going entirely astray. Their eclipse is never a surrender.

Still, let us not boast too much; revolutions can also be mistaken, and serious errors have occurred.

Let us return to 1830. Even in its deviation, 1830 was fortunate. In the system that called itself order after the revolution had been cut short, the King was more than a mere king. Louis Philippe was an unusual man.

The son of a father to whom history will grant some mitigating circumstances, though he himself deserves esteem just as much as that father deserved blame, he possessed every private virtue and many public ones. He took care of his health, his fortune, his person, and his affairs. He knew the value of a minute, though not always the value of a year. He was sober, calm, peaceable, and patient: a good man and a good prince. He slept with his wife, and in his palace servants were assigned the task of showing the bourgeois the marital bed—a display of respectable domesticity that had become useful after the earlier branch of the family had made such public displays of illegitimacy. He knew all the languages of Europe and, more

rarely, all the languages of interest and advantage, and he spoke them all. He was an admirable representative of the middle class, yet he rose above it and was greater than it in every way. He had excellent judgment, while still valuing the blood he came from. Above all, he relied on his own worth, and on the matter of his lineage he was very exact, declaring himself Orleans, not Bourbon. Entirely the first Prince of the Blood Royal while he was still only a Serene Highness, he became, from the day he was king, an open bourgeois. He was expansive in public and brief in private. He was said, though never proved, to be miserly. At heart, however, he was one of those economical men who can easily be lavish when it suits their inclination or their duty. He was educated, though not deeply moved by literature; a gentleman, though not a chevalier; simple, calm, and strong; adored by his family and household. He was a captivating talker and a clear-eyed statesman, inwardly cold, ruled by immediate interest, always governing at close range, incapable of both resentment and gratitude. He used superiority over mediocrity without mercy, and he was skilled at getting parliamentary majorities to silence those obscure unanimities that mutter beneath thrones. He was open, sometimes recklessly so, yet marvellously skillful even in that recklessness. He was fertile in expedients, appearances, and masks, making France fear Europe and Europe fear France. He unquestionably loved his country, but he preferred his family. He exercised more domination than authority, and more authority than dignity. That tendency has the unhappy quality of turning everything toward success in a way that allows cunning and does not entirely reject baseness; but it also has the valuable effect of

sparing politics violent shocks, the state fractures, and society catastrophes. He was meticulous, exact, watchful, attentive, shrewd, and tireless. At times he contradicted himself and gave the lie to his own words. He was bold against Austria at Ancona, stubborn against England in Spain, bombarded Antwerp, and paid off Pritchard. He sang the Marseillaise with conviction. He was inaccessible to discouragement, weariness, the love of the beautiful and the ideal, daring generosity, Utopia, chimæras, anger, vanity, and fear. He possessed every form of personal bravery: a general at Valmy, a soldier at Jemappes, attacked eight times by regicides and always smiling. Brave as a grenadier and courageous as a thinker, he was uneasy only before the possibility of a European upheaval, and he was not suited to great political adventures. He was always ready to risk his life, never his work. He hid his will inside influence so that he might be obeyed as an intelligence rather than as a king. He had observation, not foresight. He paid little attention to minds, but he knew men—that is, he needed to see in order to judge. He had quick, penetrating common sense, practical wisdom, easy speech, and a prodigious memory. He drew on that memory constantly, his only point of resemblance to Cæsar, Alexander, and Napoleon. He knew deeds, facts, details, dates, and proper names, but he was ignorant of tendencies, passions, the different kinds of genius in the crowd, the inner aspirations, the hidden and obscure uprisings of souls—in a word, everything that might be called the invisible currents of conscience. He was accepted on the surface, but he was little in harmony with the deeper France beneath. He escaped difficulties by sheer tact. He governed too much and not enough. He was his own

first minister. He excelled at turning the smallness of realities into an obstacle against the vastness of ideas. He combined a real creative power for civilization, order, and organization with an indescribable spirit of legal maneuvering and quibbling: the founder and lawyer of a dynasty, with something of Charlemagne and something of an attorney. In short, he was a lofty and original figure, a prince who knew how to create authority despite France's uneasiness and power despite Europe's jealousy. Louis Philippe will be counted among the eminent men of his century, and he would rank among the most illustrious rulers in history if he had loved glory just a little more, and if his sense of greatness had matched his sense of usefulness.

Louis Philippe had been handsome, and even in old age he kept a certain grace. The nation did not always approve of him, but the masses always did; he had appeal. He had a natural gift for winning people over. He lacked majesty. Though he was a king, he wore no crown, and though he was an old man, he had no white hair. His manners belonged to the old regime, while his habits belonged to the new. He was a blend of nobleman and bourgeois that suited 1830. Louis Philippe was transition on the throne. He had kept the old pronunciation and the old spelling, and used them in the service of modern opinions. He loved Poland and Hungary, but he wrote _les Polonois_ and 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 to chapel a little, never hunted, and never went to the opera. Sacristans, hunting attendants, and ballet dancers could

not corrupt him; this was part of his bourgeois popularity. He had no heart. He went out with an umbrella under his arm, and for a long time that umbrella was part of his halo. He was a little of a mason, a little of a gardener, and something of a doctor. He once bled a postilion who had fallen from his horse. Louis Philippe no more went about without his lancet than Henri IV went without his dagger. The Royalists mocked this ridiculous king, the first who had ever shed blood in order to heal.

When it comes to the complaints against Louis Philippe, one distinction must be made. Some charges belong to royalty, some to the reign, and some to the King; these are three separate columns, and they do not come to the same total. The confiscation of democratic right; progress reduced to a secondary concern; the violent suppression of street protests; the military crushing of insurrections; uprisings put down by force; the Rue Transnonain; courts-martial; the real country absorbed by the legal country, shared out among three hundred thousand privileged people—these were the acts of royalty. Belgium refused; Algeria conquered with excessive harshness and, as in the English case in India, with more barbarism than civilization; faith broken with Abd-el-Kader; Blaye; Deutz bought; Pritchard paid—these were the acts of the reign. The policy that was more domestic than national was the King's own doing.

As will be seen, once this proper distinction is made, the charge against the King is reduced.

This was his great failing: in the name of France, he was too modest.

Where did this failing come from?

We will explain it.

Louis Philippe was too much of a fatherly king. That careful nurturing of his family, with the aim of founding a dynasty, made him fearful of everything and unwilling to be disturbed. From that came an excessive timidity, which offended a people whose civic tradition was the Fourteenth of July and whose military tradition was Austerlitz.

Moreover, once we set aside the public duties that had to come first, Louis Philippe's deep affection for his family was deserved, because the family deserved it. That household was worthy of admiration. Virtue lived there alongside talent. One of Louis Philippe's daughters, Marie d'Orleans, gave her family name a place among artists, just as Charles d'Orleans had given it a place among poets. She turned her soul into a marble statue that she called Jeanne d'Arc. Two of Louis Philippe's daughters drew this praise from Metternich: "They are young people such as are rarely seen, and princes such as are never seen."

This, without concealment and without exaggeration, is the truth about Louis Philippe.

To be the prince of Equality, to embody in his own person the contradiction between the Restoration and the Revolution, to have that unsettling revolutionary side which becomes reassuring once it holds power—that was Louis Philippe's great

advantage in 1830. Never had a man fit an event more completely. The two merged into one, and the embodiment was complete. Louis Philippe was 1830 made flesh. He also had one powerful qualification for the throne: exile. He had been outlawed, a wanderer, and poor. He had lived by his own work. In Switzerland, this heir to the richest princely estates in France sold an old horse to get bread. At Reichenau, he taught mathematics, while his sister Adelaide did wool work and sewing. Memories like these, attached to a king, filled the bourgeoisie with enthusiasm. With his own hands, he had helped tear down the iron cage of Mont-Saint-Michel, built by Louis XI and used by Louis XV. He had been Dumouriez's companion and Lafayette's friend. He had belonged to the Jacobin Club. Mirabeau had slapped him on the shoulder. Danton had said to him, "Young man!" At the age of twenty-four, in '93, when he was still M. de Chartres, he watched the trial of Louis XVI from the back of a box—the man so aptly called _that poor tyrant_. The Revolution, with its blind insight, shattered royalty in the King and the King with royalty, almost without noticing the man himself in its fierce destruction of the idea. In the vast storm of the Assembly-Tribunal, amid the public anger as it questioned him, with Capet not knowing how to answer, with that royal head wavering in alarm and bewilderment under that dark breath—through that catastrophe, in which there was a kind of relative innocence on every side, among those who condemned as well as the man condemned—he had watched it all. He had stared into that dizzying scene. He had seen the centuries summoned before the bar of the Assembly-Convention. Behind Louis XVI, behind

that unfortunate passer-by made to bear the blame, he had seen the true terrible culprit, the monarchy, rise out of the shadows. And in his soul there remained a respectful fear of those immense acts of popular justice, almost as impersonal as the justice of God.

The Revolution left an enormous mark on him. Its memory stayed with him like a living impression of those great years, down to the smallest detail. One day, in front of a witness whose testimony we cannot question, he corrected from memory the entire section under the letter A in the alphabetical list of the Constituent Assembly.

Louis Philippe was a king of broad daylight. During his reign, the press was free, the tribune was free, and conscience and speech were free. The September laws are there for all to see. Though he fully understood how light steadily eats away at privilege, he left his throne exposed to it. History will give him credit for that fidelity.

Louis Philippe, like all historical figures who have passed from the stage, is now being judged by the conscience of humanity. But his case has so far reached only the lower court.

The hour when history speaks in its own free and venerable voice has not yet come for him. The time has not arrived to deliver a final judgment on this king. Even the stern and distinguished historian Louis Blanc has recently softened his first verdict. Louis Philippe was chosen by those two almosts— known as the 221 and 1830—that is, by a half-Parliament and a half-revolution. In any case, from the higher standpoint

philosophy must take, we cannot judge him here, as the reader has already seen, except with certain reservations made in the name of the absolute democratic principle. In the eyes of the absolute, apart from these two rights—the right of man first, and the right of the people second—everything is usurpation. But even now, after making those reservations, this much can be said: taken as a whole, and however he may be viewed, Louis Philippe, considered in himself and from the standpoint of human goodness, will remain, to use the old language of ancient history, one of the best princes ever to sit on a throne.

What can really be held against him? The throne. Take away Louis Philippe the king, and the man remains. And the man was good. At times, he was good enough to be admirable. Often, in the midst of his most serious concerns, after a day spent struggling with all the diplomacy of Europe, he would return to his rooms at night exhausted and half asleep—and what would he do? He would take up a death sentence and spend the night reviewing a criminal case. He thought it mattered to stand firm against Europe, but that it mattered even more to save a man from the executioner. He stubbornly held to his view against his keeper of the seals. He fought the guillotine step by step against the crown attorneys, those “chatterers of the law,” as he called them. Sometimes a whole stack of sentences covered his table, and he examined every one. It pained him to give up these wretched condemned men. One day he said to the same witness we mentioned earlier, “I saved seven last night.” In the early years of his reign, the death penalty was practically abolished, and putting up a scaffold was an act of violence against the King. When the Grève disappeared with the elder

branch, a bourgeois place of execution was created under the name of the Barrière-Saint-Jacques. “Practical men” insisted on the need for a quasi-legitimate guillotine, and this was one of the victories of Casimir Périer, who represented the narrow side of the bourgeoisie, over Louis Philippe, who represented its liberal side. Louis Philippe annotated Beccaria in his own hand. After the Fieschi machine, he cried out, “What a pity I was not wounded! Then I might have pardoned!” On another occasion, referring to the resistance of his ministry, he wrote about a political criminal, one of the most generous figures of our time: “His pardon is granted; it only remains for me to obtain it.” Louis Philippe was as gentle as Louis IX and as kind as Henri IV.

To our mind, in history—where kindness is the rarest of treasures—the man who is kind almost ranks above the man who is great.

Louis Philippe has been judged severely by some, and perhaps too harshly by others. So it is only natural that a man—himself little more than a shadow now—who knew that king should speak in his defense before history. Whatever else this testimony may be, it is plainly and above all completely disinterested. An epitaph written by a dead man is sincere. One shade may comfort another. To share the same darkness gives one the right to praise the other. No one is likely ever to say of two tombs in exile, “This one flattered the other.”

CHAPTER IV—CRACKS BENEATH THE FOUNDATION

At the point when the drama we are telling is about to descend into the depths of one of the tragic shadows hanging over the beginning of Louis Philippe's reign, it is necessary to avoid any misunderstanding. This book must therefore offer some explanation about this king.

Louis Philippe came into royal power without violence and without any direct action of his own. He owed it to a revolutionary change that was clearly different from the Revolution's true aim, and in it he, the Duc d'Orléans, had taken no personal initiative. He had been born a prince, and he believed he had been chosen king. He had not imposed this role on himself or seized it; it had been offered to him, and he had accepted it. He was convinced—wrongly, certainly, but sincerely—that the offer was lawful and that accepting it was his duty. So he held power in good faith. And we say, in all honesty, that since Louis Philippe possessed the throne in complete good faith, and democracy opposed him in good faith, the terror unleashed by these social conflicts should be blamed on neither the King nor democracy. A clash of principles is like a clash of natural forces. The ocean defends water, the hurricane defends air, the King defends royalty, and democracy defends the people. The relative thing, monarchy, resists the absolute thing, the republic. Society bleeds in this struggle, but what causes its suffering today will later help secure its safety. In any case, those who fight are not the ones to blame. One of the two

sides is plainly mistaken. Right is not like the Colossus of Rhodes, standing on two shores at once, with one foot in the republic and the other in royalty. It is indivisible, and it stands entirely on one side. But those who are in error are sincerely so. A blind man is no more a criminal than a Vendean is a ruffian. Let us therefore blame these terrible collisions on the fatal course of events alone. Whatever these storms may be, human beings are never fully responsible for them.

Let us complete this account.

The government of 1840 had a hard life from the very beginning. It was born yesterday and had to fight today.

Almost as soon as it was in place, it could already feel vague strains pulling at the July system, so recently set up and still so fragile.

Resistance appeared the very next day; perhaps it had begun the evening before. Month by month, hostility grew, moving from hidden discontent into the open.

As we have said, kings outside France gave the July Revolution very little approval, and in France itself people interpreted it in many different ways.

God reveals his visible will to humanity through events, like an obscure text written in a mysterious language. People immediately begin translating it, but their translations are rushed, inaccurate, and full of mistakes, omissions, and nonsense. Very few minds understand the divine language. The wisest, calmest, and deepest thinkers decipher it slowly, and by

the time they arrive with their version, the work is already done; twenty translations are already circulating in the public square. Each one that remains gives rise to a party, and each misunderstanding creates a faction. Every party believes it alone has the true text, and every faction believes it possesses the light.

Power itself is often just another faction.

In revolutions, there are always swimmers trying to move against the current; these are the old parties.

The old parties, which clung to hereditary rule by the grace of God, believed that since revolutions arose from the right to revolt, people also had the right to revolt against them. That is an error. In these revolutions, the one who revolts is not the people, but the king. Revolution is exactly the opposite of revolt. Every revolution, because it is a natural outcome, carries its own legitimacy within it. False revolutionaries may dishonor that legitimacy, but it remains even when defiled, and it survives even when stained with blood.

Revolutions do not come from accident, but from necessity. A revolution is a return from what is false to what is real. It exists because it must.

Even so, the old legitimist parties attacked the Revolution of 1830 with all the force that false reasoning can produce. Errors make excellent weapons. Since the revolution had no armor, they struck skillfully at its weak point: its lack of logic. They attacked it through its monarchy. They cried out to it, “Revolution, why this king?” Factions are blind men who still

manage to aim well.

The republicans raised the same cry. But from them, it was logical. What was blindness in the legitimists was clear sight in the democrats. 1830 had betrayed the people, and the angry democracy reproached it for that.

Caught between pressure from the past and pressure from the future, the July regime struggled to hold its ground. It stood for a moment caught in conflict—on one side with the long centuries of monarchy, on the other with eternal justice.

At the same time, and beyond all this, 1830 was no longer a revolution; it had become a monarchy, and so it was forced to take its place before all Europe. Preserving peace only made matters more complicated. A peace imposed against reason is often more burdensome than war. Out of this hidden conflict—always gagged, yet always growling—came armed peace, that ruinous device of civilization which, in the machinery of the European cabinets, carried suspicion within itself. The July monarchy rose up despite the restraints of those European cabinets. Metternich would gladly have kept it tightly checked. Driven forward in France by progress, it in turn drove forward the monarchies, those laggards of Europe. After first being towed along, it began to do the towing.

Meanwhile, within France itself, questions of pauperism, the proletariat, wages, education, penal servitude, prostitution, the condition of women, wealth, misery, production, consumption, distribution, exchange, money, credit, the rights of capital, and the rights of labor multiplied above society like a terrible

downward slope.

Outside the political parties properly so called, another movement began to appear. Philosophical unrest answered democratic unrest. The educated classes felt shaken, just as the masses did—differently, but no less deeply.

Thinkers reflected while the ground beneath them—that is, the people—shook with revolutionary currents, trembling under their feet with vague, indescribable convulsions. These dreamers, some alone, others gathered in groups and almost in fellowship, examined social questions in a peaceful yet profound way. They were like impassive miners, calmly driving their tunnels into the depths of a volcano, scarcely disturbed by the muffled rumbling and the furnaces they glimpsed below.

This calm was one of the finest sights in that turbulent age.

These men left the question of rights to the political parties; they concerned themselves with the question of happiness.

What they wanted to draw out of society was human well-being.

They elevated practical concerns—agriculture, industry, and commerce—almost to the level of religion. In civilization, as it has taken shape partly by God’s command and largely through human action, interests come together, join, and merge until they form a true bedrock, according to a dynamic law patiently studied by economists, those geologists of politics. The men who gathered under different names, but who can all be described by the general title of socialists, tried to break through that rock and make it gush with the living waters of

human happiness.

Their writings covered everything, from the question of the scaffold to the question of war. To the rights of man proclaimed by the French Revolution, they added the rights of woman and the rights of the child.

The reader will not be surprised that, for various reasons, we do not attempt a thorough theoretical treatment here of the questions raised by socialism. We limit ourselves to pointing them out.

Setting aside cosmogonic visions, dreams, and mysticism, all the problems the socialists set themselves can be reduced to two main ones.

First problem: producing wealth.

Second problem: sharing it.

The first problem includes the question of work.

The second includes the question of wages.

The first problem concerns how forces are put to use.

The second concerns how enjoyment is distributed.

The proper use of forces produces public power.

A sound distribution of enjoyments produces individual happiness.

By good distribution, we mean not equal distribution but equitable distribution.

When these two things are combined—public power outwardly and individual happiness inwardly—the result is social prosperity.

Social prosperity means a happy man, a free citizen, and a great nation.

England solves the first of these two problems. It is excellent at creating wealth, but poor at distributing it. A solution that works on only one side inevitably drives the country to two extremes: enormous wealth and extreme misery. Some have every comfort, while the rest—the people—go without. Privilege, exception, monopoly, and feudalism grow out of labor itself. It is a false and dangerous condition, one that feeds either public power or private misery, and roots the State in the suffering of the individual. It is a badly formed greatness, made up of every material element, with no moral element in it.

Communism and agrarian law believe they solve the second problem. They are wrong. Their kind of division destroys production. Equal partition wipes out competition, and therefore labor as well. It is a division like a butcher's cut: it kills what it divides. So these supposed solutions cannot detain us. Destroying wealth is not the same as distributing it.

To be solved properly, the two problems must be solved together. They must be joined and made into one.

If you solve only the first of the two problems, you will become Venice or England. Like Venice, you will have an artificial power; or like England, a material power. You will be the wicked rich man. You will die by violence, as Venice died, or collapse

through bankruptcy, as England will. And the world will let die and fall anything that is nothing but selfishness, anything that represents for the human race neither a virtue nor an idea.

It should be clearly understood here that by the words Venice and England, we mean not the peoples themselves but social structures—the oligarchies imposed on nations, 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 these two problems: encourage the wealthy while protecting the poor. Reduce suffering. End the unjust practice by which the strong exploit the weak. Restrain the wicked jealousy of the man still rising against the man who has already arrived. Match wages to labor fairly and precisely. Join free and compulsory education to every child's development, and make science the foundation of human dignity. Develop minds while keeping hands at work. Be, at once, a powerful nation and a family of happy people. Make property democratic, not by abolishing it, but by making it universal, so that every citizen, without exception, may own something. This is easier than people generally think. In short, learn how to create wealth and how to distribute it, and you will gain both moral and material greatness. Then you will deserve to call yourself France.

This is what socialism was saying, apart from and above the few sects that had gone astray. This is what it was seeking in reality, and what it was sketching in people's minds.

Efforts worthy of admiration! Sacred attempts!

These doctrines, these theories, these forms of resistance; the unexpected need for a statesman to reckon with philosophers; the confused signs of change that we could already glimpse; the need to create a new political system, one that would remain in harmony with the old world without clashing too sharply with the new revolutionary ideal; a situation in which Lafayette had to be used to defend Polignac; the sense of progress showing through the revolt; the chambers and the streets; the rival forces that had to be balanced around him; his faith in the Revolution; perhaps, in the end, a vague and undefined resignation born from a dim acceptance of a higher final right; his desire to remain true to his class; his domestic temperament; his sincere respect for the people; his personal honesty—all this weighed on Louis Philippe, almost painfully. And there were moments when, strong and courageous as he was, he felt overwhelmed by the difficulties of being a king.

Beneath his feet he felt a formidable breaking apart. Yet it was not a collapse into dust, for France was more truly France than ever.

Shadows piled up along the horizon. A strange darkness crept steadily closer, spreading little by little over people, over things, over ideas—a darkness born of hatreds and systems. Everything that had been hastily smothered was stirring and fermenting. At times, an honest man’s conscience could breathe again, so oppressive was the air, thick with half-truths mixed with lies. In that social unease, minds trembled like leaves before a storm. The tension was so charged that, now and then,

the first passerby, a complete stranger, seemed to bring light. Then the dim gloom closed in again. From time to time, deep, muffled rumblings revealed how much thunder the cloud was holding.

Barely twenty months had passed since the July Revolution, and 1832 began with a sense that something threatening was about to happen.

The people were in distress. Workers had no bread. The last Prince de Condé had vanished into the shadows. Brussels was driving out the Nassaus just as Paris had driven out the Bourbons. Belgium offered itself to a French Prince and gave itself to an English Prince. Behind us stood the Russian hatred of Nicolas. To the south were demons: Ferdinand in Spain, Miguel in Portugal, and the ground shaking in Italy. Metternich was stretching his hand over Bologna. France was speaking sharply to Austria at Ancona. In the north, no one knew what sinister hammering was sealing Poland into her coffin. All across Europe, irritated eyes were fixed closely on France. England, an ally under suspicion, stood ready to shove whatever was tottering and throw itself upon whatever fell. The peerage hid behind Beccaria to refuse the law four heads. The fleurs-de-lys had been erased from the King’s carriage. The cross had been torn from Notre Dame. Lafayette had been diminished. Laffitte had been ruined. Benjamin Constant was dead in poverty. Casimir Périer was dead, worn out by power. Political and social sickness broke out at the same time in the kingdom’s two capitals: one the city of thought, the other the city of labor. In Paris, there was civil war; in Lyons, servile war. In both cities,

the same furnace glow burned. A crater-red light shone on the people’s brow. The South had been driven into fanaticism. The West was unsettled. The Duchesse de Berry was in la Vendée. Plots, conspiracies, uprisings, and cholera added the dark roar of events to the dark roar of ideas.

CHAPTER V—THE FACTS FROM WHICH HISTORY GROWS, AND WHICH HISTORY OVERLOOKS

Toward the end of April, everything had grown more intense. The unrest had reached a boiling point. Since 1830, small, scattered uprisings had kept breaking out here and there. They were quickly put down, but they always flared up again, a sign of the great fire smoldering underneath. Something terrible was being prepared. People could catch glimpses of a possible revolution, though its shape was still unclear and only dimly lit. France was watching Paris; Paris was watching the Faubourg Saint-Antoine.

The Faubourg Saint-Antoine, already glowing dully, was beginning to boil over.

[Illustration: A Street Orator]

The wine shops in the Rue de Charonne were, strange as the pairing may sound when applied to wine shops, both serious and turbulent.

There, the government itself was openly being challenged. People publicly debated the question of whether to fight or remain quiet. In back rooms, workingmen were made to swear that they would rush into the street at the first alarm, and “that they would fight without counting the number of the enemy.” Once a man had taken this pledge, someone seated in the corner of the wine shop would “assume a sonorous tone” and

say, “You understand! You have sworn!”

Sometimes they went upstairs to a private room on the first floor, and scenes almost masonic took place there. The initiates were made to swear “to render service to himself as well as to the fathers of families.” That was the formula.

In the taprooms, “subversive” pamphlets were read. “They treated the government with contempt,” says a secret report from that time.

Words like these could be heard there:

“I don’t know the names of the leaders. We ordinary people will 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 to buy powder and shot.”

Another man said, “I’m not asking for six months. I’m not even asking for two. In less than a fortnight, we’ll be on equal footing with the government. With twenty-five thousand men, we can stand against them.” Another said, “I don’t sleep at night, because I spend the whole night making cartridges.” From time to time, men “with a bourgeois look, and wearing good coats” came in and “caused a stir.” With an air of authority, they shook hands with $_{\text{the}}$ most important people_ and then left. They never stayed more than ten minutes. Meaningful remarks passed quietly from one to another: “The plot is ready; everything is arranged.” “It was whispered by everyone there,” to use the exact words of one of those present. The excitement ran so high that one day a worker cried out, in front of the whole

wine-shop, “We have no weapons!” One of his comrades answered, “The soldiers do!”—echoing, without realizing it, Bonaparte’s proclamation to the army in Italy. “When they had something more secret in hand,” one report adds, “they did not tell one another.” It is hard to see what they could possibly have kept secret after all they said.

These gatherings were sometimes held regularly. At some of them, there were never more than eight or ten people, and it was always the same group. At others, anyone who wanted could come in, and the room became so crowded that people had to stand. Some came out of enthusiasm and passion; others simply because it lay on their way to work_. As in the Revolution, there were patriotic women in some of these wine-shops who embraced newcomers.

Other striking facts also came to light.

A man would walk into a shop, have a drink, and leave, saying, “Wine-seller, the revolution will pay what it owes you.”

Revolutionary agents were chosen in a wine-shop opposite the Rue de Charonne. The voting was done with ballots dropped into their caps.

Workers met at the home of a fencing master who taught in the Rue de Cotte. There was a display of weapons there, made up of wooden broadswords, canes, clubs, and foils. One day, the buttons were taken off the foils.

A worker said, “There are twenty-five of us, but they don’t count me, because they think of me as a machine.” Later, that

machine became Quenisset.

The vague things that had been building for some time gradually took on a strange, hard-to-describe notoriety. One woman sweeping her doorstep said to another, “For a long time now, a powerful force has been busy making cartridges.” In the streets, people could see proclamations addressed to the National Guard in the departments. One of them was signed: _Burtot’, wine merchant_.

One day, a man with a beard shaped like a collar and an Italian accent climbed onto a stone post outside a wine shop in the Marché Lenoir and read aloud a strange document that seemed to come from some hidden power. Crowds gathered around him and applauded.

The passages that moved the crowd most were copied down and passed along. “—Our doctrines are being held back, our proclamations torn down, our bill-posters watched and thrown into prison.”—“The recent collapse in cotton has brought many intermediaries over to us.”—“The future of nations is being forged in our obscure ranks.”—“These are the fixed terms: action or reaction, revolution or counter-revolution. For in our age, we no longer believe in either inertia or immobility. The question is this: for the people or against the people. There is no other.”—“On the day we no longer suit you, destroy us; but until that day, help us move forward.” All this happened in broad daylight.

Other acts, even bolder, seemed suspicious to the people precisely because they were so bold. On April 4, 1832, a

passerby climbed onto the post at the corner where Rue Sainte-Marguerite turns and shouted, “I am a Babouvist!” But beneath Babeuf, the people thought they could smell Gisquet.

Among other things, this man said:

“Down with property! The opposition on the left is cowardly and treacherous. When it wants to seem righteous, it preaches revolution. It acts democratic so it will not be beaten, and royalist so it will not have to fight. The republicans are beasts with feathers. Distrust the republicans, citizens of the laboring classes.”

“Be quiet, citizen spy!” shouted a workman.

That shout brought the speech to an end.

Mysterious incidents took place.

At nightfall, a laborer met a “very well-dressed man” near the canal. The man said to him, “Where are you going, citizen?” “Sir,” the laborer replied, “I do not have the honor of knowing you.” “Even so, I know you very well.” Then the man added, “Don’t be afraid. I am an agent of the committee. You are suspected of not being entirely reliable. You know that if you reveal anything, an eye is on you.” He then shook the laborer’s hand and walked away, saying, “We shall meet again soon.”

The police, who were on high alert, gathered strange snippets of conversation not only in the wine shops but in the streets as well.

“Get yourself admitted as soon as possible,” a weaver said to a cabinetmaker.

“Why?”

“Because there is going to be a shot fired.”

Two ragged passersby exchanged these striking replies, clearly charged with the spirit of Jacquerie:

“Who governs us?”

“Monsieur Philippe.”

“No, it is the bourgeoisie.”

The reader would be mistaken to think that we use the word _Jacquerie_ in a negative sense. The Jacques were the poor.

On another occasion, two men were overheard saying to each other as they passed, “We have a good plan of attack.”

Of a private conversation between four men crouching in a ditch along the circuit of the Barrière du Trône, only the following words were caught:

“Everything possible will be done to keep him from walking through Paris any longer.”

Who was this _he_? A threatening obscurity hung over it.

The “principal leaders,” as people in the faubourg called them, kept themselves apart. It was believed that they met to confer in a wine shop near Point Saint-Eustache. A certain Aug—, head of the aid society for tailors in Rue Mondétour, was said to serve as the central intermediary between the leaders and the

Faubourg Saint-Antoine.

Even so, these leaders were always surrounded by deep mystery, and no established fact can lessen the strange arrogance of this reply later given by a man on trial before the Court of Peers:

“Who was your leader?”

“I knew of none, and I acknowledged none.”

There was nothing but words—clear enough, but vague. Sometimes it was just idle talk, rumors, or hearsay. Then other signs began to appear.

In the Rue de Reuilly, a carpenter was nailing boards to a fence around a lot where a house was being built. On that site, he found a torn piece of a letter on which the following lines could still be read:

The committee must take steps to stop recruitment in the sections for the various societies.

And as a postscript:

We have learned that there are five or six thousand guns in the Rue du Faubourg-Poissonnière, No. 5 [bis], in the house of a gunsmith in that courtyard. The section has no weapons.

What alarmed the carpenter and led him to show the matter to his neighbors was that, a few steps farther on, he picked up another paper, torn like the first and even more revealing. We reproduce it here in facsimile because of the historical interest of these strange documents:

[Illustration]

+———+ | Q | C | D | E | Memorize this list. When you have done so, | | | | | | tear it up. The men admitted will do the same | | | | | | after you have passed their orders on to them. Health and | | | | | | Fraternity, u og a′ fe L. | +———+

Only later did the people who had known about this discovery at the time learn the meaning of those four capital letters: _quinturions′ centurions, decurions, éclaireurs_ [scouts]. They also learned the meaning of the letters _u og a′ fe_, which were a date and meant April 15, 1832. Under each capital letter were written names followed by highly revealing notes. For example: Q. _Bannerel_. 8 guns, 83 cartridges. A reliable man.—C. _Boubière_. 1 pistol, 40 cartridges.—D. _Rollet_. 1 foil, 1 pistol, 1 pound of powder.—E. _Tessier_. 1 sword, 1 cartridge-box. Precise.—_Terreur_. 8 guns. Brave, etc.

At last, still within the same enclosure, the carpenter found a third paper. Written in pencil, but quite clearly, it contained this kind of mysterious list:

Unity: 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, town crier of the Populaire.

The honest middle-class man into whose hands this list fell understood what it meant. It seems that the list gave the full names of the sections in the fourth arrondissement of the Society of the Rights of Man, along with the names and addresses of the section leaders. Today, now that these once-obscure facts belong only to history, we can publish them. It should also be noted that the Society of the Rights of Man appears to have been founded after the date when this paper was discovered. Perhaps this was only a preliminary draft.

Still, when all the remarks, words, written notes, and material evidence are considered together, the facts begin to emerge.

In the Rue Popincourt, in the house of a dealer in bric-a-brac, the authorities seized seven sheets of gray paper, each folded the same way, lengthwise and then into four parts. Inside these sheets were twenty-six squares of the same gray paper, folded like cartridges, and a card bearing the following words:

Saltpeter . . . . . 12 ounces. Sulphur . . . . . 2 ounces. Charcoal . . . . . 2 and a half ounces. Water . . . . . 2 ounces.

The seizure report stated that the drawer gave off a strong smell of gunpowder.

A mason, on his way home from work, left a small package behind on a bench near the Austerlitz Bridge. The package was taken to the police station. When it was opened, they found two printed dialogues signed Lahautière, a song titled “Workers, unite,” and a tin box filled with cartridges.

One workman, drinking with a companion, had the other feel him to see how warm he was; the man felt a pistol under his waistcoat.

In a ditch along the boulevard, between Père-Lachaise and the Barrière du Trône, in the most deserted stretch, some children at play found a bag hidden under a heap of shavings and scraps of wood. Inside were a bullet mold, a wooden tool for making cartridges, a wooden bowl containing grains of hunting powder, and a small cast-iron pot with clear signs that lead had been melted in it.

At five o’clock in the morning, police agents suddenly and unexpectedly entered the home of a man named Pardon, who later belonged to the Barricade-Merry section and was killed in the insurrection of April 1834. They found him standing beside his bed, holding cartridges he was in the middle of making.

Around the hour when working men go to sleep, two men were seen meeting between the Barrière Picpus and the Barrière Charenton, in a narrow lane between two walls, near a wine shop with a “Jeu de Siam” in front of it. One man pulled a pistol from under his blouse and handed it to the other. As he did so, he noticed that sweat from his chest had dampened the powder. He primed the pistol and added more powder to what

was already in the pan. Then the two men went their separate ways.

A man named Gallais, who was later killed in the Rue Beaubourg during the April affair, boasted that he had seven hundred cartridges and twenty-four flints in his house.

One day the government was warned that weapons and two hundred thousand cartridges had just been distributed in the faubourg. The following week, thirty thousand more cartridges were handed out. What was remarkable was that the police could not seize a single one.

An intercepted letter said: “The day is not far off when, within four hours by the clock, eighty thousand patriots will be under arms.”

All this unrest was out in the open, and one might almost say peaceful. The coming insurrection was calmly gathering force in full view of the government. This still-underground crisis, already becoming visible, lacked none of its strange features. The bourgeois spoke quietly with the working classes about what was being prepared. They asked, “How is the uprising coming along?” in the same tone they might have used to say, “How is your wife?”

A furniture dealer on Rue Moreau asked, “So, when are you going to launch the attack?”

Another shopkeeper said:

“The attack will happen soon.”

“I know. 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 that he was willing to sell for seven francs.

Meanwhile, revolutionary fever was spreading. No part of Paris or France was untouched by it. The pulse was beating everywhere. Like the membranes that certain inflammations produce in the human body, a network of secret societies began to spread across the country. From the Association of the Friends of the People, which was both public and secret at the same time, came the Society of the Rights of Man. It too dated itself from one of the orders of the day, _Pluviôse, Year 40 of the republican era_. It was destined to outlive even the ruling of the Court of Assizes that ordered its dissolution, and it did not hesitate to give its sections striking names such as these:

Pikes. Alarm bell. Signal cannon. Phrygian cap. January 21. The beggars. The vagabonds. Forward march. Robespierre. Level. Ça Ira.

The Society of the Rights of Man gave rise to the Society of Action. These were impatient men who broke away and rushed ahead. Other associations tried to recruit from the great parent societies. Members of the sections complained that they were being pulled apart. So there was the Gallic Society, and the organizing committee of the Municipalities. There were also associations for the freedom of the press, for individual liberty, and for educating the people against indirect taxes. Then came the Society of Equal Workingmen, which split into three groups: the levellers, the communists, and the reformers. Then there

was the Army of the Bastilles, a kind of cohort organized on a military model: four men under a corporal, ten under a sergeant, twenty under a sub-lieutenant, forty under a lieutenant. Never more than five men knew one another. It was a creation in which caution was joined to boldness, and it seemed marked by the genius of Venice.

At the top stood the central committee, with two branches: the Society of Action and the Army of the Bastilles.

A royalist group, the Chevaliers of Fidelity, tried to stir things up among these republican connections. It was condemned and rejected there.

The Paris societies had branches in the main cities—Lyons, Nantes, Lille, and Marseilles—and each had its own Society of the Rights of Man, Charbonnière, and Free Men. All of them also had a revolutionary society called the Cougourde. We have already mentioned that name.

In Paris, the Faubourg Saint-Marceau was just as alive with agitation as the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, and the schools were no less stirred than the working-class districts. A café in the Rue Saint-Hyacinthe and the wine shop of the Seven Billiards, in the Rue des Mathurins-Saint-Jacques, served as gathering places for the students. The Society of the Friends of the A B C, connected with the Mutualists of Angers and the Cougourde of Aix, met, as we have seen, at the Café Musain. These same young men also gathered, as we have already said, at a restaurant wine shop in the Rue Mondétour called Corinthe. These meetings were secret. Others were as public as they

could possibly be, and the reader can judge their boldness from these fragments of an examination in one of the later 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 was.” “You are too young to have decided on your own to take the bold step of attacking the government. Where did your instructions come from?” “From the central committee.”

At the same time, they were quietly undermining the army as well as the general population, as was later shown by the operations of Béford, Luneville, and Épinard. They were counting on the fifty-second regiment, the fifth, the eighth, the thirty-seventh, and the twentieth light cavalry. In Burgundy and in the southern towns, they planted the liberty tree—that is, a pole topped with a red cap.

That was the situation.

As we said at the beginning, the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, more than any other part of the population, sharpened this situation and made its force felt. That was the vulnerable spot. This old faubourg, crowded like an anthill, hardworking, brave, and angry like a hive of bees, trembled with expectation and a hunger for upheaval. Everything there was in motion, though regular work never stopped. It is hard to convey the look of that place, at once vivid and dark. In this faubourg, sharp misery lies hidden beneath attic roofs; there too are rare and passionate minds. It is especially dangerous when extreme poverty and extreme intelligence meet.

The Faubourg Saint-Antoine had other reasons to tremble as well, for it felt the aftershocks of commercial crises, bankruptcies, strikes, slow periods of work, and all the disruptions that come with great political unrest. In times of revolution, misery is both cause and effect. The blow it strikes comes back upon itself. This population, rich in proud virtue and capable of the greatest stored-up energy, always ready to take up arms, quick to erupt, resentful, deep, and hollowed out from within, seemed only to be waiting for a spark to fall. Whenever certain sparks drift across the horizon, driven by the wind of events, one cannot help thinking of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine and of the terrible chance that placed, at the very gates of Paris, that powder magazine of suffering and ideas.

The wine shops of the _Faubourg Antoine_, which have already appeared more than once in the scenes the reader has just gone through, have a historical fame of their own. In troubled times, people become drunk there more on words than on wine.

A kind of prophetic spirit, a breath from the future, moves through them, filling hearts and enlarging souls. The cabarets of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine are like those taverns on Mount Aventine, built over the Sibyl's cave and open to its deep, sacred breath—taverns where the tables were almost tripods, and where people drank what Ennius calls _sibylline wine_.

The Faubourg Saint-Antoine is a reservoir of people. Revolutionary upheavals open cracks there through which popular sovereignty seeps out. That sovereignty may do harm; it can be mistaken, like any other power. But even when it goes astray, it remains great. We may say of it, as of the blind Cyclops, _Ingens_.

In '93, depending on whether the idea in the air was good or evil, depending on whether it was a day of fanaticism or of enthusiasm, the Faubourg Saint-Antoine sent out either savage legions or heroic bands.

Savage. Let us explain that word. When those rough men, in the first days of the revolutionary upheaval—ragged, shouting, wild, clubs raised, pikes held high—threw themselves against old Paris in a storm, what did they want? They wanted oppression to end, tyranny to end, the rule of the sword to end. They wanted work for men, education for children, dignity and kindness for women, liberty, equality, fraternity, bread for all, ideas for all, the transformation of the world into an Eden. They wanted progress. And that holy, gentle, good thing—progress—they demanded in a terrible way, because they had been driven to extremes, half naked, clubs in hand, roaring as they came. They were savages, yes—but savages

born of civilization.

They proclaimed justice with fury. They wanted, however fearfully, to force the human race into paradise. They looked like barbarians, but they were saviors. They demanded light while wearing the face of night.

Opposed to these men—ferocious, yes, and frightening, but ferocious and frightening in the service of good ends—stand other men: smiling, embroidered, gilded, ribboned, decorated with stars, dressed in silk stockings, white plumes, yellow gloves, and polished shoes. Leaning their elbows on a velvet table beside a marble mantel, they gently insist on good manners and the preservation of the past: the Middle Ages, divine right, fanaticism, innocence, slavery, the death penalty, and war. In soft voices and with perfect politeness, they praise the sword, the stake, and the scaffold. As for us, if we had to choose between the barbarians of civilization and the civilized men of barbarism, we would choose the barbarians.

But, thank Heaven, there is still another choice. We do not have to plunge straight down, whether forward or backward.

We want neither despotism nor terror. We want progress by a gentle slope.

God sees to that. God’s whole policy is to make the slopes less steep.

CHAPTER VI—ENJOLRAS AND HIS LIEUTENANTS

It was around this time that Enjolras, anticipating a possible catastrophe, set up a kind of secret census.

Everyone was there at a secret meeting at the Café Musain.

Enjolras said, weaving in a few half-obscure but meaningful metaphors:

“We need to know exactly where we stand and who we can rely on. If fighters are needed, we must have them ready. It never hurts to have something to strike with. People passing by are always more likely to be gored when there are bulls in the road than when there are none. So let us take stock of the herd. How many are we? There is no question of putting this off until tomorrow. Revolutionaries must always move quickly; progress has no time to waste. Let us be wary of surprises. Let us not be caught unprepared. We must inspect every seam we have stitched and make sure it holds. This matter must be settled today. Courfeyrac, you will see the polytechnic students. This is their day out. Today is Wednesday. Feuilly, you will see the men of the Glacière, will you not? Combeferre has promised me he will go to Picpus. There is a real swarm there, and an excellent one. Bahorel will visit the Estrapade. Prouvaire, the masons are growing lukewarm; you will bring us news from the lodge in the Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Honoré. Joly will go to Dupuytren’s clinical lecture and take the pulse of the medical school. Bossuet will make a round of the court and speak with the

young law graduates. I will take charge of the Cougourde myself."

"That settles everything," said Courfeyrac.

"No."

"What else is there?"

"One very important thing."

"What is it?" asked Courfeyrac.

"The Barrière du Maine," Enjolras replied.

Enjolras fell silent for a moment, as if deep in thought, then went on:

"At the Barrière du Maine there are marble workers, painters, and apprentices in sculptors' studios. They're an enthusiastic group, but they're quick to lose heart. I don't know what's been wrong with them lately. Their minds are elsewhere. Their fire is dying out. They spend their time playing dominoes. Someone urgently needs to go and talk to them a bit, and do it firmly. They meet at Richefeu's. You can find them there between twelve and one. Those embers need stirring back into flame. I had been counting on that absent-minded Marius for the job. He's a good fellow at heart, but he doesn't come around anymore. I need someone for the Barrière du Maine. I have no one."

"What about me?" said Grantaire. "I'm here."

"You?"

“Me.”

“You, teaching republicans what to think! You, rekindling hearts that have gone cold in the name of principle!”

“Why not?”

“Are you good for anything?”

“I have a vague ambition to be,” said Grantaire.

“You don’t believe in everything.”

“I believe in you.”

“Grantaire, will you do me a favor?”

“Anything. I’ll black your boots.”

“Then don’t interfere in our affairs. Go sleep off your absinthe.”

“You’re ungrateful, Enjolras.”

“You, the man to go to the Barrière du Maine! You, capable of that!”

“I’m capable of going down the Rue de Grès, crossing the Place Saint-Michel, cutting through the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, taking the Rue de Vaugirard, passing the Carmelites, turning into the Rue d’Assas, reaching the Rue du Cherche-Midi, leaving the Conseil de Guerre behind me, walking along the Rue des Vieilles-Tuileries, striding across the boulevard, following the Chaussée du Maine, passing the barrier, and going into Richefeu’s. I’m capable of that. My shoes are capable of it.”

“Do you know anything about those comrades who meet at Richefeu’s?”

“Not much. We only call each other thou.”

“What will you say to them?”

"I’ll talk to them about Robespierre, pardi! About Danton. About principles."

"You?"

"Me. But I never get my due. When I go at it, I’m formidable. I’ve read Prudhomme. I know the Social Contract. I know my Constitution of Year Two by heart. 'The liberty of one citizen ends where the liberty of another citizen begins.' Do you take me for a fool? I’ve got an old banknote of the Republic in my drawer. The Rights of Man, the sovereignty of the people, sapristi! I’m even a little of a Hébertist. I can spout the most magnificent nonsense for six straight hours, watch in hand."

"Be serious," said Enjolras.

"I am serious," Grantaire replied.

Enjolras thought for a moment, then made the gesture of a man who had come to a decision.

"Grantaire," he said gravely, "I’m willing to test you. You will go to the Barrière du Maine."

Grantaire lived in furnished rooms very near the Café Musain. He went out, and five minutes later he came back. He had gone home to put on a Robespierre waistcoat.

"Red," he said as he came in, fixing Enjolras with an intent look. Then, with the palm of his forceful hand, he pressed the two scarlet points of the waistcoat against his chest.

Then he stepped up to Enjolras and whispered in his ear:

"Don’t worry."

He shoved his hat on with determination and left.

A quarter of an hour later, the back room of the Café Musain was empty. All the Friends of the A B C had gone, each in his own direction, each to his own task. Enjolras, who had kept the Cougourde of Aix for himself, was the last to leave.

The members of the Cougourde of Aix who were in Paris at that time met on the plain of Issy, in one of the abandoned quarries so numerous on that side of Paris.

As Enjolras walked there, he reviewed the whole situation in his mind. The seriousness of events was obvious. When facts move with the heavy force that warns of a hidden social illness, the smallest complication can halt them and tie them in knots. From such moments come both ruin and rebirth. Enjolras saw a bright rising light beneath the dark edge of the future. Who knew? Perhaps the moment had arrived. Once again, the people were reclaiming their rights, and what a magnificent sight that was. The revolution was once more taking hold of France with majesty and saying to the world, “The rest tomorrow!” Enjolras was satisfied. The furnace was heating up. At that moment, he had a trail of friends spread across Paris like gunpowder. In his mind, he brought together Combeferre’s thoughtful, searching

eloquence, Feuilly's broad human enthusiasm, Courfeyrac's daring, Bahorel's smile, Jean Prouvaire's melancholy, Joly's science, and Bossuet's sarcasm into a kind of electric spark that could catch fire almost everywhere at once. Everyone to work. Surely the result would match the effort. That was good. And it made him think of Grantaire.

"Wait," he said to himself. "The Barrière du Maine won't take me much out of my way. Why not go on as far as Richefeu's? Let me see what Grantaire is doing, and how he is getting on."

The clock in the Vaugirard steeple was striking one when Enjolras reached the smoking-room at Richefeu's.

He pushed open the door and went in. Folding his arms, he let the door swing shut against his shoulders and looked at the room, full of tables, men, and smoke.

A voice burst out through the haze of smoke, then another cut across it. It was Grantaire, in conversation with an opponent.

Grantaire was sitting across from another man at a marble Saint-Anne table, scattered with bits of bran and marked with dominos. He was pounding the table with his fist, and this is what Enjolras heard:

"Double six."

"Fours."

"The brute! I've got no more."

"You're done. A two."

“Six.”

“Three.”

“One.”

“My turn.”

“Four points.”

“Not much.”

“Your turn.”

“I’ve made a terrible mistake.”

“You’re doing well.”

“Fifteen.”

“Seven more.”

“That brings me to twenty-two.” [Thoughtfully: “Twenty-two!”]

“You didn’t see that double-six coming. If I’d played it at the start, the whole game would have gone differently.”

“Another two.”

“One.”

“One! Well then, five.”

“I don’t have any.”

“It was your turn, I believe?”

“Yes.”

“Pass.”

“How lucky he is! Ah, you’re lucky! [A long pause of reflection.] Two.”

“One.”

“Neither five nor one. That’s bad news for you.”

“Domino.”

“Damn it!”

CHAPTER I—THE LARK'S MEADOW

Marius had seen the ambush come to its unexpected end, the very ambush that had led him to bring Javert there. But as soon as Javert left the building, taking his prisoners away in three hackney coaches, Marius slipped out as well. It was only nine o'clock in the evening. He went to Courfeyrac's. Courfeyrac was no longer the unshakable resident of the Latin Quarter; he had moved to the Rue de la Verrerie "for political reasons." At that time, it was one of those neighborhoods where insurrection liked to make its home. Marius said to Courfeyrac, "I've come to sleep at your place." Courfeyrac pulled one of the two mattresses off his bed, spread it on the floor, and said, "There."

At seven o'clock the next morning, Marius returned to the hovel. He paid Ma'am Bougon the quarter's rent he owed her, had his books, bed, table, commode, and two chairs loaded onto a handcart, and left without giving any forwarding address. So when Javert came back later that morning to question Marius about the events of the previous evening, he found no one there but Ma'am Bougon, who answered, "Moved away!"

Madame Bougon was convinced that Marius had been, at least to some degree, an accomplice of the robbers arrested the night before. "Who would ever have thought it?" she cried to the portresses of the neighborhood. "A young man like that, who looked like a girl!"

Marius had two reasons for moving so quickly. First, he had come to loathe that house, where he had seen up close, in its ugliest and most savage form, a social monstrosity that is perhaps even more frightening than the wicked rich man: the wicked poor man. Second, he did not want to be drawn into the lawsuit that would probably follow, or be called to testify against Thénardier.

Javert thought that the young man, whose name he had forgotten, had become frightened and run away, or perhaps had not even come home at the time of the ambush. He did make some effort to find him, however, but without success.

A month passed, then another. Marius was still staying with Courfeyrac. He had learned from a young law graduate, a regular at the courts, that Thénardier was being kept in close confinement. Every Monday, Marius had five francs delivered to the clerk's office at La Force for Thénardier.

Since Marius no longer had any money, he borrowed the five francs from Courfeyrac. It was the first time in his life that he had ever borrowed money. These regular five-franc payments were a double mystery, both to Courfeyrac, who lent them, and to Thénardier, who received them. "Who can they be for?" thought Courfeyrac. "Where can this be coming from?" Thénardier asked himself.

Moreover, Marius was heartbroken. Everything had dropped through a trapdoor once again. He could no longer see anything ahead of him. His life was buried once more in mystery, and he wandered through it blindly. For a moment, in that darkness, he

had seen close at hand the young girl he loved, the old man who seemed to be her father, those unknown figures who were his only interest and his only hope in the world. And just when he thought he was about to reach them, a gust swept all those shadows away. Not even in that terrible clash had a single spark of certainty or truth appeared. There was no basis for any guess. He no longer even knew the name he had thought he knew. It certainly was not Ursule. And the Lark was only a nickname. And what was he to think of the old man? Was he really hiding from the police? Marius remembered the white-haired workman he had met near the Invalides. It now seemed likely that the workman and M. Leblanc were the same man. So he was in disguise? That man had both heroic and questionable sides. Why had he not called for help? Why had he run away? Was he, or was he not, the young girl's father? In short, was he the man Thénardier thought he recognized? Thénardier might have been mistaken. These were all insoluble questions. Still, none of this took anything away from the angelic charm of the young girl from the Luxembourg. It was heartbreaking misery. Marius carried passion in his heart and night before his eyes. He was driven forward, pulled along, and yet unable to move. Everything had vanished except love. And even love had lost its instincts and its sudden flashes of insight. Usually, the flame that burns us also gives us a little light and throws some useful rays outward. But Marius no longer heard those silent counsels of passion. He never said to himself, "What if I went to such a place? What if I tried this or that?" The girl he could no longer call Ursule was clearly somewhere, but nothing told Marius where to look for her. His whole life was

now summed up in two words: complete uncertainty in an impenetrable fog. He still longed to see her one more time, but he no longer expected it.

To make matters worse, his poverty had returned. He could feel its icy breath right behind him, close on his heels. In the middle of all his suffering—and in fact long before this—he had stopped working, and nothing is more dangerous than work once abandoned. It is a habit that disappears easily, and is hard to recover.

A certain amount of dreaming is good, like a narcotic taken in careful doses. It soothes the fevers of a mind at work, which can sometimes be intense, and it spreads through the spirit a gentle, fresh mist that softens the harsh outlines of pure thought, fills in gaps here and there, and joins and rounds off the sharp corners of ideas. But too much dreaming drags a person under and drowns him. Woe to the thinker who lets himself slip completely from thought into reverie. He imagines he can climb back up just as easily, and tells himself that, after all, the two are the same. He is mistaken.

Thought is the labor of the mind; reverie is its pleasure. To replace thought with reverie is to mistake poison for food.

Marius had begun in just that way, as the reader will remember. Then passion came and completed the work, hurling him into chimeras with neither purpose nor bottom. After that, one no longer escapes oneself except to drift away into dreams. It is barren activity. A gulf at once turbulent and stagnant. And as work decreases, needs increase. That is a law. A man given

over to reverie is usually wasteful and lax; an unstrung mind cannot keep life within strict limits.

There is some good mixed with the evil in that way of living, for if weakness is harmful, generosity is good and wholesome. But a poor man who is generous and noble, and who does not work, is doomed. His resources run out, and his needs keep appearing.

It is a fatal slope, one that draws in the most honest and steadfast as surely as the weakest and most corrupt, and it ends in one of two pits: suicide or crime.

By going out to think day after day, one eventually reaches the day when one goes out to throw oneself into the water.

Too much reverie produces men like Escousse and Lebras.

Marius went slowly down the slope, his eyes fixed on the girl he could no longer see. What we have just said may seem strange, but it is true. The memory of someone absent lights up the darkness of the heart. The more completely that person has vanished, the more brightly the memory shines. A soul sunk in gloom and despair still sees that light on its horizon—the star of its inner night. She: that was Marius's whole thought. He thought of nothing else. In a vague way, he knew that his old coat had become impossible to wear, that his new coat was already growing shabby, that his shirts were wearing out, that his hat was wearing out, that his boots were falling apart, and he said to himself, "If only I could see her once more before I die!"

Only one sweet thought remained to him: that she had loved him, that her look had told him so, that she did not know his name but did know his soul, and that wherever she was, however mysterious the place, she might still love him. Who knew whether she was not thinking of him just as he was thinking of her? Sometimes, in those unexplainable moments known to every loving heart, when he had every reason to be sad and yet felt a dim thrill of joy, he said to himself, “Her thoughts are reaching me!” Then he added, “Perhaps my thoughts reach her too.”

He would shake his head at this illusion a moment later, yet it was still enough to send rays into his soul that sometimes looked like hope. From time to time, especially in the evening—that hour which weighs most heavily even on dreamers—he would set down in a notebook the purest, most selfless, most ideal of the reveries filling his mind. The notebook contained nothing else. He called this “writing to her.”

It should not be imagined that his mind was unbalanced. Quite the opposite. He had lost the ability to work and to move steadily toward any fixed goal, but he had become clearer-sighted and more upright than ever. By a calm and truthful, though unusual, light, Marius looked at everything before him, even the most ordinary actions and people. He judged everything fairly, with a kind of honest sadness and open disinterest. His judgment, almost completely cut off from hope, kept its distance and rose above it all.

In that state of mind, nothing escaped him and nothing misled him. At every moment, he was uncovering the very basis of life, humanity, and destiny. Happy, even in the middle of suffering, is the person to whom God has given a soul capable of both love and sorrow. Anyone who has not seen the world and the human heart in that double light has seen nothing and understands nothing true.

A soul that loves and suffers is in a sublime state.

Still, one day followed another, and nothing new appeared. It only seemed to him that the dark stretch he still had to cross was growing shorter every moment. He thought he could already see, clearly, the edge of the bottomless abyss.

“What!” he kept saying to himself. “Am I not to see her again before then?”

If you go up the Rue Saint-Jacques, leave the barrier to one side, and follow the old inner boulevard for some distance, you come to the Rue de la Santé, then the Glacière, and, a little before reaching the little river of the Gobelins, you arrive at a kind of open field. It is the only place in the long, monotonous line of Paris boulevards where Ruysdael might feel tempted to sit down.

There is something there that is hard to describe, something full of grace: a green meadow crossed by taut lines from which rags flutter as they dry in the wind; an old market-gardener’s house from the time of Louis XIII., with its large roof oddly broken by dormer windows; crumbling palisades; a little water among poplar trees; women; voices; laughter. On the horizon

rise the Panthéon, the pole of the Deaf-Mutes, and the Val-de-Grâce—black, squat, fantastical, amusing, magnificent—and, farther back, the stern square outlines of the towers of Notre Dame.

Because the place is worth seeing, no one goes there. Barely a cart or wagoner passes in fifteen minutes.

By chance, Marius's solitary walks brought him to this patch of ground near the water. That day there was a rare sight on the boulevard: a passer-by. Marius, vaguely struck by the place's almost wild beauty, asked him, "What is the name of this spot?"

The man 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 else. These sudden freezes in a reverie, brought on by a single word, do happen. All at once, the whole mind tightens around one idea and can no longer notice anything beyond it.

The Lark was the name that had taken the place of Ursule in the depths of Marius's sadness. "Wait," he said, with the kind of irrational daze that belongs to these strange inner interruptions, "this is her meadow. Now I shall find out where she lives."

It was absurd, but impossible to resist.

And every day he came back to the Lark's meadow.

CHAPTER II—HOW CRIMES BEGIN TO TAKE SHAPE IN THE BREEDING GROUND OF PRISONS

Javert's triumph in the Gorbeau hovel seemed complete, but it was not.

First of all—and this was the main cause of concern—Javert had not captured the prisoner. A murdered man who runs away is even more suspicious than the murderer, and this figure, who had been such a valuable catch for the ruffians, would probably have been just as valuable a prize for the authorities.

And besides, Montparnasse had escaped him.

They would have to wait for another chance to get their hands on that "devil's dandy." Montparnasse had in fact run into Éponine, who was keeping watch under the boulevard trees, and had led her away, preferring to play Nemorin with the daughter rather than Schinderhannes with the father. It was just as well that he did. He remained free. As for Éponine, Javert had her arrested, which was only a small consolation. Éponine had joined Azelma at Les Madelonettes.

And finally, on the way from the Gorbeau house to La Force, one of the main prisoners, Claquesous, disappeared. No one knew how it had happened; the police agents and sergeants "could not understand it at all." He seemed to have turned into vapor. He had slipped out of his handcuffs, seeped through the

cracks of the carriage, and escaped through some flaw in the fiacre. All they could say was that when they reached the prison, Claquesous was gone. Either the fairies or the police had helped him. Had Claquesous dissolved into the shadows like a snowflake in water? Had the police agents secretly cooperated? Did this man belong to the double mystery of order and disorder? Did he stand at the center of both crime and repression? Did this sphinx have its front paws in crime and its hind paws in authority? Javert would not tolerate such threats, and he would have recoiled from such compromises. But his squad included inspectors besides himself who, though they were his subordinates, may have known more than he did about the Prefecture's secrets. And Claquesous was such a villain that he might also make a very useful agent. It is excellent for ruffianism, and admirable for the police, when both keep up such close juggling relations with the night. These double-edged scoundrels do exist. However that may be, Claquesous had vanished and was never found again. Javert seemed more irritated than astonished by it.

As for Marius, "that fool of a lawyer," who had probably lost his nerve and whose name Javert had forgotten, Javert gave him very little thought. Besides, a lawyer can always be tracked down later. But was he really a lawyer after all?

The investigation had begun.

The magistrate had decided not to place one of the men from the Patron-Minette gang in solitary confinement, hoping he would start talking. This man was Brujon, the long-haired man from the Rue du Petit-Banquier. He had been allowed to move

about in the Charlemagne courtyard, and the watchers kept their eyes fixed on him.

The name Brujon is one of the memories left by La Force. In that dreadful courtyard, known as the court of the Bâtiment-Neuf (New Building), which the administration called the court Saint-Bernard and the thieves called the Fosse-aux-Lions (the Lion’s Ditch), there was a wall crusted and diseased-looking, rising on the left as high as the roofs. Near an old rusty iron door that led to the ancient chapel of the ducal residence of La Force—later turned into a dormitory for ruffians—one could still see, twelve years ago, a kind of fortress roughly scratched into 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, whom the reader glimpsed only briefly at the Gorbeau house, was a very cunning and skillful young fellow with a confused, mournful expression. It was because of that mournful look that the magistrate had released him, thinking he would be more useful in the Charlemagne yard than in solitary confinement.

Thieves do not stop practicing their trade just because they have fallen into the hands of justice. They are not thrown off by such a small obstacle. Being in prison for one crime is no reason not to begin another. They are like artists who already have one painting in the salon and are still hard at work on a new one in the studio.

Brujon seemed dazed by prison. Sometimes he could be seen standing for hours in front of the sutler's window in the Charlemagne yard, staring like a fool at the miserable price list, which began with _garlic–, 62 _centimes–, and ended with _cigar–, 5 _centimes–. Or he spent his time shivering, his teeth chattering, saying he had a fever, and asking whether any of the twenty-eight beds in the fever ward were empty.

Then, all at once, toward the end of February 1832, it was discovered that Brujon, that sleepy-looking fellow, had arranged for three different errands to be carried out by the prison messengers—not in his own name, but in the names of three of his comrades. Altogether they had cost him fifty sous, an

extravagant expense that caught the attention of the prison corporal.

An investigation was opened, and when they checked the schedule of fees posted in the convicts' parlor, they found that the fifty sous broke down like this: three errands—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 one was the most expensive on the list. Now, the homes of three particularly dangerous prowlers of the barriers were located at the Panthéon, Val-de-Grâce, and the Barrière de Grenelle: Kruideniers, also called Bizarro; Glorieux, a former convict; and Barre-Carosse. This incident drew the police's attention to them. It was believed that these men belonged to Patron-Minette; two of that gang's leaders, Babet and Gueulemer, had already been captured. The messages had been sent not to houses, but to people waiting for them in the street, so it was assumed that they contained information about some planned crime. The police had other clues as well. They arrested the three prowlers and believed they had blocked one of Brujon's schemes.

About a week after these steps had been taken, the superintendent of the watch was making his rounds one night in the lower dormitory of the Bâtiment-Neuf. He was just about to drop his chestnut into the box—this was the method used to make sure the watchmen were doing their duty on time. Every hour, a chestnut had to be dropped into each of the boxes nailed to the dormitory doors. At that moment, a watchman looked through the dormitory peephole and saw Brujon sitting

on his bed, writing something by the light of the hall lamp. The guard went in. Brujon was placed in solitary confinement for a month, but they could not get hold of what he had written. The police learned nothing more from the incident.

What is certain is that the next morning a “postilion” was thrown from the Charlemagne yard into the Lions’ Ditch, over the five-story building that separated the two courtyards.

What prisoners call a “postilion” is a small ball of bread, carefully shaped and thrown “into Ireland” — in other words, over the prison roofs from one yard to another. The term comes from the idea of going over England, from one land to another, into Ireland. The little pellet lands in the yard. Whoever picks it up opens it and finds a note addressed to a prisoner there. If another prisoner finds this treasure, he passes the note along to the person it is meant for. But if a guard finds it, or one of the secretly bought-off prisoners — called “sheep” in prisons and “foxes” in the galleys — then the note is taken to the office and handed over to the police.

This time, the postilion reached the right person, even though the man it was meant for was in solitary confinement at that very moment. That man was Babet, one of the four leaders of Patron-Minette.

Inside the postilion was a rolled-up scrap of paper with only these two lines written on it:

“Babet. There is business in the Rue Plumet. A gate opening onto a garden.”

This was what Brujon had written the night before.

Despite searches by both male and female warders, Babet managed to have the note passed from La Force to the Salpêtrière, to a “good friend” of his who was imprisoned there. That woman then passed it on to another woman she knew, a certain Magnon, who was under strong police suspicion but had not yet been arrested. The reader has already encountered Magnon by name. She had connections with the Thénardiers, which will be explained in detail later, and by going to see Éponine she could serve as the link between the Salpêtrière and Les Madelonnettes.

It so happened that at that exact time, because the investigation against Thénardier concerning his daughters lacked proof, Éponine and Azelma were released. When Éponine came out, Magnon, who was waiting at the gate of the Madelonnettes, gave her Brujon’s note for Babet and told her to investigate the matter.

Éponine went to the Rue Plumet, identified the gate and the garden, watched the house, spied, and lingered around. A few days later, she brought Magnon — who delivered in the Rue Clocheperce — a biscuit, which Magnon passed on to Babet’s mistress in the Salpêtrière. In the dark symbolism of prisons, a biscuit means: Nothing can be done.

So, less than a week later, Brujon and Babet met in the yard at La Force—one going to be questioned, the other coming back from it:

"Well?" Brujon asked. "The Rue P.?"

"Biscuit," Babet replied. And so the crime Brujon had conceived in La Force came to nothing before it was ever born.

Still, that failure had consequences, though they were quite different from what Brujon had planned. The reader will soon see what they were.

Often, when we think we are tying one thread, we are really fastening another.

CHAPTER III—AN APPARITION TO FATHER MABEUF

Marius no longer went to visit anyone, but from time to time he happened to run into Father Mabeuf.

As Marius slowly went down those sorrowful steps—the kind that might be called cellar stairs, leading to lightless places where you can hear the footsteps of the happy above—M. Mabeuf was descending on his side as well.

The _Flora_ of Cauteretz_ no longer sold at all. The indigo experiments had failed in the little garden at Austerlitz, which got poor light. M. Mabeuf could grow there only a few plants that liked shade and damp. Even so, he did not lose heart. He had secured a corner in the Jardin des Plantes, with better exposure, where he could continue his indigo trials "at his own expense." To pay for this, he had pawned the copperplates for the _Flora_. He had cut his breakfast down to two eggs, and he gave one of them to his old servant, whom he had not paid for the last fifteen months. Often, that breakfast was his only meal. He no longer wore his childlike smile. He had become gloomy and stopped receiving visitors. Marius was right not to think of going there. 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. They only exchanged a sad nod. It is heartbreaking that there comes a time when misery breaks human ties. Two men who have been friends become nothing more than strangers passing in the street.

Royol the bookseller was dead. M. Mabeuf no longer recognized his books, his garden, or his indigo as separate things; they had become the three shapes his happiness, pleasure, and hope took. That was enough for him to go on living. He said to himself, "Once I've made my blueing balls, I'll be rich. I'll get my copperplates back from the pawnshop. I'll bring my _Flora_ into fashion again with a little cunning, plenty of money, and advertisements in the newspapers. And I'll buy—I know exactly where—a copy of Pierre de Médine's _Art de Naviguer_, with woodcuts, the 1655 edition." Meanwhile, he

worked all day over his patch of indigo, and at night he came home to water his garden and read his books. At that time, M. Mabeuf was nearly eighty years old.

One evening, he saw a strange apparition.

He had come home while it was still full daylight. Mother Plutarque, whose health was failing, was sick in bed. He had eaten a bone with a little meat still clinging to it, along with a piece of bread he had found on the kitchen table, and then had sat down on an overturned stone post that served as a bench in his garden.

Near this bench stood, in the style of orchard gardens, a kind of large wooden chest made of beams and planks and badly worn with age. The ground floor was a rabbit hutch, and the upper floor a fruit closet. There was nothing in the hutch, but a few apples remained in the fruit closet—the last of the winter store.

M. Mabeuf had settled down to leaf through and read, with the help of his glasses, two books he was passionately fond of and, at his age, still deeply absorbed in. His natural shyness made him somewhat open to superstition. The first book was President Delancre's famous treatise, _De l'Inconstance des Démons_; the second was a quarto by Mutor de la Rubaudière, _Sur les Diables de Vauvert et les Gobelins de la Bièvre_. This old volume interested him even more because his garden stood on one of the places where goblins had once been said to haunt. Twilight had begun to pale the sky above and darken everything below. As he read, Father Mabeuf looked over the top of the book in his hand at his plants, especially a magnificent

rhododendron that was one of his great comforts. Four days of heat, wind, and sun had passed without a drop of rain. The stems were bending, the buds drooping, the leaves falling. Everything needed water, and the rhododendron looked particularly forlorn. Father Mabeuf was one of those people for whom plants have souls. The old man had worked all day in his indigo patch and was exhausted, but he got up, set his books on the bench, and made his way to the well, bent over and unsteady on his feet. But when he took hold of the chain, he could not pull it up enough even to unhook it. Then he turned and looked up at the sky, now filling with stars, in silent anguish.

The evening had that kind of calm that buries human troubles beneath a joy at once eternal and deeply sad. The night promised to be as dry as the day had been.

“Stars everywhere!” the old man thought. “Not the smallest cloud. Not a drop of water!”

And his head, which he had lifted for a moment, sank back onto his chest.

He lifted it again and looked once more at the sky, murmuring:

“A drop of dew! A little mercy!”

He tried again to unhook the well chain, and again he failed.

At that moment, he heard a voice say:

“Father Mabeuf, would you like me to water your garden for you?”

At that moment, a sound like a wild animal moving through the hedge reached him, and he saw a tall, slender girl step out of the bushes. She straightened up in front of him and looked at him boldly. She seemed less like a human being than like some shape that had just bloomed out of the twilight.

Before Father Mabeuf, who was easily frightened and, as we have said, quick to panic, could answer with even a single word, this strange creature—with her abrupt, jerky movements in the dark—had already unhooked the chain, lowered and pulled up the bucket, filled the watering-pot, and rushed in. The good old man watched this apparition, barefoot and wearing a torn petticoat, run through the flower-beds bringing life wherever she went. The sound of the watering-pot splashing over the leaves filled Father Mabeuf with ecstasy. It seemed to him that the rhododendron was happy again.

When the first bucket was emptied, the girl drew a second, then a third. She watered the entire garden.

As she ran along the paths, her figure showing up as a solid black shape, her thin arms waving, and her fichu hanging in rags, there was something about her that looked like a bat.

When she was done, Father Mabeuf came up to her with tears in his eyes and placed his hand on her forehead.

“God will bless you,” he said. “You are an angel, since you care for the flowers.”

“No,” she answered. “I’m the devil, but it makes no difference to me.”

The old man cried out, without waiting for or even hearing her reply:

“What a pity that I am so unhappy and so poor, and that I can do nothing for you!”

“You can do something,” she said.

“What?”

“Tell me where M. Marius lives.”

The old man did not understand. “Which Monsieur Marius?”

He lifted his dim eyes and seemed to search for something that had disappeared.

“A young man who used to come here.”

Meanwhile, M. Mabeuf searched his memory.

“Ah! yes—” he cried. “I know who you mean. Wait! Monsieur Marius—the Baron Marius Pontmercy, of course! He lives—or rather, he doesn’t live there anymore—well then, I don’t know.”

As he spoke, he bent down to train a rhododendron branch and went on:

"Wait, I know now. He often walks along the boulevard and heads toward the Glacière, on Rue Croulebarbe. The Lark’s meadow. Go there. It won’t be hard to run into him."

When M. Mabeuf stood up again, no one was there; the girl had vanished.

He was thoroughly frightened.

"Really," he thought, "if my garden hadn’t been watered, I would have thought she was a spirit."

An hour later, when he was in bed, the incident came back to him. As he drifted off, in that hazy moment when thought—like that fabulous bird that turns itself into a fish to cross the sea—gradually becomes a dream in order to pass through sleep, he said to himself in confusion:

"Truly, this is very much like what Rubaudière tells about goblins. Could it have been a goblin?"

CHAPTER IV—AN APPARITION TO MARIUS

A few days after this visit from a "spirit" to Father Mabeuf, one morning—on a Monday, the day Marius borrowed the five-franc piece from Courfeyrac for Thénardier—Marius put the coin in his pocket. Before taking it to the clerk’s office, he went out "for a little walk," hoping that afterward he would be able to work. But it was always the same. As soon as he got up, he sat down with a book and a sheet of paper to scratch out some translation. At that time, his task was to translate into French a famous dispute between German thinkers, the controversy between Gans and Savigny. He picked up Savigny, then Gans, read four lines, tried to write one, failed, saw a star between himself and the page, and got up from his chair, saying, "I’ll go out. That will cheer me up."

And off he went to the Lark’s meadow.

There, more than ever, he saw the star, and less than ever Savigny and Gans.

He came home, tried to get back to work, and failed. There was no way to tie together again any of the threads that had snapped in his mind. Then he said to himself, "I won’t go out tomorrow. It keeps me from working." And he went out every day.

He spent more time in the Lark's meadow than in Courfeyrac's rooms. That was his true address: Boulevard de la Santé, by the seventh tree from the Rue Croulebarbe.

That morning he had left the seventh tree and sat down on the parapet above the River des Gobelins. Bright sunlight filtered through the newly opened, shining leaves.

He was dreaming of "Her." Then his thoughts turned into self-reproach. He thought sadly about his idleness, about the paralysis of spirit that was steadily overtaking him, and about the darkness gathering before him so thickly that he no longer even saw the sun.

Still, through that painful tangle of vague thoughts—which was not even a true monologue, so weak had all action become in him, and so little strength he had left even for despair—sounds from the outside world reached him. Behind him, below him, and along both banks of the river, he heard the Gobelins washerwomen beating their linen. Above his head, birds chattered and sang in the elm trees. On one side was the sound of freedom, the carefree happiness of leisure with wings; on the other was the sound of labor. These two cheerful sounds made him sink into deep thought, almost into reflection.

Suddenly, in the middle of his gloomy trance, he heard a familiar voice say:

"Come on! Here he is!"

He looked up and recognized that miserable child who had come to him one morning, the older of the Thénardier

daughters, Éponine; he knew her name now. Strangely enough, she had become both poorer and prettier, two changes that had seemed beyond her power to make. She had advanced in two directions at once, toward light and toward misery. She was barefoot and in rags, just as she had been on the day she had so boldly entered his room, only now her rags were two months older, the holes were bigger, and the tatters filthier. It was the same harsh voice, the same brow darkened and lined by sunburn, the same open, wild, unsteady look. And now, even more than before, her face carried that indescribably frightened and pitiful quality that prison adds to wretchedness.

There were bits of straw and hay in her hair—not like Ophelia, driven mad by the contagion of Hamlet's madness, but simply because she had slept in the loft of some stable.

And despite everything, she was beautiful. What a star you are, O youth!

Meanwhile, she had stopped in front of Marius, a faint trace of joy on her pale face, and something like a smile.

For several moments she stood there as if she could not speak.

"So I've found you at last!" she said at length. "Father Mabeuf was right—it was on this boulevard! I've searched for you so much, if you only knew! Do you know? I was in jail. Two weeks! They let me out because there was nothing against me, and besides, I'm still under age. I'm two months short of it. Oh, how I've searched for you! For six weeks! So you don't live down there anymore?"

“No,” said Marius.

“Ah, I understand. Because of that business. Those searches are unpleasant. You moved out. Really now, why do you wear old hats like this? A young man like you ought to have good clothes. Do you know, Monsieur Marius, Father Mabeuf calls you Baron Marius, something or other. It isn’t true that you’re a baron, is it? Barons are old men. They go to the Luxembourg, in front of the château where the sun is strongest, and read the _Quotidienne_ for a sou. Once I carried a letter to a baron like that. He was more than a hundred years old. Tell me, where do you live now?”

Marius did not answer.

“Ah!” she went on. “You have a hole in your shirt. I must sew it up for you.”

She went on, her expression gradually darkening:

“You don’t seem glad to see me.”

Marius said nothing. She was silent for a moment, then cried out:

“But if I wanted to, I could make you look glad!”

“What?” Marius asked. “What do you mean?”

“Ah! You used to call me _thou_,” she shot back.

“Well then, what do you mean?”

She bit her lips. She seemed to hesitate, as though caught in some inner struggle. At last, she appeared to make up her mind.

“So much the worse—I don’t care. You look so sad, and I want to make you happy. Just promise me you’ll smile. I want to see you smile and hear you say, ‘Ah, well, that’s good.’ Poor Mr. Marius! You know, you promised you’d give me anything I wanted—”

“Yes! Just say it!”

She looked Marius straight in the eyes and said:

“I have the address.”

Marius went pale. All the blood seemed to rush back to his heart.

“What address?”

“The address you asked me to find!”

She added, as if it took effort:

“The address—you know perfectly well!”

“Yes!” Marius stammered.

“That young lady’s.”

As soon as she said the word, she let out a deep sigh.

Marius leaped down from the parapet where he had been sitting and grabbed her hand in a frenzy.

“Oh! Then take me there! Tell me! Ask anything you want of me! Where is it?”

“Come with me,” she replied. “I don’t really know the street or the number; it’s in a completely different direction from here.

But I know the house well, and I'll take you to it."

She pulled her hand away and went on in a tone that would have broken any onlooker's heart, though Marius, drunk with joy and excitement, did not feel it in the least:

"Oh, how happy you are!"

A shadow crossed Marius's face. He grabbed Éponine by the arm:

"Swear one thing to me!"

"Swear?" she said. "What does that mean? Come now—you want me to swear?"

And she laughed.

"Your father! Promise me, Éponine! Swear to me that you won't give this address to your father!"

She turned to him, looking stunned.

"Éponine! How do you know my name is Éponine?"

"Promise me what I'm asking!"

But she did not seem to hear him.

"That's lovely! You called me Éponine!"

Marius seized both her arms at once.

"But answer me, for Heaven's sake! Listen carefully to what I'm telling you, and swear to me that you will not give your father this address you know!"

“My father!” she said. “Ah, yes, my father! Don’t worry. He’s locked up. Besides, what do I care about my father?”

“But you still haven’t promised me!” Marius cried.

“Let go of me!” she said, bursting out laughing. “You’re shaking me so hard! Yes, yes, I promise! I swear it to you! What does it matter to me? I won’t tell my father the address. There! Is that enough? Is that what you wanted?”

“And not to anyone else either?” said Marius.

“Not to anyone else either.”

“Now,” Marius went on, “take me there.”

“Right away?”

“Right away.”

“Come on, then. Ah, how happy he is!” she said.

After a few steps, she stopped.

“You’re following me too closely, Monsieur Marius. Let me go on ahead, and follow me like that, without making it obvious. A fine young man like you mustn’t be seen with a woman like me.”

No words could express everything contained in that word, _woman_, as that child said it.

She went on for a dozen paces, then stopped again; Marius caught up with her. She spoke to him from the side, without turning to face him:

“By the way, you know you promised me something?”

Marius felt in his pocket. Everything he had in the world was the five francs meant for Thénardier, the father. He took them out and placed them in Éponine's hand.

She opened her fingers, let the coin drop to the ground, and looked at him darkly.

"I don't want your money," she said.

CHAPTER I—THE HOUSE WITH A SECRET

Around the middle of the last century, a chief justice in the Parliament of Paris had a mistress and kept it hidden, for in those days the great lords showed off their mistresses while the bourgeois hid them. He had a “little house” built in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, on the deserted Rue Blomet, now called Rue Plumet, not far from the place then known as _Combat des Animaux_.

The house was a one-story pavilion: two rooms on the ground floor, two bedrooms upstairs, a kitchen below, a boudoir above, and an attic under the roof. In front of it lay a garden with a large gate opening onto the street. The garden covered about an acre and a half. That was all passersby could see. But behind the pavilion was a narrow courtyard, and at the end of the courtyard stood a low building with two rooms and a cellar, arranged as a hiding place for a child and nurse if necessary. At the back, this building connected through a concealed door, opened by a hidden spring, to a long, narrow, paved, twisting passage open to the sky and enclosed by two high walls. Hidden with remarkable skill, and almost lost among garden walls and cultivated plots, the passage followed every angle and turn of the surrounding land. It ended at another door, also fitted with a secret lock, which opened a quarter of a league away, almost in another neighborhood, at the lonely end of the Rue du Babylone.

The chief justice entered by this route, so that even anyone spying on him and trailing him would only have noticed that he mysteriously went somewhere every day. They would never have guessed that going to the Rue de Babylone meant going to the Rue Blomet. By buying the land cleverly, the magistrate had been able to create a secret passage on his own property, like a private sewer, and therefore without interference. Later, he sold off the plots beside the corridor in small pieces for gardens and market gardens. The owners on both sides believed they were simply looking at a shared wall, and never suspected the long paved strip winding between two walls through their flower-beds and orchards. Only the birds saw this curiosity. It is likely that the linnets and tomtits of the last century had a great deal to say about the chief justice.

The pavilion was built of stone in the Mansard style, paneled and furnished in the Watteau manner, rocaille within and old-fashioned outside. It was enclosed by a triple hedge of flowers. The whole place had an air of discretion, flirtation, and solemnity, exactly suited to a whim born of love and magistracy.

This house and passageway, now gone, still existed fifteen years ago. In 1793, a coppersmith bought the house intending to tear it down, but he was never able to pay for it; the nation bankrupted him. So in the end, it was the house that ruined the coppersmith. After that, the place stood empty and slowly fell into decay, as every home does when no human presence gives it life. It still contained its old furniture and was always either for sale or for rent, as the ten or twelve people who passed along Rue Plumet could see from a yellow, barely legible notice that

had hung on the garden wall since 1819.

Toward the end of the Restoration, those same passers-by may have noticed that the notice had disappeared and that the first-floor shutters were open. The house was occupied now. Short curtains hung in the windows, a sign that a woman was living there.

In October 1829, a middle-aged man appeared and rented the house exactly as it was, including the back building and the lane that opened onto Rue de Babylone. He had the hidden mechanisms of the two doors leading to that passage repaired. As we have said, the house was still almost completely furnished with the old magistrate's belongings. The new tenant ordered some repairs, added what was missing here and there, replaced the paving stones in the yard, bricks in the floors, steps on the staircase, missing pieces in the parquet, and panes in the lattice windows. Then he moved in with a young girl and an elderly maidservant, quietly and without fuss, more like someone slipping in than a man taking possession of his own home. The neighbors did not gossip about him, because there were no neighbors.

This discreet tenant was Jean Valjean; the young girl was Cosette. The servant was a woman named Toussaint, whom Jean Valjean had rescued from the hospital and from misery. She was elderly, she stammered, and she came from the provinces—three qualities that had led Jean Valjean to take her with him. He rented the house under the name Monsieur Fauchelevent, a private gentleman. In everything told so far, the reader has no doubt been just as quick as Thénardier to

recognize Jean Valjean.

Why had Jean Valjean left the convent of Petit-Picpus? What had happened?

Nothing had happened.

It will be remembered that Jean Valjean was happy in the convent—so happy that at last his conscience sounded the alarm. He saw Cosette every day. He felt a father's love growing stronger and stronger within him. He dwelt on that child's soul. He told himself that she was his, that nothing could take her from him, and that this would go on forever. She would surely become a nun, since she was being gently guided that way every day. The convent, then, would be her whole world, just as it was his. He would grow old there. She would grow up there. She would grow old there. And he would die there. In short, it was a beautiful hope: they would never be separated. But when he thought it over, he became troubled. He questioned himself. Was all that happiness really his? Or was it made out of someone else's happiness—the happiness of that child—which he, an old man, was seizing and stealing? Was that not theft? He told himself that this child had a right to know life before giving it up. To deprive her beforehand, and in a sense without asking her, of every joy under the pretext of saving her from every sorrow; to take advantage of her ignorance and her isolation in order to make an artificial religious calling grow in her—was that not robbing a human being of her nature and lying to God? And who could say whether, when she one day understood all this and found herself a nun against her true wishes, Cosette might not come to hate him? That last thought was almost selfish, and

less noble than the others, but he could not bear it. He decided to leave the convent.

Once he had made that decision, he recognized with anguish that it had to be done. As for objections, there were none. Five years spent hidden away within those four walls had necessarily erased or scattered the sources of danger. He could return quietly among other people. He had grown old, and everything had changed. Who would recognize him now? And even in the worst case, the danger was only to himself, and he had no right to condemn Cosette to the cloister simply because he himself had been condemned to the galleys. Besides, what is danger compared with what is right? In the end, nothing prevented him from being careful and taking precautions.

As for Cosette's education, it was nearly finished.

Once he had made up his mind, he waited for an opportunity. It did not take long to come. Old Fauchelevent died.

Jean Valjean asked to see the revered prioress and told her that, after his brother's death, he had come into a small inheritance that would allow him to live without working. He said that he would therefore leave the convent's service and take his daughter with him. But since Cosette had not taken vows, he felt it would not be right for her to have received her education there for free. So he humbly asked the Reverend Prioress to allow him to offer the community five thousand francs, as compensation for the five years Cosette had spent there.

That was how Jean Valjean left the convent of the Perpetual Adoration.

When he left the convent, he carried in his own arms the small valise whose key he still wore on his person, and he would not let any porter touch it. This puzzled Cosette because an embalming smell came from it.

Let us say at once that this trunk never left him again. He always kept it in his room. When he moved from place to place, it was the first thing he took with him, and sometimes the only one. Cosette laughed about it and called the valise his inseparable, saying, “I am jealous of it.”

Even so, Jean Valjean did not step back into the open world without deep anxiety.

He found the house in the Rue Plumet and kept himself hidden there. From that point on, he bore the name Ultime Fauchelevent.

At the same time, he rented two other apartments in Paris so that he would draw less attention than if he stayed always in the same neighborhood. He also wanted to be able, if necessary, to disappear at the first sign of alarm. In short, he did not want to be caught unprepared again, as he had been on the night when he had escaped from Javert so miraculously. These two apartments were miserable, shabby places in two neighborhoods far from each other, one in the Rue de l’Ouest and the other in the Rue de l’Homme Armé.

From time to time, he went to the Rue de l'Homme Armé or the Rue de l'Ouest and stayed there for a month or six weeks, without taking Toussaint with him. He had the porters wait on him and passed himself off as a gentleman from the outskirts of the city, living on his income and keeping a small temporary place in town. This exalted virtue kept three different addresses in Paris in order to avoid the police.

CHAPTER II—JEAN VALJEAN AS A NATIONAL GUARD

Still, his real home was in the Rue Plumet, and he had arranged his life there like this:

Cosette and the servant lived in the pavilion. Cosette had the large bedroom with the painted pier glasses, the boudoir with its gilded trim, and the magistrate's drawing room furnished with tapestries and huge armchairs. She also had the garden. In Cosette's room, Jean Valjean had placed a canopied bed of old three-colored damask and a beautiful Persian rug bought in the Rue du Figuier-Saint-Paul from Mother Gaucher. To soften the severity of these splendid old pieces, he mixed in all sorts of cheerful, graceful furnishings suited to a young girl: an étagère, a bookcase filled with gilt-edged books, an inkstand, a blotter, writing paper, a worktable inlaid with mother-of-pearl, a silver-gilt dressing case, and a toilet set of Japanese porcelain. Long damask curtains, red-based and three-colored like the bed hangings, covered the first-floor windows. On the ground floor, the curtains were tapestry. All through the winter, Cosette's little house was heated from top to bottom. Jean Valjean lived in a kind of porter's lodge at the end of the back courtyard. He had a mattress on a folding bed, a white wooden table, two straw chairs, an earthenware water jug, a few old books on a shelf, his beloved valise in one corner, and never a fire. He dined with Cosette, and for himself he kept a loaf of black bread on the table.

When Toussaint arrived, he said to her, “The young lady is the mistress of this house.”—“And you, monsieur?” Toussaint asked in surprise.—“I am something much better than the master. I am the father.”

Cosette had learned how to manage a household at the convent, and she kept their expenses in order, though they were very small. Every day, Jean Valjean took her out for a walk with her arm in his. He brought her to the Luxembourg, choosing the quietest paths, and every Sunday he took her to mass at Saint-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas because it was far away. Since it was a very poor neighborhood, he gave generously there, and the poor gathered around him in church. That was what had led to Thénardier’s letter addressed “To the benevolent gentleman of the church of Saint-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas.” He liked taking Cosette to visit the poor and the sick. No stranger ever came into the house in the Rue Plumet. Toussaint brought in their groceries, and Jean Valjean fetched water himself from a nearby fountain on the boulevard. Their firewood and wine were stored in a half-underground recess lined with rockwork near the Rue de Babylone, which had once served the chief justice as a grotto; for in that age of follies and “Little Houses,” no love affair was complete without a grotto.

In the door that opened onto the Rue de Babylone, there was a box meant for letters and papers. But since the three people living in the pavilion on the Rue Plumet received neither newspapers nor letters, the box—once the messenger of a love affair and the keeper of a lovesick lawyer’s secrets—was now

useful only for tax notices and guard summonses. For M. Fauchelevent, a gentleman of independent means, belonged to the national guard; he had not been able to slip through the fine net of the 1831 census. The information gathered by the municipality at that time had even reached the convent of the Petit-Picpus, that almost impenetrable holy cloud from which Jean Valjean had emerged in a venerable disguise, and therefore, in the eyes of the town hall, fully fit to stand guard.

Three or four times a year, Jean Valjean put on his uniform and stood guard. He did it willingly. It was an effective disguise: it blended him in with everyone else while still leaving him alone. Jean Valjean had just turned sixty, the age at which the law excused a man from service, but he did not look more than fifty. Besides, he had no wish to argue with his sergeant-major or raise objections with Comte de Lobau. He had no legal identity. He was hiding his name and his past, so he hid his age as well—he hid everything. And, as we have said, he willingly did his duty in the National Guard. His whole ambition was to look like any ordinary taxpaying man. Inwardly, this man's ideal was the angel; outwardly, it was the bourgeois.

One detail should be noted, however. When Jean Valjean went out with Cosette, he dressed as the reader has already seen and looked like a retired officer. When he went out alone, which was usually at night, he always wore a workman's trousers and blouse, along with a cap that hid his face. Was this caution or humility? Both. Cosette was used to the mysterious side of her fate and barely noticed her father's odd habits. As for Toussaint, she revered Jean Valjean and believed that

everything he did was right.

One day the butcher, who had caught sight of Jean Valjean, said to her, “That’s a strange fellow.” She answered, “He’s a saint.”

Jean Valjean, Cosette, and Toussaint never went in or out except through the door on the Rue de Babylone. Unless someone saw them through the garden gate, it would have been hard to guess that they lived on the Rue Plumet. That gate was always shut. Jean Valjean had left the garden uncultivated so it would not draw attention.

In that, perhaps, he made a mistake.

CHAPTER III—FOLIIS AC FRONDIBUS

Left to itself for more than half a century, the garden had become both strange and beautiful. Passersby forty years earlier would stop to look at it, never suspecting the secrets hidden in its fresh green depths. More than one dreamer of that time often let both eyes and thoughts wander too freely through the bars of that old locked gate—warped, leaning, attached to two green, moss-covered pillars, and oddly topped by a pediment carved with unreadable arabesques.

In one corner stood a stone bench, along with one or two mildewed statues. Several lattice frames had long since lost their nails and were rotting against the wall. There were no paths and no lawn, but there was plenty of grass everywhere. Gardening had gone away, and nature had come back. Weeds flourished, which was a stroke of luck for such a poor patch of ground. The display of gilliflowers was magnificent. Nothing in this garden hindered the sacred drive of living things to grow; ancient, vigorous life ruled there. The trees leaned down toward the nettles. Plants shot upward. Branches bent. What crept along the earth reached for what opened in the air. What drifted on the wind bowed toward what trailed through the moss. Trunks, boughs, leaves, fibres, clusters, tendrils, shoots, spines, and thorns had mingled, crossed, joined, and merged with one another. In a deep, close embrace, the vegetation had there celebrated and fulfilled, under the approving eye of the Creator, within that enclosure three hundred feet square, the holy

mystery of fraternity, the symbol of human brotherhood. This garden was no longer a garden. It was a vast thicket: as impenetrable as a forest, as crowded as a city, trembling like a nest, dark as a cathedral, fragrant as a bouquet, solitary as a tomb, and alive as a crowd.

In Floréal, this vast thicket, hidden behind its gate and enclosed by its four walls, began its secret work of growth. It trembled in the rising sun, almost like a living creature drinking in the breath of the universe. It seemed to feel the sap of April rising and surging through its veins, and it tossed its great, marvelous green tresses to the wind, scattering flowers like stars, dew like pearls, fertility, beauty, life, joy, and perfume over the damp earth, the damaged statues, the crumbling pavilion steps, and even the pavement of the deserted street. At midday, a thousand white butterflies took shelter there, and it was a heavenly sight to watch that living summer snow whirl in flakes through the shade. There, in those cheerful green shadows, a crowd of innocent voices spoke gently to the soul, and whatever the birds left unsaid, the humming filled in. In the evening, a dreamy haze rose from the garden and wrapped around it. A veil of mist, calm and almost heavenly in its sadness, covered it. The rich scent of honeysuckle and convolvulus drifted from every part of it like a delicate, intoxicating poison. The last calls of the woodpeckers and wagtails could still be heard as they drowsed among the branches. You could feel the sacred closeness between the birds and the trees: by day, the wings delight the leaves; by night, the leaves shelter the wings.

In winter, the thicket was black, dripping, bristling, and shivering, and it allowed a partial glimpse of the house. Instead of flowers on the branches and dew in the blossoms, you saw the long silver trails of snails across the cold, thick carpet of yellow leaves. Yet whatever its form, whatever its appearance, in every season—spring, winter, summer, or autumn—this little enclosure breathed melancholy, reflection, solitude, freedom, the absence of man, and the presence of God. And the old rusty gate seemed to say, "This garden belongs to me."

It made no difference that Paris surrounded it on every side: the grand old houses of the Rue de Varennes were only a few steps away, the dome of the Invalides was close by, and the Chamber of Deputies was not far off. The elegant carriages of the Rue de Bourgogne and the Rue Saint-Dominique rolled past nearby, and at the neighboring crossroads the yellow, brown, white, and red omnibuses kept crossing one another's paths. None of it mattered. The Rue Plumet was a desert. The death of its former owners, the revolution that had swept over it, the collapse of old fortunes, absence, forgetfulness, and forty years of abandonment and widowhood had been enough to give this favored place back its ferns, mulleins, hemlock, yarrow, tall weeds, and great crinkled plants with broad pale-green leaves of clothlike texture, along with lizards, beetles, and quick, restless insects. From the depths of the earth, and within those four walls, there had risen again a certain wild, indescribable grandeur. Nature, which upsets the petty arrangements of man and pours itself out completely wherever it appears, in the ant as much as in the eagle, had burst into bloom in this tiny Parisian garden with as much rough power and majesty as in a

virgin forest of the New World.

Algebra reaches even into the clouds; the light of the stars benefits the rose. No thinker would dare claim that the scent of hawthorn is useless to the constellations. So who can calculate the path of a single molecule? How do we know that the making of worlds is not shaped by the fall of grains of sand? Who understands the mutual ebb and flow between the infinitely vast and the infinitely small, the echo of causes in the depths of existence, the avalanches of creation? The smallest worm matters. The great is small, and the small is great. Everything is held in balance by necessity—a troubling vision for the mind. There are marvelous connections between beings and things. In that inexhaustible whole, from the sun to the grub, nothing looks down on anything else; all need one another. Light does not carry earthly perfumes into the blue depths of the sky without purpose; night scatters the essences of the stars among sleeping flowers. Every bird in flight has the thread of the infinite tied around its leg. Germination is bound up with the bursting of a meteor and with the peck of a swallow breaking its egg. It places the birth of an earthworm and the coming of Socrates on the same level. Where the telescope ends, the microscope begins. Which of the two has the wider field of vision? You decide. A patch of mold is a Pleiades of flowers; a nebula is an anthill of stars. The same mingling exists—more astonishing still—between the things of the mind and the facts of matter. Elements and principles mix, combine, join, and multiply until the material world and the moral world are finally brought into the same clarity. The phenomenon constantly circles back on itself. In the vast exchanges of the cosmos,

universal life moves back and forth in unknown quantities, flowing entirely within the invisible mystery of emanations. It uses everything. It loses not a single dream, not a single sleep. It sows a microscopic creature here and shatters a planet there. It sways and coils, turning light into a force and thought into an element, spread everywhere and unseen, dissolving everything except that geometrical point, the ˩. It brings everything back to the atom of the soul, expands everything in God, and entangles all activity, from top to bottom, in the obscurity of a dizzying mechanism. It links the flight of an insect to the movement of the earth and subordinates—who knows?—if only through the identity of the law, the path of the comet in the heavens to the spinning of the infusoria in a drop of water. A machine made of mind. Vast gears whose first driving force is the gnat, and whose final wheel is the zodiac.

CHAPTER IV—A CHANGE OF GATE

This garden seemed to have been created long ago to hide reckless secrets, and then transformed into a place fit to shelter innocent ones. The arbors, bowling greens, tunnels, and grottos were gone. In their place lay a magnificent, untidy darkness that fell over everything like a veil. Paphos had been turned into Eden. It is impossible to say what touch of repentance had made this retreat so pure. This flower-girl now offered her blossom to the soul. This once flirtatious garden, formerly quite compromised, had returned to innocence and modesty. A magistrate helped by a gardener—a worthy man who believed himself the successor of Lamoignon, and another worthy man who believed himself the successor of Lenôtre—had arranged it, trimmed it, ruffled it, adorned it, and shaped it for gallantry. Then nature took it back, filled it with shade, and prepared it for love.

And in this solitude there was also a heart completely ready. Love had only to appear. Here he would find a temple made of greenery, grass, moss, birdsong, tender shadows, trembling branches, and a soul full of sweetness, faith, candor, hope, longing, and illusion.

Cosette had left the convent while she was still almost a child. She was a little over fourteen, and she was at that “ungrateful age.” We have already said that, except for her eyes, she was plain rather than pretty. None of her features were awkward in themselves, but she was awkward overall—thin, timid and bold

at the same time, in short a little girl already grown up.

Her education was complete—or rather, she had been taught religion, and above all devotion; then “history,” meaning the sort of thing that goes by that name in convents, along with geography, grammar, participles, the kings of France, a little music, a little drawing, and so on. But in every other way she knew almost nothing, which is both a great charm and a great danger. A young girl’s soul should not be left in darkness. If it is, sudden and vivid illusions will later take shape there, as they do in a dark room. She should be enlightened gently and discreetly, more by the reflected light of reality than by its harsh, direct glare. What she needs is a useful, gracefully austere twilight that drives away childish fears and prevents missteps. Only maternal instinct—that admirable intuition made up of the maiden’s memories and the woman’s experience—truly knows how to create that half-light and what it should contain.

Nothing can take the place of that instinct. All the nuns in the world are not worth as much as one mother when it comes to shaping 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 full of tenderness and care; but he was only an old man, and he knew nothing about such things.

And yet, in this work of education, in this serious task of preparing a woman for life, what knowledge is needed to contend with that vast ignorance called innocence!

Nothing prepares a young girl for passion like a convent. A convent turns the mind toward the unknown. The heart, forced back in upon itself, works inward and downward because it cannot pour itself out, and it grows deep because it cannot spread wide. From this come visions, guesses, conjectures, the outlines of romances, a longing for adventure, fantastic constructions—whole structures built in the inner darkness of the mind, dark and secret dwellings where passions at once find a home as soon as the gate is opened to them. A convent is a pressure that, if it is to overcome the human heart, would have to last a lifetime.

When Cosette left the convent, she could hardly have found anything sweeter—or more dangerous—than the house on the Rue Plumet. It carried on her solitude while introducing her to freedom. The garden was enclosed, yet nature there was sharp, lush, sensual, and fragrant. It held the same dreams as the convent, but now with glimpses of young men. There was still a grating, but this one opened onto the street.

Even so, when she arrived there, we must repeat, she was still only a child. Jean Valjean gave her this neglected garden. “Do whatever you like with it,” he told her. Cosette was delighted. She turned over every clump of earth and every stone. She searched for “creatures.” She played there while waiting for the time when she would dream there. She loved the garden first for the insects she found in the grass under her feet, while waiting for the day when she would love it for the stars she would see through the branches above her head.

And she loved her father—that is, Jean Valjean—with all her soul, with an innocent daughterly devotion that made the good man a dear and delightful companion to her. It will be remembered that M. Madeleine had once read a great deal. Jean Valjean had kept up that habit. He had learned to speak well. He possessed the hidden wealth and eloquence of a truly humble mind that had educated itself on its own. He kept just enough sharpness to give flavor to his kindness; his mind was rugged, and his heart was gentle. During their conversations in the Luxembourg, he explained everything to her, drawing both on what he had read and on what he had suffered. As she listened to him, Cosette's eyes wandered dreamily.

This simple man was enough for Cosette's mind, just as the untamed garden was enough for her eyes. After a good chase after butterflies, she would come running back to him, out of breath, and say, "Ah! How I've run!" He would kiss her on the forehead.

Cosette adored the old man. She was always close behind him. Wherever Jean Valjean was, that was where happiness was. Jean Valjean lived neither in the pavilion nor in the garden. She liked the paved back courtyard better than the flower-filled enclosure, and his little lodge with its straw-bottomed chairs better than the large drawing-room hung with tapestry and furnished with cushioned easy-chairs. Sometimes Jean Valjean would say to her, smiling with the happiness of being fussed over, "Go to your own rooms now! Leave me alone for a little while!"

She would give him those sweet, affectionate scoldings that are so lovely when they come from a daughter to her father.

“Father, your rooms are so cold. Why don’t you have a carpet and a stove in here?”

“My dear child, there are so many people better than I am who do not even have a roof over their heads.”

“Then why do my rooms have a fire, and everything I need?”

“Because you are a woman and a child.”

“Nonsense! Are men supposed to be cold and uncomfortable?”

“Some men are.”

“Very well, then I shall come here so often that you will have to keep a fire.”

At other times she said to him:

“Father, why do you eat such dreadful bread?”

“Because, my daughter.”

“Well then, if you eat it, I will too.”

So, to keep Cosette from eating black bread, Jean Valjean began to eat white bread.

Cosette remembered her childhood only dimly. Every morning and evening, she prayed for the mother she had never known. In her mind, the Thénardiers remained like two monstrous figures from a nightmare. She remembered going out “one day, at night” to fetch water in a forest. She believed it had been very far from Paris. It seemed to her that her life had begun in a pit,

and that Jean Valjean had pulled her out of it. Her childhood felt to her like a time when she had been surrounded by nothing but centipedes, spiders, and snakes. When she lay thinking in the evening before sleep, since she did not clearly think of herself as Jean Valjean's daughter or of him as her father, she sometimes imagined that her mother's soul had passed into that good man and come to live beside her.

When he was seated, she would rest her cheek against his white hair and let a silent tear fall, saying to herself, "Perhaps this man is my mother."

Strange as it may seem, Cosette, in the deep ignorance of a girl raised in a convent—and with motherhood being something completely beyond the understanding of virginity—had ended by imagining that she had had almost no mother at all. She did not even know her mother's name. Whenever she asked Jean Valjean, he said nothing. If she asked again, he answered only with a smile. Once she pressed him; the smile ended in tears.

Jean Valjean's silence kept Fantine hidden in darkness.

Was it caution? Was it reverence? Was he afraid of giving that name over to a memory other than his own, with all the risks that involved?

As long as Cosette was little, Jean Valjean had been willing to speak to her about her mother. But once she became a young girl, he could no longer do it. It seemed to him that he no longer dared. Was it because of Cosette? Was it because of Fantine? He felt a kind of sacred dread at letting that shadow enter Cosette's thoughts and at bringing a third presence into their

shared fate. The more holy that shade was to him, the more he felt he had to fear it. He thought of Fantine and was overcome into silence.

In the darkness, he dimly made out something that seemed to be holding a finger to its lips. Had all the modesty that had once lived in Fantine—and had left her so violently while she was alive—come back after her death to stand guard, outraged, over the peace of that dead woman, and in its shy reserve keep her in her grave? Was Jean Valjean yielding to that influence without knowing it? We who believe in death are not inclined to dismiss this mysterious explanation.

That was why it was impossible for him to speak Fantine's name, even to Cosette.

One day Cosette said to him:

"Father, I saw my mother in a dream last night. She had two great wings. My mother must have been almost a saint when she was alive."

"Through suffering," Jean Valjean replied.

Still, Jean Valjean was happy.

When Cosette went out with him, she leaned on his arm, proud and happy, her heart completely full. Jean Valjean felt his own heart melt with joy at these signs of a love so entirely for him, so fully content with him alone. The poor man trembled, flooded with a kind of heavenly happiness. In his ecstasy, he told himself that this would last all their lives. He thought he had not really suffered enough to deserve such shining bliss, and in the

depths of his soul he thanked God for allowing him—a miserable man—to be loved in this way by that innocent creature.

CHAPTER V—THE ROSE REALIZES THAT IT IS A WEAPON OF WAR

One day, Cosette happened to look at herself in the mirror and said, “Really!” It almost seemed to her that she was pretty. The thought left her strangely unsettled. Until then, she had never really thought about her face. She saw herself in the mirror, but she did not truly look. Besides, she had so often been told that she was plain; only Jean Valjean would gently say, “No indeed! no indeed!” In any case, Cosette had always believed she was ugly, and had grown up with that idea in the easy acceptance of childhood. And now, all at once, her mirror was telling her the same thing Jean Valjean had told her: “No indeed!” That night she could not sleep. “What if I were pretty?” she thought. “How strange it would be if I were pretty!” And she remembered the girls whose beauty had caused such a stir in the convent, and said to herself, “What! Am I to be like Mademoiselle So-and-So?”

The next morning she looked at herself again, this time on purpose, and was immediately filled with doubt. “Where did I get such an idea?” she said. “No, I am ugly.” She had simply not slept well; her eyes were hollow and she was pale. The night before, the thought that she might be beautiful had not exactly made her happy, but losing the ability to believe it made her deeply sad. She did not look at herself again, and for more than two weeks she tried to arrange her hair with her back to the mirror.

In the evening, after dinner, she usually did wool embroidery or some convent needlework in the drawing-room while Jean Valjean read beside her. Once, she lifted her eyes from her work and felt quite uneasy at the way her father was looking at her.

Another time, as she was walking along the street, it seemed to her that someone behind her, whom she could 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 wearing a plush hat and her merino gown then.

At last, one day in the garden, she heard poor old Toussaint say, “Do you notice how pretty Cosette is becoming, sir?” Cosette did not hear her father’s reply, but Toussaint’s words stirred something inside her. She fled the garden, ran up to her room, rushed to the mirror—it had been three months since she had looked at herself—and cried out. She had just dazzled herself.

She was beautiful—there was no denying it, and she had to agree with Toussaint and with what she saw in the mirror. Her

figure had filled out, her skin had turned fair, her hair shone, and an unfamiliar brilliance lit her blue eyes. The awareness of her beauty came over her all at once, like sudden daylight. Other people had noticed it too; Toussaint had said as much. It was clearly she the passerby had meant, and now there could be no doubt. She went back down into the garden feeling like a queen, imagining she could hear birds singing though it was winter, seeing the sky glowing gold, the sun among the trees, flowers in the bushes—overwhelmed, almost wild, with a joy beyond words.

Jean Valjean, for his part, felt a deep, nameless heaviness in his heart.

For some time now, he had watched with dread the beauty that seemed to grow more radiant every day on Cosette's sweet face. The dawn that smiled on everyone else was dark for him.

Cosette had been beautiful for quite a long time before she realized it herself. But from the very first day, that unexpected light, slowly rising and spreading over the whole of the young girl, struck Jean Valjean's dark spirit like a wound. He felt it as a change in a happy life—a life so happy that he hardly dared to stir, for fear of upsetting anything. This man had endured every kind of suffering. He was still raw from the blows of fate. He had once been almost wicked and had become almost saintly. After dragging the chain of the galleys, he now dragged the invisible but heavy chain of endless misery. The law had never truly loosened its hold on him; at any moment he could be seized and dragged back from the obscurity of his virtue into the full light of public shame. He accepted everything, excused everything,

forgave everything, and asked only one thing of Providence, of man, of the law, of society, of nature, of the world: that Cosette might love him.

If only Cosette could go on loving him. If only God would not keep the child's heart from turning to him and staying with him. When Cosette loved him, he felt healed, rested, soothed, blessed, repaid, crowned. If Cosette loved him, then all was well. He wanted nothing more. If anyone had asked him, "Could you wish for anything better?" he would have answered, "No." If God Himself had said, "Do you desire heaven?" he would have replied, "I would lose by it."

Anything that might disturb this situation, even on the surface, made him tremble, as though something new were beginning. He had never clearly understood what a woman's beauty meant, but he sensed instinctively that it was something terrible.

He looked with dread at that beauty, blooming ever more triumphantly and splendidly beside him, before his very eyes, on the innocent and formidable brow of that child, while he stood in the depths of his own plainness, his old age, his misery, and his outcast state.

He said to himself, "How beautiful she is! What will become of me?"

There, moreover, was the difference between his tenderness and a mother's. What filled him with anguish would have filled a mother with joy.

The first signs did not take long to appear.

The very next day after she had said to herself, “I really am beautiful,” Cosette began to pay attention to her clothes. She remembered the passer-by’s remark: “Pretty, but badly dressed.” It was like the passing breath of an oracle, gone in an instant after leaving in her heart one of the two seeds destined later to fill a woman’s whole life: coquetry. Love is the other.

With faith in her beauty, her whole feminine nature opened within her. She began to hate her merino dresses and to feel ashamed of her plush hat. Her father had never refused her anything. She quickly learned the whole art of the bonnet, the gown, the mantle, the boot, the cuff, the fashionable fabric, the flattering color—that art which makes the Parisian woman something so charming, so profound, and so dangerous. The phrase _heady woman_ was invented for the Parisienne.

In less than a month, little Cosette, in that Thebaid on the Rue de Babylone, had become not only one of the prettiest women in Paris, but also one of the best dressed—and that means much more.

She would have loved to run into her “passer-by,” just to see what he would say and to “teach him a lesson!” The truth was that she was utterly charming in every way, and she could tell the difference between a bonnet from Gérard and one from Herbaut with remarkable precision.

Jean Valjean watched this transformation with anxiety. He, who felt that he himself could never do more than crawl, or at best walk, saw wings beginning to grow on Cosette.

And just by looking at Cosette's clothes, a woman would have known that she had no mother. She missed certain small niceties, certain particular social rules. A mother, for example, would have told her that a young girl does not wear damask.

The first day Cosette went out in her black damask dress and mantle, with her white crape bonnet, she took Jean Valjean's arm, cheerful, glowing, rosy, proud, and dazzling. "Father," she said, "how do you like me dressed like this?" Jean Valjean answered in a voice with the bitterness of an envious man: "Charming!" He behaved just as he usually did during their walk. But when they returned home, he asked Cosette:

"Won't you put on that other dress and bonnet again—you know the ones I mean?"

This happened in Cosette's room. She turned toward the wardrobe where her discarded schoolgirl clothes were hanging.

"That disguise!" she said. "Father, what do you expect me to do with it? Oh no, what an idea! I'll never wear those horrors again. With that contraption on my head, I look like Madame Mad-dog."

Jean Valjean let out a deep sigh.

From that moment on, he noticed that Cosette, who had always used to ask to stay at home, saying, "Father, I enjoy myself more here with you," now was always asking to go out. After all, what is the point of having a lovely face and beautiful clothes if you never show them?

He also noticed that Cosette no longer liked the back garden as she once had. Now she preferred the front garden, and she did not mind walking back and forth in front of the iron fence. Jean Valjean, who was shy, never set foot there. He stayed in the back yard, like a dog.

As Cosette became aware of her own beauty, she lost the charm of not knowing it. That unselfconsciousness is a rare grace, because beauty joined with innocence is beyond words, and nothing is more lovely than a radiant, innocent girl moving through life with the key to paradise in her hand and no idea that she holds it. But what she lost in innocent grace, she gained in a thoughtful, serious charm. Her whole being, filled with the joy of youth, innocence, and beauty, gave off a splendid melancholy.

It was at this time that Marius, after six months had passed, saw her once again at the Luxembourg.

CHAPTER VI—THE BATTLE BEGINS

Cosette, hidden in her own shadow, like Marius in his, was fully ready to catch fire. Destiny, with its mysterious and relentless patience, was slowly drawing these two beings together. Both were charged and weakened by the stormy electricity of passion. These two souls were as full of love as clouds are full of lightning, and they were bound to spill over and merge in a single look, the way clouds meet in a flash of fire.

The exchanged glance has been so overused in love stories that people have finally stopped taking it seriously. Nowadays, one hardly dares to say that two people fell in love because they looked at each other. And yet that is how people do fall in love, and the only way. Everything else is nothing; it comes afterward. Nothing is more real than those great shocks two souls give each other when they exchange that spark.

At the very moment when Cosette unconsciously sent out the glance that unsettled Marius, Marius had no idea that he had also given her a look that disturbed Cosette.

He did her the same good and the same harm.

She had been used to seeing him for a long time, and she had studied him the way girls study and notice things while seeming to look somewhere else. Marius still thought Cosette was ugly when she had already begun to think him handsome. But since he paid no attention to her, the young man meant nothing to her.

Even so, she could not help telling herself that he had beautiful hair, beautiful eyes, fine teeth, and a charming voice when she heard him talking with his friends. He may have carried himself awkwardly when he walked, if you like, but he did it with a grace that was entirely his own. He did not seem stupid at all. There was something noble, gentle, simple, and proud about him. In short, though he appeared to be poor, he had an air of distinction.

On the day their eyes finally met and said those first vague, inexpressible things that a glance can only half utter, Cosette did not understand at once. She went back thoughtfully to the house in the Rue de l'Ouest, where Jean Valjean had come, as usual, to spend six weeks. The next morning, when she woke, she thought of that strange young man, so long cold and indifferent, who now seemed to notice her. It did not seem to her that this attention was at all pleasing. On the contrary, she felt somewhat irritated by this handsome, disdainful young man. A hint of battle stirred within her. It occurred to her, and the thought gave her a completely childish delight, that at last she was going to have her revenge.

Because she knew she was beautiful, she was fully aware, though only vaguely, that she possessed a weapon. Women play with their beauty as children play with a knife. They wound themselves.

The reader will remember Marius's hesitation, his pounding heart, his fears. He stayed on his bench and did not come near. This annoyed Cosette. One day she said to Jean Valjean, "Father, let us walk a little in that direction." Since Marius would

not come to her, she went to him. In such matters, all women resemble Mahomet. And, strangely enough, the first sign of true love in a young man is shyness; in a young girl, it is boldness. This seems surprising, and yet nothing is simpler. The two sexes are moving toward each other and taking on each other's qualities.

That day, Cosette's glance drove Marius out of his senses, and Marius's glance made Cosette tremble. Marius went away confident, and Cosette uneasy. From that day on, they adored each other.

The first thing Cosette felt was a deep, confused sadness. It seemed to her that her soul had turned dark since the day before. She no longer recognized herself. The purity of a young girl's soul, made of innocence and lightheartedness, is like snow. Love, its sun, melts it.

Cosette did not know what love was. She had never heard the word used in its earthly sense. In the secular songbooks that made their way into the convent, _amour_ (love) was replaced by _tambour_ (drum) or _pandour_. This produced riddles that amused the imaginations of the older girls, such as: _Ah, how delightful is the drum!_ or, _Pity is not a pandour_. But Cosette had left the convent too early to spend much time puzzling over the "drum." So she did not know what to call what she was now feeling. Is anyone less sick because they do not know the name of their illness?

She loved all the more passionately because she loved without understanding. She did not know whether it was a good thing or

a bad one, helpful or dangerous, lasting or temporary, permitted or forbidden; she loved. She would have been very surprised if anyone had said to her: “You are not sleeping? But that is forbidden! You are not eating? Why, that is very bad! You feel tightness and pounding in your heart? That must not happen! You blush and turn pale when a certain being dressed in black appears at the end of a certain green path? Why, that is dreadful!” She would not have understood, and she would have answered: “How can it be my fault, when I have no control over it and know nothing about it?”

The love that came to her was exactly what her soul was ready for. It was a kind of distant admiration, silent contemplation, the worship of a stranger. It was youth appearing to youth, a dream from the night made real and yet still somehow a dream. It was the longed-for phantom finally made flesh, but still without a name, a flaw, a stain, a demand, or a defect. In short, it was the far-off lover who remained in the ideal: a chimera given form. Any closer, more tangible encounter would have frightened Cosette at this early stage, when she was still half lost in the exaggerated haze of convent life. She had all the fears of a child and all the fears of a nun at once. The spirit of the convent, which had soaked into her over five years, was still slowly fading from her and made everything around her seem to tremble. In this state, he was not a lover; he was not even an admirer. He was a vision. She gave herself up to adoring Marius as something charming, radiant, and impossible.

Because perfect innocence comes so close to perfect coquetry, she smiled at him with complete openness.

Every day she impatiently awaited the hour of their walk. She found Marius there, felt unspeakably happy, and sincerely believed she was saying exactly what she felt when she said to Jean Valjean:

“What a delightful garden the Luxembourg is!”

Marius and Cosette knew nothing about each other. They did not speak, greet, or know one another; they only saw each other. And like stars in the sky, separated by millions of leagues, they lived by looking at each other.

So Cosette gradually became a woman and blossomed, beautiful and loving, aware of her beauty but unaware of her love. Through that very innocence, she was also a coquette.

CHAPTER VII—SET ONE SADNESS AGAINST ANOTHER, AND A HALF

Every situation has its own instincts. Old, eternal Mother Nature gave Jean Valjean a dim warning that Marius was there. Jean Valjean shuddered to the depths of his soul. He saw nothing and knew nothing, yet he kept searching the darkness around him with stubborn attention, as if he sensed that something was being built on one side of him while something else was falling apart on the other. Marius, also warned by that same Mother Nature, in keeping with the deep law of God, did everything he could to stay out of sight of “the father.” Even so, Jean Valjean sometimes caught sight of him. Marius’s behavior was no longer natural at all. He showed a mix of cautiousness and clumsy boldness. He no longer came close to them as he once had. He sat at a distance and pretended to read; why did he pretend? Before, he had come in his old coat; now he wore his new one every day. Jean Valjean was not even sure he had not begun curling his hair. His eyes looked very strange, and he wore gloves. In short, Jean Valjean thoroughly detested this young man.

Cosette gave nothing away. Without knowing exactly what was happening to her, she felt sure that something was going on and that it had to be hidden.

Jean Valjean was deeply disturbed by the coincidence between Cosette’s new interest in dress and the stranger’s new habit of

wearing fresh clothes. It might have been accidental, of course, but it felt like a threatening accident.

He never said a word to Cosette about this stranger. One day, however, he could not help himself, and with that vague despair that suddenly sinks its weight into the deepest part of sorrow, he said to her, “That young man has a very pedantic air.”

A year earlier, when Cosette was still only an indifferent little girl, she would have answered, “Why, no, he is charming.” Ten years later, with Marius’s love in her heart, she would have replied, “A pedant, and unbearable to look at! You are right!” But at the point her life and heart had reached then, she merely answered with perfect calm: “That young man!”

As if she were seeing him for the first time in her life.

“How foolish I am!” thought Jean Valjean. “She had not noticed him. I am the one who pointed him out to her.”

Oh, the simplicity of earlier times! Oh, the hidden depths in children!

One of the laws of those early years of suffering and turmoil, of those lively struggles between a first love and the first obstacles, is that the young girl never lets herself be caught in any trap, while the young man falls into every one. Jean Valjean had begun a silent war against Marius, and Marius, with the noble foolishness of his age and his love, never suspected it. Jean Valjean set all sorts of snares for him: he changed the hour, he changed the bench, he forgot his handkerchief, he came alone to the Luxembourg. Marius rushed straight into

every trap. To every question Jean Valjean silently placed in his path, he innocently answered, “yes.” But Cosette stayed enclosed in her seeming indifference and unshakable calm, so that Jean Valjean came to this conclusion: “That fool is wildly in love with Cosette, but Cosette does not even know he exists.”

Even so, he carried a sad uneasiness in his heart. The moment when Cosette would begin to love could come at any time. Does not everything begin with indifference?

Only once did Cosette make a mistake and alarm him. He got up to leave after staying three hours, and she said, “What, already?”

Jean Valjean had not stopped going to the Luxembourg, because he did not want to do anything unusual and, above all, because he feared to put Cosette on her guard. But during those hours that were so sweet to the lovers, while Cosette sent her smile to the enraptured Marius, who noticed nothing else now and saw nothing in the whole world but the radiant face he adored, Jean Valjean fixed blazing, terrible eyes on Marius. He, who had finally come to believe himself incapable of any malicious feeling, found that when Marius was there, he had moments when he thought he was becoming savage and fierce again. He felt the old depths of his soul, once filled with so much anger, opening again and rising up against that young man. It almost seemed to him that unknown craters were forming in his chest.

What! He was there—that creature! What was he doing there? He had come sneaking around, sniffing things out, watching,

testing! He had come saying, “Well! Why not?” He had come to pry into his life—Jean Valjean’s life—to pry into his happiness, meaning to seize it and carry it away!

Jean Valjean went on: “Yes, that’s it! What is he looking for? An adventure! What does he want? A love affair! A love affair! And me? What! I was first the most miserable of men, and then the most unhappy. I have gone through sixty years of life on my knees. I have suffered everything a man can suffer. I have grown old without ever being young. I have lived without family, without relatives, without friends, without life, without children. I have left my blood on every stone, every thorn bush, every milepost, along every wall. I have been gentle, though others were harsh to me, and kind, though others were malicious. In spite of everything, I became an honest man again. I repented of the evil I had done, and I forgave the evil done to me. And now, at the very moment when I receive my reward, when it is all ending, when I am just reaching the goal, when I finally have what I want—when it is right, when it is good, when I have paid for it, when I have earned it—now all of it is to take flight, all of it is to vanish, and I am to lose Cosette, and lose my life, my joy, my soul, because some great fool felt like coming to loaf about in the Luxembourg.”

Then his eyes filled with a strange, sorrowful light.

It was no longer one man looking at another; no longer one enemy watching another enemy. It was a dog watching a thief.

The reader knows the rest. Marius kept on with his foolish course. One day he followed Cosette to the Rue de l’Ouest.

Another day he spoke to the porter. The porter, in turn, spoke up and said to Jean Valjean, “Monsieur, who is that curious young man asking about you?” The next day Jean Valjean gave Marius that look which Marius finally noticed. A week later, Jean Valjean had gone away. 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, asked no questions, and did not try to find out his reasons. She had already reached the point where she was afraid of being understood and of giving herself away. Jean Valjean had never known these sorrows—the only sorrows that are sweet, and the only ones unfamiliar to him. As a result, he did not grasp the serious meaning of Cosette’s silence.

He only saw that she had grown sad, and he became gloomy himself. On both sides, inexperience had come into conflict.

One day he tried an experiment. He asked Cosette:

“Would you like to go to the Luxembourg?”

A light came over Cosette’s pale face.

“Yes,” she said.

They went there. Three months had passed. Marius no longer went there. Marius was not there.

The next day, Jean Valjean asked Cosette again:

“Would you like to go to the Luxembourg?”

She answered sadly and gently:

“No.”

Jean Valjean was wounded by her sadness and heartbroken by her gentleness.

What was happening in that mind, so young and yet already so unreadable? What was beginning there? What was going on in Cosette’s soul? Sometimes, instead of going to bed, Jean Valjean stayed sitting on his pallet with his head in his hands. He spent entire nights asking himself, “What is Cosette thinking?” and imagining the things that might be passing through her mind.

Oh, in those moments, what sorrowful looks he turned toward that cloister—that pure height, that dwelling of angels, that unreachable glacier of virtue. How he gazed, in despairing ecstasy, at that convent garden filled with unseen flowers and secluded virgins, where every fragrance and every soul rises straight to heaven. How he adored that Eden, forever closed to him, from which he had willingly and madly come out. How he regretted his self-denial and his folly in bringing Cosette back into the world—poor hero of sacrifice, struck down and thrown to earth by his own devotion. How he said to himself, “What have I done?”

But Cosette noticed none of this. There was no bad temper, no harshness. His face was always calm and kind. Jean Valjean’s manner was more gentle and fatherly than ever. If anything revealed his lack of happiness, it was the extra softness in his behavior.

For her part, Cosette was wasting away. She suffered from Marius's absence just as deeply as she had delighted in his presence, though in a strange way and without fully realizing it. When Jean Valjean stopped taking her on their usual walks, a woman's instinct whispered dimly in the depths of her heart that she must not appear to care too much about the Luxembourg garden, and that if she seemed indifferent to it, her father would begin taking her there again. But days passed, then weeks, then months. Jean Valjean silently accepted Cosette's silent consent. She regretted it, but it was too late. So Marius had vanished; everything was over. On the day she returned to the Luxembourg, Marius was no longer there. What could she do? Would she ever find him again? She felt a pain in her heart that nothing eased, and it grew worse every day. She no longer knew whether it was winter or summer, whether it was raining or sunny, whether the birds were singing, whether it was the season for dahlias or daisies, whether the Luxembourg was lovelier than the Tuileries, whether the laundry the washerwoman brought back was too stiff with starch or not stiff enough, whether Toussaint had done her shopping well or badly. She remained sad and lost in thought, focused on only one thing, her eyes blank and fixed, like someone staring at night into a black, bottomless place where an apparition has disappeared.

Still, she did not let Jean Valjean see any of this, except for her paleness.

She still kept her gentle expression for him.

That paleness alone was more than enough to worry Jean Valjean. Sometimes he asked her:

“What is the matter with you?”

She answered, “Nothing is the matter with me.”

And after a silence, when she sensed that he too was sad, she would add:

“And you, father—is anything wrong with you?”

“With me? Nothing,” he said.

These two people had loved each other completely, with such tender devotion, and had lived for each other for so long. Now they suffered side by side, each because of the other—without saying so, without blaming one another, and still with a smile.

CHAPTER VIII—THE CHAIN-GANG

Jean Valjean was the more unhappy of the two. Youth, even in sorrow, always carries a kind of light of its own.

At times, Jean Valjean suffered so deeply that he became almost childlike. Grief has a way of bringing out the childish side of a person. He could not shake the conviction that Cosette was slipping away from him. He wanted to fight it, to keep her, to win back her admiration through something outward and dazzling. These thoughts were childish, as we have said, and at the same time old-manish. Yet in their very childishness they gave him a fairly accurate sense of the power that gold braid has over the imagination of young girls. One day he happened to see a general ride past in full uniform—Count Coutard, the military governor of Paris. He envied that glittering man. How wonderful it would be, he thought, if he could wear that unmistakable uniform. If Cosette could see him like that, she would be dazzled. And if he walked with Cosette on his arm through the gates of the Tuileries, the guard would present arms to him. That, he thought, would be enough for Cosette and would drive away any idea she had of looking at young men.

An unexpected blow was added to these sad thoughts.

In the secluded life they led, ever since they had come to live in the Rue Plumet, they had fallen into one habit. From time to time they took little pleasure outings to watch the sun rise, a gentle kind of enjoyment suited both to those just entering life and to

those preparing to leave it.

For people who love solitude, an early-morning walk is like a walk at night, but with the added cheerfulness of nature. The streets are empty, and the birds are singing. Cosette, a bird herself, liked getting up early. These morning outings were planned the evening before. He suggested them, and she agreed. They arranged them almost like a secret plot, setting out before dawn, and each trip was a small delight for Cosette. Young people enjoy these innocent little whims.

As we have seen, Jean Valjean was drawn to places where few people went—to lonely corners and forgotten spots. Near the barriers of Paris, there were then some poor meadows that almost blended into the city. In summer, thin, unhealthy grain grew there, and in autumn, after the harvest, the fields looked less as if they had been cut than as if they had been stripped bare. Jean Valjean loved to wander there. Cosette was not unhappy there either. For him, it meant solitude; for her, freedom. There she became a little girl again. She could run and almost play. She would take off her hat, set it on Jean Valjean’s knees, and gather bunches of flowers. She watched the butterflies on the blossoms but did not try to catch them; gentleness and tenderness are born with love, and a young girl who carries within her heart a trembling, fragile ideal feels pity even for a butterfly’s wing. She made garlands of poppies and placed them on her head. Lit through by the sun, glowing until they seemed to burn, they formed around her rosy face a crown of living embers.

Even after their life had become sad, they still kept up their habit of taking early walks.

So one morning in October, drawn out by the flawless calm of the autumn of 1831, they set off and at daybreak found themselves near the Barrière du Maine. It was not yet dawn, but the first breaking of day—a moment both lovely and severe. A few constellations still hung here and there in the deep, pale blue. The earth was entirely black, the sky entirely white. The grass trembled lightly, and everywhere there was the mysterious chill of twilight. A lark, seeming almost mixed with the stars, was singing high above, and one might have thought that this tiny hymn soothed the vastness of the sky. In the east, the Val-de-Grâce stood out as a dark mass against the clear horizon, sharp as steel. Behind its dome, Venus rose in dazzling brilliance and looked like a soul escaping from a gloomy building.

Everything was peaceful and silent. No one was on the road. Only a few scattered laborers, barely visible, were making their way to work along the side paths.

Jean Valjean sat in a crosswalk on some planks stacked by the gate of a timber yard. His face was turned toward the road, his back to the light. He had forgotten the sun, which was just about to rise. He had fallen into one of those deep states of thought in which the mind draws inward so completely that even the eyes seem shut in, as if by four walls. Some meditations are like descending straight down into a well; once at the bottom, it takes time to come back to earth. Jean Valjean had sunk into one of these reveries. He was thinking about Cosette, about the

happiness that might be theirs if nothing came between them, and about the light she brought into his life—a light that came from her soul. In his dreamlike thoughts, he was almost happy. Cosette, standing beside him, was watching the clouds turn pink.

Suddenly Cosette cried out, “Father, I think someone is coming over there.” Jean Valjean looked up.

Cosette was right. The road leading to the old Barrière du Maine is, as the reader knows, an extension of the Rue de Sèvres, crossed at right angles by the inner boulevard. At the bend where the road and boulevard meet, at the point where it branches off, they heard a noise that was hard to explain at that hour, and a kind of confused mass came into view. Some shapeless thing was turning off the boulevard and into the road.

It grew larger. It seemed to move in an orderly way, though it bristled and trembled. It looked like a vehicle, but its load could not yet be clearly seen. There were horses, wheels, shouts, and the crack of whips. Little by little, its shape became clearer, though it was still half lost in shadow. It was indeed a vehicle that had just turned from the boulevard into the road and was heading toward the barrier near which Jean Valjean sat. A second of the same kind followed, then a third, then a fourth. Seven carts appeared one after another, the horses’ heads almost touching the back of the wagon ahead. Figures moved on the vehicles. Flashes showed through the dim light, as if naked swords were there. A clanking sound could be heard, like chains rattling. As this thing came closer, the voices grew louder, and it became something terrible, like a vision rising out

of a nightmare.

As it came closer, it took shape, outlined behind the trees in the pale color of an apparition. The mass turned white. The slowly breaking dawn cast a sickly light over this swarming heap, at once both sepulchral and alive, making the figures' heads look like the faces of corpses. This was what it was:

Seven wagons were moving in single file along the road. The first six were built in a strange way. They looked like coopers' carts: long ladders set on two wheels, with handbarrow-like ends at the back. Each cart—or rather, each ladder—was pulled by four horses harnessed one behind another. On these ladders rode strange groups of men. In the weak light, you sensed them more than saw them. There were twenty-four on each vehicle, twelve on each side, sitting back to back and facing outward toward the roadside, their legs hanging in the air. That was how they traveled. Behind their backs was something that clanked: a chain. Around their necks was something that caught the light: an iron collar. Each man wore his own collar, but they all shared the same chain. So if the twenty-four men had to get down from the cart and walk, they were bound into a kind of merciless unity, forced to twist across the ground with the chain as a backbone, like centipedes. At the front and back of each vehicle stood two men with muskets, upright, each pinning one end of the chain beneath his foot. The iron collars were square. The seventh vehicle was a huge open baggage wagon with slatted sides, four wheels, and six horses. It carried a clanging heap of iron boilers, cast-iron pots, braziers, and chains. Mixed in among them were several men, bound hand and foot and

stretched out flat, who seemed to be sick. This wagon, made like a lattice, was fitted with battered hurdles that looked as though they had been used in earlier punishments. The vehicles kept to the middle of the road. On both sides marched a double line of guards with a vile appearance, wearing three-cornered hats like soldiers of the Directory. Their clothes were shabby, stained, and full of holes. They were wrapped in old veterans' uniforms and undertakers' trousers, half gray and half blue, nearly falling into rags, with red epaulets, yellow shoulder belts, short sabers, muskets, and clubs. They were a kind of soldierly scum. These myrmidons seemed made up of the wretchedness of beggars and the authority of executioners. The man who appeared to command them carried a postilion's whip. All these details, blurred in the dim dawn, grew sharper and clearer as the light increased. At the front and rear of the convoy rode mounted gendarmes, stern, with drawn swords in hand.

The procession was so long that by the time the first cart reached the barrier, the last was only just emerging from the boulevard. A crowd appeared from nowhere—no one could have said where it came from—and formed in an instant, as so often happens in Paris. It pressed in from both sides of the road to watch. In the nearby lanes, you could hear people shouting to one another and the clatter of market gardeners' wooden shoes as they hurried over to stare.

The men packed onto the drays let themselves be jolted along in silence. The morning cold had left them pale and ashen. They all wore linen trousers, with bare feet shoved into wooden shoes. The rest of what they wore was a miserable patchwork.

Their clothing was grotesquely mismatched; nothing looks more mournful than a harlequin in rags. There were battered felt hats, tarpaulin caps, and hideous woolen nightcaps; beside a short blouse, a black coat worn through at the elbow. Many wore women's head coverings; others had baskets on their heads. Hairy chests showed through, and through the tears in their clothes you could make out tattoos: temples of Love, flaming hearts, Cupids. You could also see sores and unhealthy red blotches. Two or three had a straw rope tied to the crossbar of the dray and hanging beneath them like a stirrup to support their feet. One man held something in his hand and kept lifting it to his mouth. It looked like a black stone that he was gnawing, but it was bread. Not one pair of eyes was untouched: they were either dry, dull, or burning with a vicious light. The mounted escort cursed; the chained men said nothing. From time to time came the sound of a blow, as cudgels struck shoulder blades or skulls. Some of the men yawned. Their rags were dreadful. Their feet dangled, their shoulders swayed, their heads knocked together, their chains clanked, their eyes flashed fiercely, and their fists either clenched or hung limp like the hands of corpses. Behind the convoy, a band of children ran along, shrieking with laughter.

This line of vehicles, whatever exactly it was, was deeply bleak. You could see at once what would happen if heavy rain came tomorrow, or even within the hour, and then another storm after that. Their ragged clothes would be soaked through. Once wet, these men would never dry out again. Once chilled, they would never be warm again. Their linen trousers would cling to their bones. Water would fill their shoes. No crack of the whip would

stop their teeth from chattering. The chain would still hold them by the neck. Their legs would still hang down. It was impossible not to shudder at the sight of these human beings, bound and helpless under the cold autumn clouds, abandoned to the rain, the wind, and all the violence of the weather like trees or stones.

Even the sick men were not spared blows from the cudgel. They lay on the seventh wagon, tied up with ropes and motionless, as if they had been thrown there like sacks stuffed with misery.

Suddenly the sun appeared. The vast light of the East broke out, and it seemed to set all those savage faces on fire. Their tongues were loosened. Grins, curses, and songs burst out in a kind of blaze. The broad, level sheet of light split the line in two, lighting up heads and bodies while leaving feet and wheels in shadow. Thoughts showed themselves on those faces. It was a terrible moment: visible demons with their masks torn away, fierce souls laid bare. Even flooded with light, this wild crowd remained dark. Some of the merrier ones had quills in their mouths, and through them they blew vermin over the crowd, choosing the women as their targets. The dawn sharpened these pitiful profiles with black shadow. Not one of these creatures was untouched by the deformity of misery. The whole scene was so monstrous that it seemed as if the brightness of the sun had turned into the glare of lightning. The wagonload at the head of the line had started a song and was shouting at the top of its voice with a wild, hollow cheerfulness: a pot-pourri by Desaugiers, famous at the time, called _The Vestal_. The trees shivered sadly. In the side lanes, bourgeois faces listened with foolish delight to these coarse songs droned out by spectres.

Every kind of misery seemed to meet in that procession, as if chaos itself had taken shape. There were faces with the sharp angles of every kind of beast: old men, youths, bald heads, gray beards, cynical monsters, bitter resignation, savage grins, vacant postures, snouts topped with caps, heads like young girls' with corkscrew curls at the temples, childish faces, and, because of that very contrast, horribly gaunt faces like skeletons, lacking only death itself. On the first cart sat a black man who had probably once been a slave, and who could compare one set of chains with another. The dreadful force that levels from below—shame—had passed across all these brows. At that depth of degradation, everyone had undergone the final changes in the furthest reaches of their being, and ignorance turned into stupidity stood equal with intelligence turned into despair. There was no distinguishing among these men, who looked like the very bloom of the mire. It was clear that whoever had arranged that filthy procession had made no attempt to sort them. These creatures had been chained and paired together in a jumble, perhaps in alphabetical order, and thrown onto the carts at random. And yet, when horrors are gathered together, they always end by producing some result. Every addition of wretched men creates a total. Each chain gave off a shared spirit, and each cartload had a face of its own. Beside the cart where they were singing was one where they were howling; a third where they were begging. In one they were grinding their teeth; another threatened the crowd; another cursed God; the last was as silent as the grave. Dante would have thought he was seeing his seven circles of hell on the move: the damned on their way to torment, advancing in grim fashion, not in the

terrible flaming chariot of the Apocalypse, but—more sorrowful still—on the hangman's cart.

One of the guards, with a hook at the end of his club, pretended from time to time to stir this heap of human filth. An old woman in the crowd pointed them out to her little boy of five and said, "You little rascal, let that be a warning to you!"

As the singing and blasphemy grew louder, the man who seemed to command the escort cracked his whip. At that signal, a terrible, heavy, indiscriminate beating rained down on the seven cartloads with a sound like hail. Many of the men howled and frothed at the mouth. That only increased the delight of the street boys who had come running up, swarming over those wounds like flies.

Jean Valjean's eyes had taken on a dreadful look. They were no longer truly eyes, but those deep, glassy things that replace a living gaze in certain miserable men—eyes that seem cut off from reality, yet burn with the reflection of terror and disaster. He was not watching a scene; he was seeing a vision. He tried to stand, to run, to get away, but his feet would not move. Sometimes what you see takes hold of you and keeps you there. He remained rooted to the spot, stunned and rigid, asking himself through a confused, unspeakable anguish what this grave-like persecution meant, and where this hellish uproar that pursued him had come from. Then suddenly he lifted his hand to his forehead, as people do when memory returns all at once. He remembered that this was indeed the usual route, that this detour was customarily made to avoid any chance of meeting royalty on the road to Fontainebleau, and that thirty-five years

earlier he himself had passed through that barrier.

Cosette was just as frightened, but in a different way. She did not understand; what she saw did not seem possible to her. At last she cried out:

“Father! What are those men in those carts?”

Jean Valjean answered, “Convicts.”

“Where are they going?”

“To the galleys.”

At that moment the beating, delivered by a hundred hands, grew even more furious. Blows from the flat of swords were mixed in with it. It was a full storm of whips and clubs. The convicts bowed under it; torture forced from them a hideous obedience, and they all fell silent, casting glances like chained wolves.

Cosette was trembling in every limb. She went on:

“Father, are they still men?”

“Sometimes,” the unhappy man answered.

It was the chain gang, in fact, that had left Bicêtre before dawn and taken the road to Le Mans to avoid Fontainebleau, where the King was then staying. That made the dreadful journey last three or four days longer; but torture can always be stretched out if the goal is to spare the royal personage the sight of it.

Jean Valjean returned home completely shaken. Encounters like that are a shock, and the memory they leave behind feels like

being violently rattled to the core.

Even so, Jean Valjean did not notice that, as they made their way back to the Rue de Babylone with Cosette, she kept asking him more questions about what they had just seen. Perhaps he was too absorbed in his own misery to hear her properly or answer. But that evening, when Cosette left him to go to bed, he heard her say softly, as if speaking to herself: "It seems to me that if I were to meet one of those men in my path, oh, my God, I would die just from seeing him close by."

Fortunately, by chance, the day after that tragic one there was some official celebration for I know not what—festivities in Paris, a review on the Champ de Mars, jousts on the Seine, theatrical performances in the Champs-Élysées, fireworks at the Arc de l'Étoile, lights everywhere. Jean Valjean went against his usual habits and took Cosette to see these festivities, hoping to draw her mind away from the memory of the day before and bury, beneath the cheerful uproar of all Paris, the horrible thing that had passed before her eyes. The military review woven into the celebration made the presence of uniforms seem perfectly natural; Jean Valjean put on his National Guard uniform with the vague inner feeling of a man seeking shelter. The outing seemed to achieve its purpose. Cosette, who made it a rule to please her father and who, besides, found every spectacle new, accepted the diversion with the light, easy grace of youth. She did not look too scornfully on that flutter of pleasure called a public festival. So Jean Valjean was able to believe that he had succeeded, and that no trace of that hideous vision remained.

A few days later, on a bright sunny morning, they were both on the steps leading down to the garden. This was another break from the rules Jean Valjean seemed to have set for himself, and from the habit of staying in her room that sadness had led Cosette to adopt. Cosette, wearing a dressing gown, stood there in the careless early-morning clothes that suit young girls so charmingly, like a cloud drawn across a star. Her face, fresh and rosy from sleep, was full of light as she quietly accepted the loving gaze of the tender old man and pulled apart a daisy petal by petal. Cosette did not know the sweet little saying, "He loves me a little, passionately," and so on. Who was there to teach it to her? She handled the flower instinctively and innocently, never suspecting that tearing apart a daisy is like doing the same to a heart. If there were a fourth Grace, smiling and called Melancholy, she would have looked like that. Jean Valjean was spellbound, watching those tiny fingers on the flower, forgetting everything in the light that seemed to come from the child. On one side, a robin was singing in the bushes. Little white clouds drifted across the sky so gaily that they seemed newly set free. Cosette kept carefully pulling the petals from her flower. She seemed to be thinking of something, and whatever it was must have been something lovely. Then suddenly she turned her head over her shoulder with the graceful languor of a swan and said to Jean Valjean, "Father, what are the galleys like?"

CHAPTER I—AN OUTER WOUND, INNER HEALING

So their life gradually grew darker.

But one comfort remained to them, something that had once been a joy: bringing bread to the hungry and clothes to those who were cold. Cosette often went with Jean Valjean on these visits to the poor, and during them they recovered a little of the easy closeness they had once shared. Sometimes, when the day had gone well, and they had helped many people in need and brought warmth and cheer to many little children, Cosette would be fairly cheerful in the evening. It was during this period that they made their visit to the Jondrette hovel.

The day after that visit, Jean Valjean appeared at the pavilion in the morning, as calm as usual, but with a large wound on his left arm. It was badly inflamed, red and angry, and looked like a burn. He gave some explanation for it. The wound kept him in the house for a month with a fever. He refused to send for a doctor. When Cosette urged him, he said, “Call the dog-doctor.”

Every morning and evening, Cosette dressed the wound with such gentle grace, and with such angelic happiness at being able to help him, that Jean Valjean felt all his old joy coming back. His fears and anxieties faded away, and as he looked at Cosette he said, “Oh, what a blessed wound! Oh, what a fortunate misfortune!”

As soon as Cosette saw that her father was ill, she abandoned the pavilion and took once more to the little lodging and the back courtyard. She spent nearly all her days beside Jean Valjean and read aloud to him from whatever books he wanted. They were usually books of travel. Jean Valjean seemed to be living through a new birth. His happiness was returning in those indescribable rays of light. The Luxembourg, the prowling young stranger, Cosette's coldness—all those shadows on his soul were fading. He had reached the point of saying to himself, "I imagined all that. I am an old fool."

His happiness was so great that the dreadful discovery of the Thénardiers in the Jondrette hovel, unexpected as it had been, had in a way passed over him almost without leaving a mark. He had managed to escape, and all trace of him had been lost—what more did he care about? He thought only of those miserable people and pitied them. "Now they are in prison, and from this point on they will be unable to do any harm," he thought, "but what a wretched family in distress!"

As for the terrible vision at the Barrière du Maine, Cosette did not mention it again.

Sister Sainte-Mechtilde had taught Cosette music in the convent. Cosette had a voice like a linnet, but with soul, and sometimes in the evening, in the wounded man's humble room, she sang melancholy songs that delighted Jean Valjean.

Spring arrived. The garden was so lovely at that time of year that Jean Valjean said to Cosette:

“You never go there. I want you to walk in it.”

“As you wish, father,” said Cosette.

To obey her father, she started taking her walks in the garden again, usually by herself. As we have said, Jean Valjean rarely went there, probably because he was afraid of being seen through the fence.

Jean Valjean’s wound had distracted everyone.

When Cosette saw that her father was suffering less, that he was recovering, and that he seemed happy, she felt a quiet contentment without even noticing it, so gently and naturally had it come over her. It was March. The days were getting longer, and winter was fading away; winter always carries off some part of our sadness with it. Then came April, the dawn of summer, fresh as every dawn is, cheerful as childhood, and sometimes a little ready to weep, like a newborn life. In that month, nature has lovely flashes of beauty that pass from the sky, the trees, the meadows, and the flowers into the human heart.

Cosette was still too young to resist the deep influence of that April joy, which resembled her so closely. Little by little, and without realizing it, the darkness left her spirit. In spring, sad souls grow lighter, just as light reaches into cellars at noon. Cosette was no longer sad. Even so, she did not stop to explain it to herself. In the morning, around ten o’clock, after breakfast, when she had managed to coax her father into the garden for a quarter of an hour, and while she walked up and down in the sunshine before the steps, supporting his left arm, she did not

notice that she was laughing constantly and that she was happy.

Jean Valjean, overwhelmed with joy, watched her become fresh and rosy again.

“Oh, what a fortunate wound!” he repeated under his breath.

And he felt grateful to the Thénardiers.

Once his wound had healed, he went back to his solitary walks at twilight.

It is a mistake to think that someone can wander alone like that through the deserted parts of Paris without running into some adventure.

CHAPTER II—MOTHER PLUTARQUE HAS NO TROUBLE EXPLAINING A PHENOMENON

One evening, little Gavroche had nothing to eat. He remembered that he had not had dinner the day before either. It was starting to get old. He decided to make an effort to find some supper. He wandered out past the Salpêtrière into deserted areas; that was where lucky finds turned up. Where no one is around, you can always find something. He came to a cluster of houses that seemed to him to be the village of Austerlitz.

On one of his earlier strolls, he had noticed an old garden there, watched over by an old man and an old woman, and in that garden, a fairly decent apple tree. Next to the apple tree stood a kind of fruit shed that was not securely locked, and where a person might manage to get an apple. One apple makes a supper; one apple is life. What had been Adam's ruin might turn out to be Gavroche's salvation. The garden backed onto a lonely, unpaved lane, lined with brush while waiting for houses to be built; the garden was separated from it by a hedge.

Gavroche headed for this garden. He found the lane, recognized the apple tree, checked the fruit shed, and looked over the hedge; a hedge meant only a single stride. The day was fading, there was not even a cat in the lane, and the moment was favorable. Gavroche began to climb the hedge, then suddenly stopped. Someone was talking in the garden.

Gavroche peered through one of the gaps in the hedge.

[Illustration: Help from Below]

A couple of steps away, at the foot of the hedge on the other side, exactly where he had been planning to make his entrance, there was a sort of flat stone that served as a bench. On this bench sat the old man from the garden, while the old woman stood in front of him. The old woman was complaining. Gavroche, who was not especially discreet, listened.

“Monsieur Mabeuf!” said the old woman.

“Mabeuf!” thought Gavroche. “That name is downright ridiculous.”

The old man being addressed did not move. The old woman repeated:

“Monsieur Mabeuf!”

Without lifting his eyes from the ground, the old man finally decided to answer:

“What is it, Mother Plutarque?”

“Mother Plutarque!” thought Gavroche. “Another ridiculous name.”

Mother Plutarque started again, and the old man had no choice but to continue the conversation:

“The landlord isn’t happy.”

“Why?”

“We’re three quarters behind on the rent.”

“In three months, we’ll owe him four quarters.”

“He says he’ll put you out on the street.”

“I will go.”

“The greengrocer insists on being paid. She won’t leave her fagots anymore. What will you keep yourself warm with this winter? We’ll have no wood.”

“There is the sun.”

“The butcher won’t give us credit anymore; he won’t let us have any more meat.”

“That’s only right. I don’t digest meat well. It’s too heavy.”

“What shall we have for dinner?”

“Bread.”

“The baker wants to be paid, and says, ‘no money, no bread.’”

“Very well.”

“What will you eat?”

“We have apples in the apple-room.”

“But, Monsieur, we can’t live like this without money.”

“I have none.”

The old woman went away, and the old man stayed behind alone. He sank into thought. Gavroche grew thoughtful too. It was almost dark.

The first thing Gavroche's thinking led him to do was this: instead of climbing over the hedge, he crouched down beneath it. The branches spread apart a little at the bottom of the thicket.

"Well," Gavroche said to himself, "here's a little nook!" and he curled up inside it. His back was almost touching Father Mabeuf's bench. He could hear the old man breathing.

Then, for dinner, he tried to sleep.

It was only a light doze, with one eye open. Even while drifting off, Gavroche stayed on watch.

The pale twilight sky washed the earth in whiteness, and the lane stretched like a ghostly line between two rows of dark bushes.

All at once, two figures appeared in that pale strip. One was ahead, and the other followed some distance behind.

"Here come two people," muttered Gavroche.

The first figure looked like an elderly middle-class man, stooped and thoughtful, dressed very simply, and walking slowly because of his age as he strolled in the evening air.

The second was upright, steady, and slim. It matched its pace to the first man's, but even in its deliberate slowness there was a clear sense of flexibility and quickness. There was also something fierce and unsettling about it. The whole figure had the look of what people then called an elegant man: the hat was well shaped, the black coat was well cut, probably made of fine cloth, and fitted closely at the waist. The head was held high with a kind of strong grace, and in the dim light you could make

out the pale profile of a young man beneath the hat. He had a rose in his mouth. Gavroche knew this second figure well. It was Montparnasse.

About the other man, he could have said only that he was a respectable old gentleman.

Gavroche immediately began to watch closely.

It was obvious that one of the two walkers had some plan involving the other. Gavroche was in a perfect position to see what happened. The bedroom had become a hiding place at exactly the right moment.

Montparnasse out hunting at that hour and in that place meant trouble. Gavroche felt his street-boy heart fill with pity for the old man.

What should he do? Step in? One weak creature trying to help another! Montparnasse would only laugh. Gavroche knew perfectly well that the old man first, and the child after him, would be no more than two bites for that fearsome eighteen-year-old ruffian.

While Gavroche was still deciding, the attack came—sudden and horrible. Like a tiger springing on a wild ass, like a spider pouncing on a fly. Montparnasse suddenly spat out his rose, leaped at the old man, grabbed him by the collar, and clung to him, and Gavroche could barely keep from crying out. A moment later, one of the two men was on the ground, groaning and struggling, with a marble-hard knee pressed against his chest. But it was not what Gavroche had expected. The man

lying on the ground was Montparnasse; the man on top was the old man. All this happened only a few steps from Gavroche.

The old man had taken the blow and returned it in such a terrible way that, in an instant, the attacker and the attacked had switched places.

“Now that’s a tough old veteran!” Gavroche thought.

He could not help clapping his hands. But the applause was wasted. It did not reach the two fighters, so completely absorbed in each other and deaf to everything else as they struggled, their breath mingling.

Then silence fell. Montparnasse stopped struggling. Gavroche muttered to himself, “Could he be dead?”

The old man had not said a word or let out a cry. He got to his feet, and Gavroche heard him say to Montparnasse:

“Get up.”

Montparnasse got up, but the old man kept a firm hold on him. Montparnasse looked both humiliated and furious, like a wolf caught by a sheep.

Gavroche watched and listened, straining to make his ears help his eyes. He was enjoying himself enormously.

His careful attention as a spectator was rewarded. He managed to catch a fragment of dialogue that the darkness gave an indescribably tragic tone. The old man asked the questions; Montparnasse answered.

“How old are you?”

“Nineteen.”

“You are strong and healthy. Why don’t you work?”

“It bores me.”

“What is your trade?”

“Doing nothing.”

“Be serious. Can anything be done for you? What would you like to be?”

“A thief.”

There was a pause. The old man seemed lost in deep thought. He stood perfectly still and did not loosen his grip on Montparnasse.

Every few moments, the strong, agile young ruffian jerked like a wild animal caught in a trap. He gave sudden pulls, tried to twist his knee free, writhed desperately, and struggled to escape.

The old man seemed not to notice and held both his arms with one hand, with the calm indifference of absolute strength.

The old man remained lost in thought for a while. Then he looked steadily at Montparnasse and, in a gentle voice, delivered a solemn speech in the darkness where they stood. Gavroche did not miss a single word:

“My child, through sheer laziness, you are stepping into one of the hardest lives there is. Ah, you call yourself an idler? Then get ready to work. There is a terrible machine—have you seen

it? The rolling mill. Beware of it. It is cunning and savage. If it catches the hem of your coat, it will drag you in whole. That machine is laziness. Stop while there is still time and save yourself. Otherwise, you are lost. Before long, you will be caught in the gears. And once you are trapped there, hope is over. Work, lazy boy! Rest is finished for you. The iron hand of relentless labor has seized you. You do not want to earn your living, to have a task, to do your duty? You find it tiresome to live like other men? Very well—you will be different. Work is the law. Whoever rejects it will be punished by boredom. You do not want to be a workingman? Then you will be a slave. Labor will release you on one side only to seize you again on the other. You do not want to be its friend? Then you will be its negro slave. Ah, you refuse the honest weariness of ordinary men? Then you shall have the sweat of the damned. Where others sing, you will only gasp and choke. From below, you will look up and see other men at work, and they will seem to you as if they were resting. The laborer, the harvester, the sailor, the blacksmith—they will appear glorious to you, like blessed spirits in paradise. How bright the forge will seem! To guide the plough, to bind the sheaves—what joy! A ship free in the wind—what delight! But you, lazy idler, will dig, drag, roll, march. Drag your halter. You will be a beast of burden in the team of hell. Ah, doing nothing is your aim. Well then, not a week, not a day, not an hour of your life will be free from oppression. You will not be able to lift anything without pain. Every passing minute will make your muscles crack. What is a feather to others will be a rock to you. The simplest things will turn into steep climbs. Life itself will become monstrous around

you. To go, to come, to breathe—each will be a terrible labor. Your own lungs will feel as heavy as a hundred-pound weight. Even deciding whether to walk here or there will become a problem to solve. When other people want to go out, they push open a door and step into the open air. If you want to go out, you will have to break through a wall. What does an ordinary man do when he wants to step into the street? He goes downstairs. You, instead, will tear up your sheets and slowly make a rope from them. Then you will climb out your window and hang by that thread over an abyss, in the night, in storm and rain and hurricane winds. And if the rope is too short, only one way down will remain: to fall. To drop blindly into the gulf from an unknown height—onto what? Onto whatever lies below, onto the unknown. Or you will crawl up a chimney, risking fire. Or creep through a sewer pipe, risking drowning. I say nothing of the holes you will have to conceal, the stones you will have to lift and replace twenty times a day, the plaster you will have to hide in your straw mattress. A lock stands in your way. The bourgeois carries in his pocket a key made by a locksmith. But if you want to pass through, you will be forced to create a dreadful little masterpiece. You will take a large sou and cut it into two thin plates. With what tools? You will have to invent them. That is your affair. Then you will hollow out the inside of those plates, carefully preserving the outside, and cut threads along the edges so they can screw together like a box and its lid. Once top and bottom are joined, no one will suspect a thing. To the overseers it will be only a sou; to you it will be a box. And what will you put in this box? A tiny piece of steel. A watch-spring with teeth cut into it, to make a saw. With this saw,

no longer than a pin and hidden inside a sou, you will cut through the lock bolt, sever bars, the padlock on your chain, the bar on your window, and the fetter on your leg. And when this masterpiece is done, when this marvel is achieved, when all these miracles of art, dexterity, skill, and patience have been carried out—what will your reward be if it is discovered that you made it? The dungeon. That is your future. What abysses there are in idleness and pleasure! Do you know that choosing to do nothing is a miserable decision? To live in idleness on the property of society, to be useless—that is to say, harmful—leads straight down into wretchedness. Woe to the man who wants to live as a parasite. He will become vermin. Ah, so work does not please you? You think only of drinking well, eating well, sleeping well. You will drink water. You will eat black bread. You will sleep on a plank, with a fetter fastened to your limbs, its cold iron pressing against your flesh all night long. You will break those fetters and flee. Good. Then you will crawl on your belly through the brushwood and eat grass like the beasts of the forest. And you will be caught again. Then you will spend years in a dungeon, chained to a wall, groping for your jug so you can drink, gnawing at a horrible loaf of darkness that dogs would not touch, eating beans the worms have eaten before you. You will be a wood-louse in a cellar. Ah, have pity on yourself, miserable young child—you who were at nurse less than twenty years ago, and who no doubt still have a mother alive. I beg you, listen to me. I implore you. You want fine black clothes, polished shoes, curled hair, sweet oils on your locks, to please low women, to look handsome. You will be shaved bare, and you will wear a red blouse and wooden shoes. You want

rings on your fingers? You will have an iron collar on your neck. If you so much as look at a woman, you will be struck. And you will go in there at twenty. And you will come out at fifty. You will enter young, rosy, fresh, with bright eyes, all your white teeth, and your handsome young hair. You will come out broken, bent, wrinkled, toothless, hideous, with white hair. Ah, my poor child, you are on the wrong road. Laziness is giving you terrible advice. The hardest work of all is stealing. Believe me: do not take up that painful trade of the idle man. It is no easy thing to become a rascal. It is far less unpleasant to be an honest man. Now go, and think over what I have said to you. By the way, what did you want from me? My purse? Here it is."

The old man let go of Montparnasse and placed his purse in his hand. Montparnasse weighed it for a moment, then quietly slipped it into the back pocket of his coat, with the same automatic caution he would have used if he had stolen it.

After saying and doing all this, the old man turned away and calmly went back to his walk.

"What a fool!" muttered Montparnasse.

Who was this old man? The reader has no doubt already guessed.

Montparnasse stared after him in amazement as he disappeared into the dusk. That moment of reflection proved fatal for him.

As the old man walked away, Gavroche came closer.

With a sideways glance, Gavroche made sure that Father Mabeuf was still sitting on his bench, probably fast asleep. Then

the street urchin slipped out of his hiding place and began crawling through the darkness toward Montparnasse, who was standing there motionless. In this way he reached him without being seen or heard, gently slid his hand into the back pocket of the fine black frock coat, took the purse, and pulled his hand back. Then, crawling once more, he glided away through the shadows like a snake. Montparnasse, who had no reason to be on guard and who was thinking for the first time in his life, noticed nothing. Once Gavroche had made his way back to where Father Mabeuf was, he tossed the purse over the hedge and ran off as fast as he could.

The purse landed on Father Mabeuf’s foot. The jolt woke him.

He bent down and picked up the purse.

He had no idea what it was, and opened it.

The purse had two compartments. One held a little small change; the other contained six napoleons.

M. Mabeuf, greatly alarmed, consulted his housekeeper about the matter.

“That fell from heaven,” said Mother Plutarque.

CHAPTER I—SOLITUDE COMBINED WITH THE BARRACKS

Cosette's grief, which had been so sharp and intense four or five months earlier, had begun to heal without her even realizing it. Nature, spring, youth, her love for her father, and the cheerful life of birds and flowers slowly brought something like forgetfulness into her pure young soul, drop by drop. Was the fire there completely out? Or had it simply been covered by layers of ash? The truth was that she hardly felt that painful, burning place anymore.

One day she suddenly thought of Marius. "Why," she said to herself, "I don't think of him anymore."

That same week, she noticed a very handsome lancer officer passing the gate. He had a wasp-like waist, a splendid uniform, the cheeks of a young girl, a sword under his arm, waxed mustaches, and a shiny schapka. He was blond, with prominent blue eyes and a round face, and he was vain, insolent, and good-looking—the exact opposite of Marius. He had a cigar in his mouth. Cosette thought he must belong to the regiment quartered in the barracks on the Rue de Babylone.

The next day, she saw him pass again. She noted the hour.

From then on—was it chance?—she saw him pass almost every day.

The officer's comrades noticed that in that "poorly kept" garden, behind that spiteful rococo fence, there was a very pretty girl who was almost always there when the handsome lieutenant passed by—the lieutenant already known to the reader, whose name was Théodule Gillenormand.

"Look there!" they said to him. "There's a little beauty there making eyes at you. See?"

"Do I have time," the lancer replied, "to look at every girl who looks at me?"

This was happening at the exact moment when Marius was sinking deeper and deeper into misery and saying, "If only I could see her before I die!" If that wish had been granted, if he had seen Cosette at that moment looking at the lancer, he would not have been able to say a word; he would have died of grief.

Whose fault was it? No one's.

Marius had one of those natures that bury themselves in sorrow and stay there. Cosette was one of those people who fall into sorrow and then rise out of it again.

Cosette, besides, was going through that dangerous time—the fateful stage of a young woman's dreaming when she is left entirely to herself. In such a moment, the lonely heart of a girl is like a vine tendril that clings, by pure chance, either to the carved top of a marble column or to the post outside a tavern. It is a swift, decisive, critical time for every orphan, whether rich or poor, since wealth does not protect anyone from choosing badly. Unequal marriages happen even in the highest circles;

the true mismatch is between souls. Many an unknown young man, with no name, rank, or fortune, is in fact a marble column supporting a temple of noble feelings and noble ideas. And many a fashionable, prosperous man, with polished boots and smooth, glossy words, if one looks not at his exterior but at what is inside him—a sight reserved for his wife—is nothing more than a post outside a drinking-shop, darkly inhabited by violent, filthy, wine-soaked passions.

What was in Cosette's soul? A passion that had quieted, or perhaps only fallen asleep; something clear and bright on the surface, troubled a little below that, and dark in the deeper places. The image of the handsome officer was reflected on top. Did some memory still remain in the depths—at the very bottom? Perhaps. Cosette herself did not know.

Then a strange incident occurred.

CHAPTER II—COSETTE'S FEARS

During the first two weeks of April, Jean Valjean went away on a journey. As the reader knows, this happened from time to time, though at long intervals. He was never gone more than a day or two. Where did he go? No one knew, not even Cosette. Only once, on one of these departures, had she gone with him in a hired carriage as far as a little dead-end lane, at the corner of which she read: _Impasse de la Planchette_. There he got out, and the carriage took Cosette back to the Rue de Babylone. Jean Valjean usually made these short trips when money in the house was running low.

So Jean Valjean was away. He had said, "I shall return in three days."

That evening, Cosette was alone in the drawing room. To relieve her boredom, she opened her piano and began to sing, accompanying herself with the chorus from _Euryanthe_: "Hunters astray in the wood!"—probably the most beautiful passage in all music. When she finished, she sat lost in thought.

Suddenly, she thought she heard footsteps in the garden.

It could not be her father; he was away. It could not be Toussaint; she was in bed, and it was ten o'clock at night.

She went to the closed drawing-room shutter and pressed her ear against it.

It sounded to her like a man's footsteps, moving very softly.

She hurried up to the first floor to her room, opened a small panel in the shutter, and looked out into the garden. The moon was full. She could see everything as clearly as if it were day.

There was no one there.

She opened the window. The garden was perfectly still, and the only thing she could make out was that the street, as usual, was deserted.

She gave it no more thought.

Besides, Cosette was not naturally very timid. Some of the blood of the bohemian and the barefoot adventuress ran in her veins. It will be remembered that she was more lark than dove. There was a streak of wildness and courage in her.

The next day, a little earlier, toward nightfall, she was walking in the garden. In the middle of the confused thoughts filling her mind, she thought for a moment that she heard a sound like the one from the evening before, as if someone were walking under the trees in the dusk, not far from her. But she told herself that nothing sounds more like footsteps on grass than two branches rubbing together after swaying back and forth, and she paid no attention to it. Besides, she could see nothing.

She came out of "the thicket"; she still had to cross a small lawn to reach the steps.

The moon, which had just risen behind her, threw Cosette's shadow out in front of her across the lawn as she stepped from the shrubbery.

Cosette stopped in alarm.

Beside her own shadow, the moon clearly traced another on the grass, a shadow especially shocking and terrifying: a shadow wearing a round hat.

It was the shadow of a man, who must have been standing at the edge of the clump of shrubs, a few paces behind Cosette.

She stood there for a moment, unable to speak, cry out, call for help, move, or even turn her head.

Then she gathered all her courage and turned around firmly.

No one was there.

She looked down at the ground. The figure was gone.

She went back into the thicket, searched every corner bravely, went all the way to the gate, and found nothing.

She felt completely frozen with terror. Was this another hallucination? What—two days in a row! One hallucination might be explained, but two? The troubling thing was that the shadow certainly had not been a phantom. Phantoms do not wear round hats.

The next day Jean Valjean returned. Cosette told him what she thought she had heard and seen. She wanted to be reassured, and hoped her father would shrug his shoulders and say to her, “You silly little goose.”

Jean Valjean became anxious.

“It cannot be anything,” he said.

He left her on some pretext and went into the garden, and she saw him examining the gate very carefully.

During the night she woke up. This time she was certain, and she clearly heard someone walking near the flight of steps below her window. She ran to her little wicket and opened it. There really was a man in the garden, holding a large club. Just as she was about to scream, the moon lit up the man’s profile. It was her father. She went back to bed, saying to herself, “He is very uneasy!”

Jean Valjean spent that night and the next two nights in the garden. Cosette saw him through the hole in her shutter.

On the third night, the moon was waning and rising later; at about one o’clock in the morning, she heard a loud burst of laughter and her father’s voice calling to her:

“Cosette!”

She jumped out of bed, threw on her dressing-gown, and opened her window.

Her father was standing on the lawn below.

“I woke you to set your mind at ease,” he said. “Look—there is your shadow with the round hat.”

Cosette laughed with him. All her gloomy suspicions faded away, and the next morning, as she ate breakfast with her father, she joked about the ominous garden haunted by the shadows of iron chimney pots.

Jean Valjean became completely calm again. As for Cosette, she gave little thought to whether the chimney pot had really stood where the shadow appeared—or where she thought it had appeared—or whether the moon had been in the same place in the sky.

She did not stop to wonder about the odd behavior of a chimney pot that seemed afraid of being caught and slipped away the moment someone looked at its shadow. The shadow had seemed to startle and vanish when Cosette turned around, and she had felt quite certain of that. Cosette’s peace of mind was fully restored. To her, the proof was complete, and the whole idea that someone might be walking in the garden in the evening or at night disappeared from her mind.

A few days later, however, something new happened.

CHAPTER III—WITH COMMENTARY BY TOUSSAINT

In the garden, near the fence along the street, there was a stone bench hidden from curious eyes by a cluster of elms. Still, if necessary, someone outside could reach it by stretching an arm past the trees and the gate.

One evening later that same April, Jean Valjean had gone out, and after sunset Cosette sat down on this bench. A lively breeze moved through the trees. Cosette was lost in thought. Little by little, a vague sadness came over her—that irresistible sadness evening brings, perhaps, who knows, from the mystery of the tomb standing half open at that hour.

Perhaps Fantine was in that shadow.

Cosette got up and slowly walked around the garden, crossing the grass wet with dew. In the kind of melancholy sleepwalking state into which she had drifted, she said to herself, "Really, you need wooden shoes in the garden at this hour. You catch cold."

She went back to the bench.

As she was about to sit down again, she noticed a fairly large stone in the place she had just left, a stone that clearly had not been there a moment earlier.

Cosette stared at the stone, wondering what it meant. Then it suddenly struck her that the stone had not landed on the bench by itself. Someone must have put it there; an arm must have reached through the railing. The thought frightened her. This

time her fear was real: the stone was there. There could be no doubt. She did not touch it. She ran away without looking back, took refuge in the house, and at once shut the door-like window that opened onto the steps, securing it with the shutter, bolt, and bar. She asked Toussaint:

“Has my father come back yet?”

“Not yet, Mademoiselle.”

[We have already mentioned, once and for all, that Toussaint stuttered. May we be allowed to leave that out from now on? Trying to write out the sound of a speech defect is unpleasant to us.]

Jean Valjean was a thoughtful man and fond of walking at night, so he often came home very late.

“Toussaint,” Cosette went on, “are you careful every evening to secure the shutters that open onto the garden with the bars, and to put the little iron pieces into the little rings that keep them closed?”

“Oh, you may be quite easy on that point, Miss.”

Toussaint never neglected her duties, and Cosette knew that perfectly well, but she still could not help adding:

“It is so lonely here.”

“In that respect,” said Toussaint, “it’s true. We could be murdered before we had time to say $_{ouf}$!_ And Monsieur does not sleep in the house either, on top of that. But don’t be afraid, Miss. I fasten the shutters up like prison doors. Women alone!

That is enough to make anyone shudder, I assure you. Just imagine if you were to see men come into your room at night and say, 'Keep quiet!' and start cutting your throat. It isn't so much the dying; you die, since everyone must die, and that is all right. It's the horror of feeling those people touch you. And then their knives—they can't possibly cut cleanly with them! Ah, good heavens!"

"Be quiet," said Cosette. "Fasten everything securely."

Cosette was terrified by the dramatic scene Toussaint had invented, and perhaps also by the memory of the strange sights of the past week, which came back to her mind. She did not even dare say, "Go and look at the stone that has been placed on the bench!" She was afraid that opening the garden gate might let "the men" in. She made sure all the doors and windows were securely fastened, sent Toussaint through the whole house from attic to cellar, shut herself in her own room, bolted the door, looked under her bed, went to sleep, and slept badly. All night she dreamed of that huge stone, as big as a mountain and full of caves.

At sunrise—for daylight has a way of making us laugh at the fears of the night, and the greater our fear was, the greater our laughter often is—Cosette woke and decided that her terror had been nothing but a bad dream. She said to herself, "What was I thinking? It is just like the footsteps I imagined I heard in the garden a week or two ago at night. It is just like the shadow of the chimney pot. Am I becoming a coward?" The sun, shining through the cracks in the shutters and turning the damask curtains crimson, reassured her so completely that everything

slipped from her mind, 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 the stone, just as I dreamed all the rest.”

She got dressed, went down into the garden, ran to the bench, and broke into a cold sweat. The stone was there.

But that feeling lasted only a moment. What is terror at night becomes curiosity in daylight.

“Bah!” she said. “Come, let us see what it is.”

She lifted the stone, which was fairly large. Under it was something that looked like a letter: a white envelope. Cosette snatched it up. There was no address on one side and no seal on the other. Yet although the envelope was unsealed, it was not empty. Papers could be seen inside.

Cosette looked it over. Her feeling was no longer alarm, no longer curiosity; it was the beginning of anxiety.

Cosette pulled out what was inside: a small paper notebook, each page numbered and covered with a few lines in a very fine, rather pretty handwriting, or so Cosette thought.

Cosette looked for a name, but there was none. Who was this meant for? Probably for her, since someone had left the packet on her bench. Who had sent it? An irresistible curiosity took hold of her. She tried to look away from the pages trembling in her hand. She looked up at the sky, the street, the acacias glowing in the light, the pigeons fluttering over a nearby roof. Then her eyes suddenly dropped back to the manuscript, and she told

herself she had to know what it said.

This is what she read.

CHAPTER IV—A HEART BENEATH A STONE

[Illustration: Cosette With Letter]

Love is the shrinking of the whole universe into a single being, and the unfolding of that single being until it becomes as vast as God.

Love is the greeting the angels give to the stars.

How sorrowful the soul is when love is the cause of its sorrow!

What emptiness there is when the one being who alone fills the whole world is absent! Oh, how true it is that the beloved becomes God. One might understand God being jealous of this, if God, the Father of all, had not so clearly made creation for the soul, and the soul for love.

A glimpse of a smile beneath a white crape bonnet with a lilac veil is enough to send the soul into the palace of dreams.

God is behind everything, but everything hides God. Things are dark, and living beings are opaque. To love someone is to make that person transparent.

Some thoughts are prayers. There are moments when, whatever position the body is in, the soul is kneeling.

Separated lovers soften absence with a thousand imaginary devices that still have a reality of their own. They are kept from seeing each other; they cannot write to each other. So they discover countless mysterious ways to communicate. They

send each other the songs of birds, the scent of flowers, the smiles of children, the light of the sun, the sighing of the breeze, the rays of the stars—in short, all creation. And why not? Everything God has made exists to serve love. Love is powerful enough to make all of nature carry its messages.

Oh Spring! You are a letter that I write to her.

The future belongs even more to the heart than to the mind. Love alone can fill eternity. In the infinite, only what can never be exhausted is enough.

Love is part of the soul itself. It shares the same nature. Like the soul, it is a divine spark—incorruptible, indivisible, and imperishable. It is a point of fire within us, immortal and infinite, that nothing can contain and nothing can put out. We feel it burning to the marrow of our bones, and we see its light shining in the depths of heaven.

Oh, love! Adoration! The delight of two minds that understand each other, of two hearts that give themselves to each other, of two gazes that reach into each other! You will come to me, won't you, happiness? Walks for two in lonely places! Blessed, radiant days! I have sometimes dreamed that now and then a few hours break away from the lives of angels and come down to earth to pass through the destinies of men.

God can add nothing to the happiness of those who love except to make it last forever. After a life of love, an eternity of love is indeed an increase. But even God cannot make more intense the indescribable joy that love gives the soul in this world. God is the fullness of heaven; love is the fullness of man.

You look at a star for two reasons: because it shines, and because you cannot penetrate its mystery. Beside you stands a gentler light and a deeper mystery: woman.

All of us, whoever we are, have beings we breathe through. Without them, we lack air and begin to suffocate. Then we die. To die for lack of love is terrible. It is the soul being smothered.

When love has joined and blended two beings into a sacred, angelic unity, then for them the secret of life has been found. They are no longer anything but the two edges of the same destiny. They are nothing but the two wings of the same spirit. Love, take flight.

The day a woman passes before you and seems to give off light as she walks, you are lost—you are in love. But one thing still remains for you to do: think of her so deeply that she is compelled to think of you.

Only God can bring to completion what love begins.

True love lives in despair and can be spellbound by a lost glove or a found handkerchief. It needs eternity for its devotion and its hopes. It is made of both the infinitely great and the infinitely small.

If you are a stone, be adamant. If you are a plant, be the sensitive plant. If you are a man, be love.

Nothing is enough for love. We have happiness, and we long for paradise. We possess paradise, and we long for heaven.

Oh, you who love each other, all of this is contained within love. Learn how to find it there. Love has contemplation, and heaven as well; and beyond heaven, it has sensual delight.

“Does she still come to the Luxembourg?” “No, sir.” “This is the church where she attends mass, isn’t it?” “She no longer comes here.” “Does she still live in this house?” “She has moved away.” “Where has she gone to live?”

“She did not say.”

What a sad thing it is not to know the address of one’s soul!

Love has its childish side; other passions have their petty sides. Shame on the passions that diminish a man. Honor to the one that makes a child of him!

There is one strange thing—do you know it? I live in the night. There is a being who took away my sky when she left.

Oh, if only we were lying side by side in the same grave, hand in hand, and now and then, in the darkness, gently touching a finger—that would be enough for my eternity!

You who suffer because you love, love even more. To die of love is to live in it.

Love. A dark, starry transfiguration is mixed with this torment. There is ecstasy in agony.

Oh, the joy of birds! They sing because they have nests.

Love is a heavenly breath drawn from the air of paradise.

Deep hearts and wise minds accept life as God has made it. It is a long ordeal, a mysterious preparation for a destiny we do not know. That true destiny begins for a person with the first step into the tomb. Then something reveals itself, and he begins to make out what is final. Think carefully about that word: final. The living catch glimpses of the infinite; only the dead are allowed to see what is final. Meanwhile, love and suffer, hope and reflect. Alas for the one who has loved only bodies, forms, and appearances. Death will take all of that away. Try to love souls, and you will find them again.

In the street I met a very poor young man who was in love. His hat was shabby, his coat was threadbare, and his elbows poked through holes. Water leaked through his shoes, and the stars shone through his soul.

What a great thing it is to be loved. What a far greater thing it is to love. Through passion, the heart becomes heroic. It is made only of what is pure; it can rest on nothing that is not noble and great. An unworthy thought can no more grow there than a nettle can grow on a glacier. The calm and exalted soul, beyond the reach of common passions and emotions, rises above the clouds and shadows of this world—its follies, lies, hatreds, vanities, and miseries. It lives in the blue of heaven and feels only the deep, hidden tremors of destiny, just as mountain

peaks feel the shock of an earthquake.

If there were no one left to love, the sun would go out.

CHAPTER V—COSETTE AFTER THE LETTER

As Cosette read, she slowly sank into thought. Just as she lifted her eyes from the last line of the notebook, the handsome officer rode past the gate in triumph—it was his usual hour. Cosette found him ugly.

She turned back to the book and went on reading. The handwriting, Cosette thought, was wonderfully beautiful. It was the same hand throughout, but written with different inks—sometimes deep black, sometimes pale and watered down, as if more ink had been poured into the inkwell—so it must have been written on different days. A mind had poured itself out there, then, sigh by sigh, unevenly, without order, without plan, without any clear aim, almost at random. Cosette had never read anything like it. This manuscript, in which she already sensed more light than darkness, affected her like the door of a sanctuary left half open. Every one of those mysterious lines seemed to shine before her eyes and flood her heart with a strange light. Everything she had been taught had spoken to her of the soul, never of love, much as if one spoke of the torch and not of the flame. These fifteen pages suddenly, gently revealed to her the whole of love, sorrow, destiny, life, eternity, the beginning, and the end. It was as though a hand had opened and suddenly scattered a handful of light over her. In those few lines she felt a passionate, ardent, generous, honest nature; a sacred resolve; immense sorrow and immense despair; a suffering heart; an ecstasy fully opened. What was

this manuscript? A letter. A letter with no name, no address, no date, no signature—urgent and selfless, a mystery made of truths, a message of love meant to be carried by an angel and read by a virgin, a meeting arranged beyond the limits of earth, the love letter of a phantom to a shadow. It came from someone far away, calm and sorrowful, who seemed ready to seek refuge in death and who sent to his absent beloved, his lady, the secret of fate, the key to life: love. It had been written with one foot in the grave and one finger in heaven. These lines, falling one by one onto the page, were what might be called drops of the soul.

Now who could these pages have come from? Who could have written them?

Cosette did not hesitate for a moment. There was only one man.

He!

Day broke again in her soul; everything came back. She felt a joy she had never known before, and a deep pain as well. It was him! He had written! He was there! It was his arm that had reached through that railing! While she had seemed to forget him, he had found her again! But had she really forgotten him? No, never. She was foolish to have believed that even for a moment. She had always loved him, always adored him. The fire had been covered over and had smoldered for a while, but now she saw everything clearly. It had only been growing stronger, and now it had flared up again and set her whole being ablaze. This notebook was like a spark that had leapt from his soul into hers. She felt the blaze rising again.

She absorbed every word of the manuscript. “Oh yes!” she said. “How clearly I recognize all of that! That is exactly what I had already read in his eyes.” As she finished reading it for the third time, Lieutenant Théodule passed the gate again, his spurs clattering on the pavement. Cosette had to lift her eyes. She found him dull, foolish, stupid, useless, vain, unpleasant, impertinent, and extremely ugly. The officer seemed to think it was his duty to smile at her.

She turned away, flushed with shame and indignation. She would gladly have thrown something at his head.

She hurried off, went back into the house, and shut herself in her room to read the manuscript again, commit it to memory, and dream. When she knew it completely, she kissed it and tucked it into her bosom.

It was all over: Cosette had fallen once more into a deep, heavenly love. The abyss of Eden had opened again.

All day, Cosette stayed in a kind of daze. She could hardly think. Her thoughts were a tangled skein in her mind, and she could make no sense of anything. Through her trembling, she hoped—but for what? For vague, undefined things. She did not dare promise herself anything, yet she did not want to deny herself anything either. Waves of paleness crossed her face, and shivers ran through her body. At moments, it seemed to her that she was entering a world of fantasies; she asked herself, “Is this real?” Then she would touch the dear paper hidden against her breast beneath her dress, press it to her heart, and feel its corners against her skin. If Jean Valjean had seen her

then, he would have shuddered before that radiant, mysterious joy overflowing beneath her eyelids. “Oh yes!” she thought. “It is certainly he! This comes from him, and it is for me!”

And she told herself that the angels had intervened, that some heavenly chance had given him back to her.

Oh, the transformation worked by love! Oh, dreams! That heavenly chance, that intervention of the angels, was a pellet of bread thrown by one thief to another, from the Charlemagne Courtyard to the Lion’s Ditch, over the roofs of La Force.

CHAPTER VI—OLD PEOPLE HAVE A WAY OF GOING OUT AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME

When evening came, Jean Valjean went out, and Cosette dressed herself. She arranged her hair in the way that suited her best, and she put on a dress whose bodice had been cut just one snip too low, so that, with its slanting line, it showed the beginning of her throat and was, as young girls say, “a trifle indecent.” It was not at all indecent, but it was prettier than usual. She dressed this way without knowing why.

Did she intend to go out? No.

Was she expecting a visitor? No.

At dusk, she went down into the garden. Toussaint was busy in her kitchen, which opened onto the back yard.

She began to wander beneath the trees, now and then pushing branches aside with her hand because some of them hung very low.

In this way, she came to the bench.

The stone was still there.

She sat down and gently placed her white hand on the stone, as if she wanted to caress it and thank it.

All at once, she felt that strange, hard-to-explain sensation that someone is standing behind you, even though you cannot see them.

She turned her head and stood up.

It was him.

His head was bare. He looked thinner and paler. His black clothes were barely visible. The twilight cast a faint light across his noble brow and left his eyes in shadow. Beneath an expression of incomparable sweetness, there was something about him that suggested death and night. His face was lit by the last light of day and by the thought of a soul preparing to depart.

He seemed not yet a ghost, but no longer a man.

He had thrown his hat into the thicket a few paces away.

Cosette, though on the verge of fainting, did not cry out. She slowly backed away, drawn toward him even as she retreated. He did not move. Because of the indescribable sadness that surrounded him, she felt the gaze of eyes she could not see.

As Cosette stepped back, she came up against a tree and leaned on it. Without that tree, she would have fallen.

Then she heard his voice—that voice she had, in truth, never really heard before—barely louder than the rustling leaves, murmuring:

“Forgive me—I’m here. My heart is overflowing. I couldn’t go on living as I was, so I came. Have you read what I left there on the

bench? Do you recognize me at all? Don't be afraid of me. It has been a long time—you remember the day you looked at me in the Luxembourg, near the Gladiator. And the day you walked past me? It was the 16th of June and the 2nd of July. That was almost a year ago. I haven't seen you for so long. I asked the woman who rented out the chairs, and she told me she no longer saw you. You lived in the Rue de l'Ouest, on the third floor, in the front rooms of a new house—you see, I know! I followed you. What else could I do? And then you vanished. Once, while I was reading the newspapers under the arcade of the Odéon, I thought I saw you go by. I ran after you. But no—it was someone wearing a bonnet like yours. At night I came here. Don't be afraid; no one sees me. I come to look at your windows from nearby. I walk very softly so you won't hear me, because you might be frightened. The other evening I was behind you; you turned around, and I ran away. Once I heard you singing. I was happy. Did it trouble you that I heard you singing through the shutters? That couldn't have harmed you, could it? No, surely not? You see, you are my angel! Let me come sometimes; I think I am going to die. If you only knew! I adore you. Forgive me—I am speaking to you, but I don't know what I'm saying. Perhaps I have offended you; have I offended you?"

"Oh! my mother!" she said.

And she collapsed as if she were about to die.

He caught her as she fell and gathered her into his arms, pressing her close without knowing what he was doing. He held her up even as he himself swayed. It was as if his mind were filled with smoke; lightning seemed to flash from his lips; his

thoughts disappeared. He felt as though he were performing some sacred act and committing a desecration at the same time. Yet he felt not the slightest sensual desire for this beautiful woman whose strength he could feel against his chest. He was out of his mind with love.

She took his hand and placed it over her heart. He felt the paper there and stammered:

“Then you love me?”

She answered in so low a voice that it was hardly more than a breath:

“Hush! You know it!”

She hid her flushed face against the chest of the proud, exhilarated young man.

He sank onto the bench, and she sat beside him. They had no more words. The stars were beginning to shine. How did their lips come together? How does it happen that birds sing, that snow melts, that a rose opens, that May unfolds, that dawn turns white behind the black trees on the trembling crest of the hills?

A kiss, and that was all.

Both of them started and stared into the darkness with shining eyes.

They felt neither the cool night nor the cold stone, neither the damp earth nor the wet grass. They looked at each other, and their hearts were overflowing with thoughts. Without realizing it,

they had clasped hands.

She did not ask him, or even wonder, how he had gotten in or how he had found his way into the garden. It seemed perfectly natural to her that he should be there.

Now and then, Marius's knee brushed Cosette's, and both of them trembled.

From time to time, Cosette managed to stammer out a word. Her soul trembled on her lips like a drop of dew on a flower.

Little by little, they began to talk. After silence, which had been full to overflowing, came outpouring. Above them, the night was calm and magnificent. These two beings, pure as spirits, told each other everything: their dreams, their raptures, their ecstasies, their fantasies, their weaknesses; how they had adored each other from afar; how they had longed for each other; the despair they had felt when they stopped seeing one another. In a perfect intimacy that nothing could deepen, they entrusted each other with their most secret and mysterious thoughts. With innocent faith in their own illusions, they shared everything that love, youth, and the last traces of childhood still lingering around them suggested to their minds. Their two hearts poured themselves into each other so completely that, after a quarter of an hour, the young man possessed the young girl's soul, and the young girl possessed the young man's soul. Each was filled with the other. They were enchanted by each other; they dazzled each other.

When they had finished, when they had told each other everything, she rested her head on his shoulder and asked him:

“What is your name?”

“My name is Marius,” he said. “What’s yours?”

“My name is Cosette.”

CHAPTER I—THE MISCHIEVOUS PLAYFULNESS OF THE WIND

Since 1823, when the inn at Montfermeil was heading for ruin and slowly sinking—not into the abyss of bankruptcy, but into the mire of small debts—the Thénardiers had had two more children, both boys. That brought the total to five: two girls and three boys.

Madame Thénardier had managed, with remarkable good fortune, to get rid of the last two while they were still very young.

Got rid of_ is the right phrase. There was only the smallest trace of natural feeling in that woman. And, incidentally, she was not the only example of such a thing. Like the Maréchale de La Mothe-Houdancourt, Thénardier was a mother only to her daughters. That was where her motherhood stopped. Her hatred of the human race began with her own sons. Toward them, her cruelty never softened, and in that part of her heart there was a dark, mournful wall. As the reader has seen, she hated the eldest; she cursed the other two. Why? Because. The most terrible of reasons, the most impossible answer—because. “I have no use for a litter of squalling brats,” said this mother.

Let us explain how the Thénardiers had managed to get rid of their last two children—and even make a profit from it.

The woman named Magnon, mentioned a few pages earlier, was the same one who had managed to get old Gillenormand to support the two children she claimed as her own. She lived on the Quai des Célestins, at the corner of the old Petit-Musc street, a location that helped soften her bad reputation. The reader may remember the great croup epidemic that swept through the river districts of the Seine in Paris thirty-five years earlier. During it, medical science took the opportunity to conduct large-scale experiments on the effectiveness of alum inhalations, a treatment now usefully replaced by external tincture of iodine. During that epidemic, Magnon lost both her little boys on the same day, one in the morning and the other in the evening. It was a terrible blow. Those children were valuable to their mother: they brought in eighty francs a month. That eighty francs was paid regularly in M. Gillenormand's name by his rent collector, M. Barge, a retired tipstaff who lived in the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile. Once the children died, the income stopped. Magnon looked for a way out. In that dark underworld of shared vice to which she belonged, everyone knows everything, secrets are kept, and people help one another. Magnon needed two children; the Thénardiers had two. They were the same sex and the same age. It was a good arrangement for one side and a good investment for the other. The little Thénardiers became the little Magnons. Magnon left the Quai des Célestins and moved to the Rue Clocheperce. In Paris, the identity that ties a person to himself can be broken simply by crossing from one street to another.

Because the registry office had not been alerted in any way, it raised no objection, and the substitution was carried out in the simplest possible manner. The only condition was that Thénardier demanded ten francs a month for lending out her children. Magnon promised to pay it, and she did pay it. Needless to say, M. Gillenormand continued to honor his agreement. He came to see the children every six months. He did not notice the change. “Monsieur,” Magnon said to him, “how much they look like you!”

Thénardier, who found it easy to take on new identities, used this chance to become Jondrette. His two daughters and Gavroche had barely had time to realize they had two little brothers. When misery reaches a certain point, it brings on a kind of ghostly indifference, and people begin to look at other human beings as if they were ghosts. Even your closest relatives can become nothing more than dim, shadowy figures, faintly outlined against the blurred background of life and easily lost again in the unseen.

On the evening of the day when she had handed her two little boys over to Magnon, fully intending never to take them back, Madame Thénardier felt—or seemed to feel—a moment of hesitation. She said to her husband, “But this is abandoning our children!” Thénardier, calm and authoritative, brushed aside her scruple with a single remark: “Jean-Jacques Rousseau did even more.” From hesitation, the mother moved to anxiety. “But what if the police start bothering us? Tell me, Monsieur Thénardier, is what we’ve done allowed?” Thénardier answered, “Everything is allowed. No one will see anything in it but the purest

innocence. Besides, no one has any reason to look too closely into children who haven't a sou."

Magnon was a kind of society woman within the world of crime. She took care with her dress. She shared lodgings, furnished in a style that was both pretentious and shabby, with a clever English thief who had been turned into a Frenchwoman. This Englishwoman, now a naturalized Parisian, backed by very wealthy relatives and closely connected with the medals in the Library and Mademoiselle Mars's diamonds, later became famous in court reports. She was known as Mamselle Miss_.

The two little children who ended up with Magnon had no reason to complain about their situation. Thanks to the eighty francs that came with them, they were well looked after, as anything profitable usually is. They were not badly dressed or badly fed. They were treated almost like "little gentlemen"—better by their false mother than by their real one. Magnon put on the manners of a lady and never used thieves' slang in front of them.

So several years went by. Thénardier took this as a good sign. One day, as Magnon handed him his monthly payment of ten francs, he happened to say to her, "Their father ought to give them some education."

In an instant, these two poor children, who until then had been somewhat protected even by their hard fate, were suddenly thrown into the world and forced to fend for themselves.

A mass arrest of criminals, like the one in the Jondrette garret, with all the investigations and imprisonments that must follow, is

a real disaster for that ugly, hidden counter-society that lives beneath ordinary society. An incident like this brings every kind of catastrophe into that dark world. The disaster that struck Thénardier also brought down Magnon.

One day, not long after Magnon had given Éponine the note about the Rue Plumet, the police suddenly raided the Rue Clocheperce. Magnon was arrested, and so was Mamselle Miss. Everyone in the house, which was known to be suspicious, was caught in the sweep. While this was happening, the two little boys were playing in the back yard and saw none of it. When they tried to go back into the house, they found the door locked and the place empty. A cobbler across the way called them over and handed them a paper that "their mother" had left for them. On it was an address: $_{M}$. Barge, collector of rents, Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, No_. 8. The owner of the stall said to them, "You can't stay here any longer. Go there. It's close by. The first street on the left. Ask your way with this paper."

The children set off, the older one leading the younger and carrying in his hand the paper that was supposed to guide them. It was cold, and his little fingers were so numb that he could barely hold it. At the corner of the Rue Clocheperce, a gust of wind snatched it away, and with night falling, the child could not find it again.

They began to wander through the streets with no idea where to go.

CHAPTER II—IN WHICH LITTLE GAVROCHE PROFITS FROM NAPOLEON THE GREAT

Spring in Paris is often swept by harsh, biting winds. They do not exactly chill you; they freeze you. These north winds cast a gloom over even the loveliest days. They feel like those drafts of cold air that slip into a warm room through the cracks of a badly fitted door or window. It is as if winter's dark door had been left half open, and the wind were pouring through it. In the spring of 1832, when the first great epidemic of the century broke out in Europe, these north winds were harsher and more piercing than ever. It was as though a door even colder than winter's had been left ajar. It was the door of the tomb. In those winds, one could feel the breath of cholera.

From a meteorological standpoint, these cold winds had one unusual feature: they did not prevent a heavy buildup of electricity in the air. During this period, storms often broke out, with thunder and lightning.

One evening, while these rough winds were blowing so fiercely that it felt as though January had returned and the bourgeois had put their cloaks on again, little Gavroche, always cheerfully shivering in his rags, stood as if spellbound in front of a wigmaker's shop near the Orme-Saint-Gervais. He was wrapped in a woman's woolen shawl, picked up who knows where, which he had turned into a scarf. Little Gavroche seemed to be admiring, with deep attention, a wax bride in a

low-cut dress crowned with orange blossoms, turning in the window and smiling at passersby between two Argand lamps. But in fact, he was studying the shop to see whether he might be able to steal a cake of soap from the storefront and then sell it for a sou to a hairdresser in the suburbs. He had often managed to get his breakfast from that kind of trick. He called this line of work, at which he was especially skilled, "shaving barbers."

As he stared at the bride and kept an eye on the cake of soap, he muttered under his breath: "Tuesday. It wasn't Tuesday. Was it Tuesday? Maybe it was Tuesday. Yes, it was Tuesday."

No one ever found out what this monologue meant.

Perhaps, though, it had something to do with the last time he had eaten dinner, three days earlier, since it was now Friday.

Inside his shop, warmed by a good stove, the barber was shaving a customer. Every so often he glanced at the enemy outside: that freezing, brazen street urchin, both hands shoved in his pockets, though his mind was clearly wide awake.

While Gavroche was studying the shop window and the cakes of Windsor soap, two children, one taller than the other, came timidly in. They were very neatly dressed and even smaller than he was. One seemed to be about seven, the other five. They turned the handle and entered the shop to ask for something—perhaps alms—in a weak, pleading murmur that sounded more like a groan than a prayer. They both spoke at once, and neither could be understood, because the younger kept breaking into sobs and the elder's teeth were chattering

from the cold. The barber spun around furiously and, without putting down his razor, shoved the older child back with his left hand and the younger with his knee, then slammed the door, saying, “Imagine coming in here and freezing everyone for nothing!”

The two children went on their way again, crying. Meanwhile, clouds had gathered, and it began to rain.

Little Gavroche ran after them and called out:

“What’s the matter, brats?”

“We don’t know where we’re going to sleep,” the older one replied.

“Is that all?” said Gavroche. “What a fuss over that. Crying about it! They must be green.”

Then, along with his teasing air of superiority, he took on a tone of affectionate authority and gentle patronage:

“Come along with me, youngsters!”

“Yes, sir,” said the elder.

And the two children followed him as if he had been an archbishop. They had stopped crying.

Gavroche led them up the Rue Saint-Antoine toward the Bastille.

As he walked, Gavroche threw an indignant glance back at the barber’s shop.

“That fellow’s got no heart, that whiting,” he muttered. “He’s an Englishman.”

A woman who saw the three of them marching in single file, with Gavroche leading, burst out laughing loudly. There was nothing respectful about her laughter toward the group.

“Good day, Mamselle Omnibus,” Gavroche said to her.

A moment later, the wig-maker came back to mind, and he added:

“I got the animal wrong; he’s not a whiting, he’s a serpent. Barber, I’m going to fetch a locksmith and have a bell hung on your tail.”

The wig-maker had put him in a combative mood. As he stepped across a gutter, he called out to a bearded female porter, fit to meet Faust on the Brocken, who was holding a broom.

“Madam,” he said, “so you’re taking your horse out?”

Then he splashed mud onto a passerby’s polished boots.

“You little rascal!” the furious passerby shouted.

Gavroche lifted his nose above his shawl.

“Is monsieur making a complaint?”

“About you!” the man burst out.

“The office is closed,” said Gavroche. “I’m not taking any more complaints.”

Meanwhile, as he went farther up the street, he noticed a beggar girl of thirteen or fourteen, wearing a dress so short that her knees showed, lying there half-frozen under a carriage

entrance. The poor child was getting too old for that sort of thing. Growth plays tricks like that. A skirt becomes too short at exactly the moment when bare skin becomes improper.

“Poor girl!” said Gavroche. “She doesn’t even have trousers. Here, take this.”

And unwrapping all the warm wool he had around his neck, he threw it over the beggar girl’s thin, purple shoulders, where the scarf became a shawl again.

The child looked at him in astonishment and took the shawl without a word. When misery reaches a certain depth, the poor no longer groan over hardship or give thanks for kindness.

That done, “Brrr!” said Gavroche, shivering even more than Saint Martin, who at least kept half his cloak.

At that “brrr!” the rain, as if out of spite, came down harder than ever. The wicked sky punishes good deeds.

“Oh, come on!” Gavroche cried. “What’s this supposed to mean? It’s raining again! Good heavens, if this keeps up, I’m canceling my subscription.”

And he started marching again.

“It’s all right,” he went on, glancing at the beggar girl as she curled up under the shawl. “She’s got a fine hide.”

Then he looked up at the clouds and cried:

“Caught!”

The two children stayed close behind him.

As they passed one of those heavy barred windows that mark a bakery—where bread is kept behind bars like gold—Gavroche turned around and said:

“Ah, by the way, brats, have we had dinner?”

“Sir,” the older one replied, “we haven’t had anything to eat since this morning.”

“So you’ve got neither father nor mother?” Gavroche asked grandly.

“Beg pardon, sir, we do 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 something of a philosopher.

“We’ve been wandering around for two hours,” the older child went on. “We’ve searched at the street corners for things, but we haven’t found anything.”

“I know,” Gavroche burst out. “The dogs eat everything.”

After a pause, he went on:

“Ah! We’ve lost our authors. We don’t know what’s become of them. That won’t do, gamins. It’s stupid to let old people wander off like that. Well then! We still have to get some sleep.”

Still, he asked them no questions. After all, what could be more natural than their having no home?

The older of the two children, who had almost completely slipped back into the quick forgetfulness of childhood,

exclaimed:

“It’s strange all the same. Mamma told us she would take us to get a blessed palm on Palm Sunday.”

“Nonsense,” said Gavroche.

“Mamma,” the older child went on, “is a lady who lives with Mamselle Miss.”

“Rubbish!” Gavroche shot back.

Meanwhile, he had stopped, and for the last two minutes he had been feeling around and rummaging through every sort of nook in his rags.

At last he tossed his head with a look meant to seem merely pleased, though in truth it was triumphant.

“Let’s keep calm, youngsters. Here’s supper for the three of us.”

And from one of his pockets he pulled out a sou.

Without giving the two little urchins a moment to be astonished, he shoved them both ahead of him into the baker’s shop and slapped his sou down on the counter, shouting:

“Boy! Five centimes’ worth of bread.”

The baker, who was the owner himself, picked up a loaf and a knife.

“In three pieces, boy!” Gavroche went on.

Then he added with dignity:

“There are three of us.”

And when he saw that the baker, after looking the three customers over, had taken down a dark loaf, he shoved his finger deep into his nose and drew in his breath with the same commanding air he might have had if he were taking a pinch of Frederick the Great’s snuff from his thumb, then flung this indignant exclamation straight in the baker’s face:

“Keksekça?”

Any readers tempted to think that Gavroche’s remark to the baker was a Russian or Polish word, or one of those wild cries the Yoways and Botocudos shout to each other across a river through the wilderness, should know that it is a word they themselves use every day. It stands in 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 second-quality bread.”

“You mean larton brutal [black bread]!” Gavroche shot back, calm and coolly scornful. “White bread, boy! White bread [larton savonné]! I’m paying.”

The baker could not help smiling, and as he cut the white bread he looked at them with a pity that offended Gavroche.

“Come now, baker’s boy!” he said. “What are you sizing us up like that for?”

All three of them laid end to end would hardly have made up a full measure.

When the bread had been cut, the baker tossed the sou into his drawer, and Gavroche said to the two children:

“Dig in.”

The little boys stared at him in surprise.

Gavroche burst out laughing.

“Ah! of course—that’s it. They still don’t understand; they’re too little.”

And he repeated:

“Go on, eat.”

At the same time, he held out a piece of bread to each of them.

Then, thinking the older boy seemed more worth talking to, and that he deserved a little extra encouragement and should not hesitate to satisfy his hunger, he added as he handed him the biggest piece:

“Stuff that into your mouth.”

One piece was smaller than the others, and he kept that one for himself.

The poor children, Gavroche included, were starving. They tore into the bread in huge bites and clogged the baker’s shop, while the baker, now that they had paid, glared at them angrily.

“Let’s go back out into the street,” said Gavroche.

They set off again toward the Bastille.

Now and then, as they passed lit shop windows, the smaller boy stopped to look at the time on a lead watch hanging from his neck on a cord.

“Well, he really is a little innocent,” said Gavroche.

Then, growing thoughtful, he muttered under his breath:

“Still, if I were in charge of the little ones, I’d keep them locked up better than that.”

Just as they were finishing their bit of bread and had reached the corner of that dark Rue des Ballets, at the far end of which the low, menacing gate of La Force could be seen:

“Hallo, is that you, Gavroche?” someone said.

“Hallo, is that you, Montparnasse?” said Gavroche.

A man had just spoken to the street boy, and it was none other than Montparnasse in disguise, wearing blue spectacles, though Gavroche recognized him at once.

“Well, I’ll be damned!” Gavroche went on. “Your face is the color of a linseed plaster, and you’ve got blue glasses like a doctor. You’re dressing up in style, I swear!”

“Hush!” said Montparnasse. “Not so loud.”

And he quickly pulled Gavroche away from the light of the shop windows.

The two little ones followed automatically, holding hands.

Once they were tucked under the arch of a porte-cochère, out of the rain and out of sight:

“Do you know where I’m going?” Montparnasse demanded.

“To the Abbey of Ascend-with-Regret,” Gavroche replied.

“Clown!”

Then Montparnasse went on:

“I’m going to find Babet.”

“Ah!” Gavroche cried. “So her name is Babet.”

Montparnasse lowered his voice:

“Not she. He.”

“Ah! Babet.”

“Yes, Babet.”

“I thought he was locked up.”

“He got out,” Montparnasse replied.

And he quickly told the gamin how, that very morning, Babet had been transferred to La Conciergerie and had escaped by turning left instead of right in “the police office.”

Gavroche showed his admiration for the trick.

“What a genius!” he cried.

Montparnasse added a few more details about Babet’s escape and ended with:

“Oh, that’s not all.”

As he listened, Gavroche had taken the cane from Montparnasse’s hand and absentmindedly pulled at the top; a

dagger blade slid into view.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, hurriedly shoving the dagger back. “You brought your gendarme dressed up as a bourgeois.”

Montparnasse winked.

“Well, now!” Gavroche went on. “So you’re planning to have a scrap with the bobbies?”

“You never know,” Montparnasse replied airily. “It’s always useful to have a pin on you.”

Gavroche pressed on:

“What are you up to tonight?”

Once again Montparnasse turned solemn and said, drawing out every syllable: “Things.”

Then he abruptly changed the subject:

“By the way!”

“What?”

“Something happened the other day. Listen to this. I run into a bourgeois. He gives me a sermon and his purse. I put it in my pocket. A minute later, I reach in. There’s nothing there.”

“Except the sermon,” said Gavroche.

“But you,” Montparnasse went on, “where are you headed now?”

Gavroche pointed to his two protégés and said:

“I’m going to put these little ones to bed.”

“And where is this bed?”

“At my place.”

“Where’s your place?”

“At my place.”

“So you’ve got somewhere to stay?”

“Yes, I do.”

“And where is it?”

“In the elephant,” said Gavroche.

Montparnasse, who was not easily surprised, could not help exclaiming.

“In the elephant!”

“Well, yes, in the elephant!” Gavroche shot back. “Kekçaa?”

This is another word from a language no one writes, though everyone speaks it.

Kekçaa means: _Qu’est que c’est que cela a?_ [What’s the matter with that?]

The street boy’s shrewd remark brought Montparnasse back to his senses and restored his composure. He seemed to take a more reasonable view of Gavroche’s lodging.

“Of course,” he said, “yes, the elephant. Is it comfortable there?”

“Very,” said Gavroche. “It’s really great there. There aren’t any drafts, like there are under the bridges.”

“How do you get in?”

“Oh, I get in.”

“So there’s a hole?” Montparnasse asked.

“Of course there is! But don’t go telling anyone. It’s between the front legs. The police haven’t spotted it.”

“And you climb up? Yes, I see.”

“Just a quick move of the hand, cric, crac, and it’s done—no one there.”

After a pause, Gavroche added:

“I’ll get a ladder for these children.”

Montparnasse burst out laughing:

“Where the devil did you find those little brats?”

Gavroche answered with complete simplicity:

“They’re a couple of brats a wigmaker gave me.”

Meanwhile, Montparnasse had begun to think:

“You recognized me very quickly,” he muttered.

He took two small objects from his pocket—just two quills wrapped in cotton—and pushed one into each nostril. It gave him a different nose.

“That changes you,” Gavroche remarked. “You look less ugly that way. You ought to keep them in all the time.”

Montparnasse was a handsome young man, but Gavroche loved to tease.

“Seriously,” Montparnasse asked, “what do you think of me like this?”

Even his voice sounded different. In an instant, Montparnasse had become unrecognizable.

“Oh! Do Punch for us!” Gavroche cried.

The two children, who until then had not been listening because they were busy sticking their fingers up their noses, came closer at that name and stared at Montparnasse with growing delight and admiration.

Unfortunately, Montparnasse was uneasy.

He put his hand on Gavroche’s shoulder and said, stressing every word: “Listen to me, boy! If I were out in the square with my dog, my knife, and my wife, and you spent ten sous on me, I wouldn’t refuse to work—but this isn’t Shrove Tuesday.”

This strange phrase had an odd effect on the street urchin. He spun around quickly, swept his bright little eyes over everything with intense attention, and spotted a police sergeant standing a few steps away with his back to them. Gavroche let out an “Ah! good!” but instantly checked himself, and, shaking Montparnasse’s hand:

“Well, good evening,” he said. “I’m off to my elephant with my brats. If you ever need me some night, you can come look for me there. I live on the entresol. There’s no porter. Ask for Monsieur Gavroche.”

“Very good,” said Montparnasse.

Then they went their separate ways: Montparnasse headed toward the Grève, and Gavroche toward the Bastille. The five-year-old, being pulled along by his brother, who was himself being pulled by Gavroche, turned around several times to watch “Porrichinelle” as he walked away.

The cryptic phrase Montparnasse used to warn Gavroche that a policeman was nearby had no magic in it except the repeated assonance of _dig–, used five or six times in different forms. That syllable, _dig–, spoken by itself or cleverly woven into a sentence, meant: “Be careful, we can’t talk freely anymore.” There was also, in Montparnasse’s remark, a bit of verbal elegance that Gavroche completely missed: _mon dogue, ma dague et ma digue_, a Temple slang expression meaning my dog, my knife, and my wife. It had once been very popular among clowns and the red-tails in the great age when Molière was writing and Callot was drawing.

Twenty years ago, you could still see, in the southwest corner of the Place de la Bastille, near the canal basin dug out of the old moat of the fortress-prison, a strange monument. It has already vanished from the memory of Parisians, though it deserved to be remembered, since it came from the idea of a “member of the Institute, the General-in-chief of the army of

Egypt."

We call it a monument, though it was really only a rough model. Yet even that model—a marvelous sketch, the grand skeleton of one of Napoleon's ideas, which one gust of wind after another had carried off and pushed farther and farther away from us—had become historical and taken on a certain solidity that contrasted with its unfinished look. It was an elephant forty feet high, built of wood and masonry, with a tower on its back like a house. It had once been painted green by some house painter, and was now painted black by the sky, the wind, and time. In that deserted, unprotected corner of the square, the giant's broad forehead, trunk, tusks, tower, huge hindquarters, and four pillar-like legs created, at night beneath the stars, a startling and terrifying shape. It seemed like a symbol of popular power. It was dark, mysterious, and immense. It was some great visible phantom, no one quite knew what, standing upright beside the invisible ghost of the Bastille.

Few strangers ever came to this building, and no one passing by gave it a glance. It was falling apart. With each season, more plaster peeled away from its sides and left ugly scars. The "ædiles," as refined speech called them, had forgotten it existed after 1814. There it stood in its corner, melancholy, ailing, and crumbling, enclosed by a rotting fence and constantly dirtied by drunken coachmen. Cracks wound across its belly. A lath stuck out from its tail. Tall grass grew between its legs. And because the level of the ground around it had been rising for thirty years, through that slow, steady process that gradually lifts the soil in large cities, it now stood in a depression, as if the earth were

sinking beneath it. It was filthy, despised, repellent, and magnificent all at once—ugly to the bourgeois, mournful to the thinker. It had something of rubbish waiting to be swept away, and something of majesty waiting to be beheaded. As we have said, its appearance changed at night. Night is the true element of all that is dark. As soon as twilight fell, the old elephant was transformed. In the grave serenity of the shadows, it took on a calm yet formidable presence. Because it belonged to the past, it belonged to the night, and the darkness suited its grandeur.

This rough, squat, heavy, rigid, severe, almost misshapen, yet unquestionably majestic monument, marked by a kind of magnificent and savage solemnity, has vanished. In its place now stands, reigning peacefully, a sort of gigantic stove with its pipe—a replacement for the dark fortress with its nine towers, much as the bourgeoisie replaced the feudal classes. It is only natural that a stove should symbolize an age in which power is thought to reside in a pot. That age will pass. People have already begun to understand that, while there may be force in a boiler, true power exists only in the mind. In other words, what leads the world and pulls it forward is not locomotives but ideas. Harness locomotives to ideas—that is well and good. But do not mistake the horse for the rider.

In any case, to return to the Place de la Bastille: the architect of this elephant managed to make something grand out of plaster; the architect of the stove has managed to make something pretty out of bronze.

This stovepipe of a monument, grandly christened the July Column, this memorial to a revolution that came to nothing, was still wrapped in 1832 in a huge wooden casing—which, for our part, we regret—and surrounded by a vast plank fence that finished the work of isolating the elephant.

It was toward this corner of the square, faintly lit by the glow of a distant streetlamp, that the street urchin led his two “brats.”

The reader must allow us to pause here and remind him that we are dealing with plain fact, and that twenty years ago the courts were asked to judge, on charges of vagrancy and damage to a public monument, a child who had been found asleep inside this very elephant of the Bastille. That fact noted, we continue.

When he reached the giant figure, Gavroche understood the effect that something immensely large could have on something very small, and said:

“Don’t be afraid, little ones.”

Then he slipped through a gap in the fence into the elephant’s enclosure and helped the boys scramble through after him. The two children, somewhat frightened, followed Gavroche without a word and trusted themselves to this little ragged Providence who had given them bread and promised them shelter.

There, stretched along the fence, lay a ladder that the workers from the neighboring lumberyard used during the day. Gavroche lifted it with remarkable strength and set it against one of the elephant’s forelegs. Near the top of the ladder, you could make out a sort of black hole in the giant creature’s belly.

Gavroche pointed out the ladder and the hole to his guests and said:

“Climb up and go in.”

The two little boys exchanged frightened looks.

“You’re scared, brats!” Gavroche cried.

Then he added:

“You’ll see!”

He grabbed the elephant’s rough leg and, in an instant, without even bothering with the ladder, climbed up to the opening. He slipped inside like a snake sliding through a crack and vanished. A moment later, the two children saw his pale head appear dimly at the edge of the dark hole, like a white, ghostly face.

“Well!” he cried. “Climb up, kids! You’ll see how cozy it is in here! Come on, you!” he said to the older one. “I’ll give you a hand.”

The little boys nudged each other. The street urchin both scared them and made them feel safe at the same time. Besides, it was raining hard. The older one decided to take the chance. When the younger saw his brother climbing up and found himself left alone between the paws of that enormous beast, he felt very much like crying, but he did not dare.

The older boy climbed the ladder’s rungs with hesitant steps, while Gavroche called out encouragement, like a fencing master coaching his students or a mule driver urging on his animals.

“Don’t be scared!—That’s it!—Keep going!—Put your foot there!—Give me your hand!—That’s right, be brave!”

And when the child came within reach, he suddenly grabbed him firmly by the arm and pulled him in.

“Got you!” he said.

The boy had made it through the opening.

“Now,” said Gavroche, “wait for me. Please have a seat, Monsieur.”

Then, coming back out of the hole the same way he had gone in, he slid down the elephant’s leg as nimbly as a monkey, landed on his feet in the grass, grabbed the five-year-old around the waist, and set him squarely in the middle of the ladder. Then he started climbing up behind him, shouting to the older boy:

“I’ll push him up, you pull!”

A moment later, the little boy was shoved, dragged, pulled, pushed, and stuffed into the hole before he had time to understand what was happening. Gavroche climbed in after him and kicked the ladder away, sending it flat onto the grass. Then he began clapping his hands and shouting:

“Here we are! Long live General Lafayette!”

When that burst of excitement was over, he added:

“Now, kids, you’re in my house.”

Gavroche was at home, in fact.

Oh, the unexpected usefulness of what seems useless! The generosity of great things! The kindness of giants! This enormous monument, once meant to express one of the Emperor's ideas, had become a shelter for a street boy. The little brat had been welcomed and protected by the colossus. Well-dressed bourgeois out for their Sunday stroll would pass the elephant of the Bastille and, looking at it with contempt, would often say, "What good is that?" It was good for saving a small creature from the cold, the frost, the hail, and the rain. It gave shelter from the winter wind. It kept him from sleeping in mud, which brings fever, and from sleeping in snow, which brings death. It took in an innocent child whom society had cast out. It helped reduce public crime. It was a den open to someone for whom every other door was closed. It was as if the wretched old mastodon, overrun by vermin and forgotten, covered with lumps, mold, and sores, tottering, worm-eaten, abandoned, condemned—a kind of beggar among colossi, asking alms in vain with a gentle expression in the middle of the crossroads—had taken pity on another beggar, the poor little pygmy wandering barefoot, roofless, blowing on his fingers, dressed in rags, living on scraps others had thrown away. That was what the elephant of the Bastille was good for. This idea of Napoleon's, scorned by men, had been reclaimed by God. What had once been merely glorious had become sacred. To carry out his vision, the Emperor would have needed porphyry, bronze, iron, gold, and marble; for God, a heap of old planks, beams, and plaster was enough. The Emperor had dreamed like a genius. In that gigantic elephant, armed and immense, with its trunk raised, carrying its tower and spraying its cheerful,

life-giving waters in every direction, he had wanted to embody the people. God had done something greater with it: he had given a child a home there.

The opening Gavroche had used to get in was a gap that was barely visible from the outside. As we have said, it was hidden beneath the elephant's belly and was so narrow that only cats and homeless children could squeeze through.

"Let's start," said Gavroche, "by telling the porter we're not at home."

Then he plunged into the darkness with the easy confidence of someone who knew the place well, picked up a plank, and blocked the opening.

Gavroche disappeared into the dark again. The children heard the crackle of a match being struck and pushed into the phosphoric bottle. Chemical matches did not exist yet; in those days, the Fumade steel was considered an advance.

A sudden light made them blink. Gavroche had just managed to light one of those bits of resin-soaked cord known as _cellar rats_. The _cellar rat_, which gave off more smoke than light, made the inside of the elephant dimly visible.

Gavroche's two guests looked around, and what they felt was something like what a person might feel if locked inside the great tun of Heidelberg—or better yet, what Jonah must have felt in the whale's belly in the Bible. A huge, complete skeleton seemed to surround them. Overhead, a long brown beam, from which heavy curved ribs sprang at regular intervals, suggested

a spine and rib cage. Stalactites of plaster hung from it like entrails, and great spiderwebs stretched from side to side like grimy diaphragms. Here and there, in the corners, large blackish patches could be seen that looked alive and suddenly darted from place to place in frightened, jerky movements.

Pieces that had fallen from the elephant's back into its belly had filled the hollow space, so that it was possible to walk on it as if it were a floor.

The younger child pressed close against his brother and whispered:

"It's dark."

That remark drew an outburst from Gavroche. The two boys were so frozen with alarm that they needed a jolt.

"What are you muttering about over there?" he cried. "Are you making fun of me? Turning up your noses? Do you want the Tuileries? Are you idiots? Well, answer me! I'm warning you, I'm not one of your fools. Come now, are you little brats from the Pope's establishment?"

A little roughness helps when people are frightened. It reassures them. The two children moved closer to Gavroche.

Gavroche, touched in a fatherly way by this trust, softened at once and, turning to the smaller child, said:

"Idiot," he said, lingering over the insult in an almost affectionate tone. "It's dark outside. Outside, it's raining; in here, it isn't. Outside, it's cold; in here, there's not a breath of wind. Outside, there are crowds of people; in here, there's no one.

Outside, there isn't even any moon; in here, I've got my candle, blast it!"

The two children began to look around the room with a little less fear, but Gavroche gave them no time to take it in.

"Quick," he said.

And he shoved them toward what we are happy to be able to call the far end of the room.

There stood his bed.

Gavroche's bed was complete—in other words, it had a mattress, a blanket, and a curtained alcove.

The mattress was a straw mat. The blanket was a fairly large piece of gray wool cloth, very warm and almost new. As for the alcove, this was how it was made:

Three fairly long poles had been driven into the debris that made up the floor—that is, the belly of the elephant—two in front and one behind. They were tied together at the top with a rope, forming a kind of pyramid. This frame supported a brass-wire mesh that had simply been laid over it, but arranged with skill and fastened with iron wire so that it covered all three openings. A row of very heavy stones held the mesh down against the floor, so that nothing could get underneath. The grating was simply a piece of the brass screening used to cover aviaries in menageries. Gavroche's bed stood behind this net, as if inside a cage. The whole thing looked like an Esquimaux tent.

This wire mesh served in place of curtains.

Gavroche moved aside the stones that held the net down in front, and the two overlapping flaps of mesh fell open.

“Get down on all fours, brats!” said Gavroche.

He carefully helped his guests into the cage, then crawled in after them, pulled the stones back into place, and sealed the opening shut again.

All three stretched out on the mat. Gavroche still had the _cellar rat_ in his hand.

“Now,” he said, “go to sleep! I’m going to put out the candelabra.”

“Monsieur,” the older brother asked Gavroche, pointing to the netting, “what is that for?”

“That,” Gavroche answered gravely, “is for the rats. Go to sleep!”

Still, he felt he ought to add a few words of explanation for the benefit of these young creatures, and he went on:

“It comes from the Jardin des Plantes. They use it for wild animals. They’ve got a whole store of them there. All you have to do is climb over a wall, crawl through a window, and go through a door. You can take as many as you want.”

As he spoke, he wrapped the younger child completely in a fold of the blanket, and the little one murmured:

“Oh! this feels so good! It’s warm!”

Gavroche looked at the blanket with satisfaction.

“That came from the Jardin des Plantes too,” he said. “I took it from the monkeys.”

Then, pointing out to the older boy the mat he was lying on—a very thick, excellently made mat—he added:

“That belonged to the giraffe.”

After a pause, he continued:

“The animals had all these things. I took them away. It didn’t bother them. I told them, ‘It’s for the elephant.’”

He stopped again, then went on:

“You climb over walls and don’t care a bit about the government. There!”

The two children looked at this fearless, resourceful being with shy, astonished respect. He was a vagabond like them, alone like them, fragile like them; yet there was something admirable and all-powerful about him. He seemed almost supernatural to them. His face combined all the grimaces of an old mountebank with the most innocent and charming smiles.

“Monsieur,” the older one ventured timidly, “then you are not afraid of the police?”

Gavroche merely replied:

“Idiot! Nobody says ‘police.’ They say ‘bobbies.’”

The younger boy kept his eyes wide open, but he said nothing. Since he was lying at the edge of the mat and the older one was

in the middle, Gavroche tucked the blanket around him the way a mother would. He also raised the mat under the child's head with some old rags to make a pillow. Then he turned to the older boy:

"Hey! We're pretty comfortable here, aren't we?"

"Ah, yes!" the older boy replied, looking at Gavroche with the expression of an angel who had been rescued.

The two poor little children, who had been soaked through, began to warm up again.

"Oh, by the way," Gavroche went on, "what were you bawling about?"

And pointing to the little one, he said to his brother:

"A tiny thing like that—I've got nothing to say about him. But a big fellow like you crying! That's stupid; you looked like a calf."

"Good heavens," the child replied, "we have nowhere to stay."

"Oh, come on!" Gavroche shot back. "You don't say 'lodging'; you say 'crib.'"

"And besides, we were afraid to be all alone like that at night."

"You don't say 'night'; you say 'darkmans.'"

"Thank you, sir," said the child.

"Listen," Gavroche went on, "you must never cry like that again over anything. I'll look after you. You'll see how much fun we'll have. In summer, we'll go to the Glacière with Navet, a friend of mine. We'll swim in the Gare. We'll run around stark naked in

front of the rafts by the Austerlitz bridge—that drives the washerwomen wild. They yell, they get furious, and if you only knew how ridiculous they look! We'll go see the living skeleton. Then I'll take you to the theater. I'll take you to see Frédérick Lemaître. I have tickets. I know some of the actors. I even acted in a play once. There were a lot of us fellows, and we ran under a sheet, and that made the sea. I'll get you a part at my theater. We'll go see the savages. They aren't real, those savages. They wear pink tights all wrinkled up, and you can see where the elbows have been patched with white. Then we'll go to the Opera. We'll get in with the hired applauders. The Opera claque is well run. I wouldn't mix with the claque on the boulevard. At the Opera, just imagine, some of them pay twenty sous, but they're fools. They're called dishclouts. And then we'll go watch the guillotine at work. I'll show you the executioner. He lives in the Rue des Marais. Monsieur Sanson. He has a letter box on his door. Ah, we'll have a grand time!"

At that moment, a drop of wax fell on Gavroche's finger and brought him back to reality.

"Damn!" he said. "The wick's burning out. Attention! I can't spend more than a sou a month on light. When a person goes to bed, he ought to sleep. We don't have time to read M. Paul de Kock's novels. Besides, the light might show through the cracks in the carriage gate, and that's all the police would need to spot it."

"And besides," the older boy said timidly—he was the only one who dared speak to Gavroche and answer him—"a spark might fall into the straw, and we have to be careful not to set the

house on fire."

"People don't say 'set the house on fire,'" Gavroche remarked. "They say 'torch the crib.'"

The storm grew more violent, and the heavy rain beat against the back of the colossus while thunder crashed overhead. "You're wasting your time, rain!" said Gavroche. "It amuses me to hear the decanter pouring down the legs of the house. Winter is a fool; it wastes its goods, throws away its effort, can't get us wet, and so it makes a racket, like the old water-carrier it is."

Gavroche, being a philosopher of the nineteenth century, took the thunder and everything that came with it in stride. Then a huge flash of lightning burst out, so bright that a glimmer of it slipped into the elephant's belly through the crack. Almost at the same moment, the thunder rolled violently. The two little creatures screamed and sprang up so fast that they nearly knocked the netting out of place, but Gavroche turned his fearless face toward them and used the thunderclap as his cue to laugh.

"Settle down, children. Don't bring the whole structure down. That's fine thunder, first-rate; excellent. And that lightning bolt is no joke either. Bravo, good Lord! Devil take it! It's almost as good as the kind they have at the Ambigu."

With that, he put the netting back in order, gently laid the two children down on the bed, pressed their knees so they would stretch out full length, and cried:

“Since the good Lord is lighting his candle, I can blow out mine. Now then, little ones, my young humans, 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 yourselves up well in the hide! I’m going to put out the light. Are you ready?”

“Yes,” murmured the older one, “I’m fine. It feels like I’ve got feathers under my head.”

“People don’t say ‘head,’” Gavroche cried. “They say ‘nut.’”

The two children snuggled close together. Gavroche finished settling them on the mat, pulled the blanket up to their ears, then repeated his command for the third time in his solemn slang:

“Shut your peepers!”

And he put out his little light.

Barely had the light gone out when a strange trembling began to run through the netting under which the three children lay.

It was made up of many dull scratching sounds that rang against the metal, as if claws and teeth were gnawing at the copper wire. Along with it came all sorts of small, sharp cries.

The little five-year-old boy heard the commotion above them and shivered with fear. He nudged his brother’s elbow, but his older brother had already shut his eyes, just as Gavroche had told him to. Then the little one, no longer able to hold back his terror, asked Gavroche in a very low voice, barely above a whisper:

“Sir?”

“Eh?” said Gavroche, who had just closed his eyes.

“What is that?”

“It’s the rats,” Gavroche replied.

And he put his head back down on the mat.

The rats, in fact, swarmed by the thousands inside the elephant’s carcass. They were the living black specks we have already mentioned. As long as the candle was burning, its flame had kept them at bay. But the moment the cavern—which was their city as well—fell dark again, they caught the scent of what the good storyteller Perrault calls “fresh meat.” They rushed in crowds at Gavroche’s tent, climbed on top of it, and began gnawing at the mesh as if trying to break through this strange new trap.

But the little boy still could not sleep.

“Sir?” he began again.

“Eh?” said Gavroche.

“What are rats?”

“They’re mice.”

That explanation calmed the child a little. He had seen white mice before, and they did not frighten him. Even so, he spoke up once more.

“Sir?”

“Eh?” said Gavroche again.

“Why don’t you have a cat?”

“I did have one,” Gavroche replied. “I brought one here, but they ate her.”

This second explanation undid the comfort of the first, and the little boy began to tremble again.

The exchange between him and Gavroche began again for the fourth time:

“Monsieur?”

“Eh?”

“Who got eaten?”

“The cat.”

“And who ate the cat?”

“The rats.”

“The mice?”

“Yes, the rats.”

The child, alarmed and thrown into confusion by the idea of mice that ate cats, went on:

“Sir, would those mice eat us?”

“You bet they would!” Gavroche blurted out.

The child’s fear had reached its peak. But Gavroche added:

“Don’t be scared. They can’t get in. Besides, I’m here! Here, take my hand. Be quiet and shut your eyes!”

At the same moment, Gavroche reached across his brother and took the little boy’s hand. The child clutched it tightly and felt comforted. Courage and strength have mysterious ways of passing from one person to another. Silence settled around them again; the sound of their voices had scared the rats away. A few minutes later the rats came rushing back, but it was no use. The three little boys were fast asleep and heard nothing more.

The night hours slipped by. Darkness lay over the vast Place de la Bastille. A winter wind, mixed with rain, blew in gusts. The patrol searched every doorway, alley, enclosure, and dark corner, and as they looked for people wandering the streets at night, they passed silently in front of the elephant. The monster stood upright and motionless, staring into the shadows with open eyes, as though happily dreaming over its good deed; and it sheltered the three poor sleeping children from both the sky and from men.

To understand what follows, the reader must remember that at that time the Bastille guardhouse stood at the far end of the square, and that anything happening near the elephant could neither be seen nor heard by the sentry.

Toward the end of the hour just before dawn, a man came running out of the Rue Saint-Antoine, circled the enclosure of the July Column, and slipped between the railings until he was beneath the elephant’s belly. If any light had fallen on him,

anyone could have guessed from how thoroughly soaked he was that he had spent the night in the rain. Once under the elephant, he gave a strange cry, not belonging to any human language, and one that only a parrot could have copied. He repeated it twice. The following spelling gives only a rough idea of the sound:

“Kirikikiou!”

At the second call, a clear, young, cheerful voice answered from inside the elephant:

“Yes!”

Almost at once, the plank covering the opening was pulled aside, and a child came through. He climbed down the elephant’s leg and landed lightly beside the man. The child was Gavroche. The man was Montparnasse.

As for his cry of Kirikikiou–, that was no doubt what the boy had meant when he said:

“Ask for Monsieur Gavroche.”

When he heard it, he woke with a start, crawled out of his “alcove,” pushed the netting aside a little, then carefully put it back in place. After that, he opened the trap and climbed down.

In the darkness, the man and the child recognized each other without a word. Montparnasse said only this:

“We need you. Come and give us a hand.”

The boy asked no questions.

“I’m with you,” he said.

Then the two of them headed for the Rue Saint-Antoine, where Montparnasse had come from, weaving quickly through the long line of market gardeners’ carts rolling down toward the markets at that hour.

The market gardeners, huddled half-asleep in their wagons among the lettuces and vegetables, wrapped up to their eyes in mufflers against the driving rain, did not even look at these strange passersby.

CHAPTER III—THE UPS AND DOWNS OF ESCAPE

This is what had happened that same night at La Force:

Babet, Brujon, Guelemer, and Thénardier had planned an escape, even though Thénardier was being kept in close confinement. Babet had arranged it for his own advantage that very day, as the reader has already seen from Montparnasse's account to Gavroche. Montparnasse was supposed to help them from outside.

After spending a month in solitary confinement, Brujon had used the time for two things: first, to make a rope, and second, to work out a plan. In earlier days, those harsh cells where prison discipline left a convict entirely to himself consisted of four stone walls, a stone ceiling, a flagged floor, a camp bed, a barred window, and an iron-lined door, and they were called dungeons. But "dungeon" was judged too dreadful a word. So now they consist of an iron door, a barred window, a camp bed, a flagged floor, four stone walls, and a stone ceiling, and they are called chambers of punishment. A little light gets in around midday. The drawback of these chambers, which, as the reader can see, are not dungeons, is that they give men who ought to be working time to think.

So Brujon thought things over, and he came out of the punishment cell with a rope. Since he had a reputation for being very dangerous in the Charlemagne courtyard, he was transferred to the New Building. The first thing he found there

was Guelemer, and the second was a nail; Guelemer, that is to say, crime; a nail, that is to say, freedom. It is time for the reader to have a clear picture of Brujon. He looked delicate and unhealthy, and he carried himself with a deeply calculated air of weariness. He was a smooth, clever young fellow, and a thief, with a gentle glance and a dreadful smile. His glance came from his will; his smile came from his nature. His first training in his trade had to do with rooftops. He had become highly skilled in the craft of the men who strip off lead, rob roofs, and plunder gutters by the method known as double pickings.

What completed this especially favorable moment for an escape attempt was that roofers were, at that very time, relaying and repointing part of the prison slate roof. The Saint-Bernard courtyard was no longer completely cut off from the Charlemagne and Saint-Louis courtyards. Above, there were scaffolds and ladders—in other words, bridges and stairs leading toward freedom.

The New Building was the prison's weak spot. It was the most cracked and run-down structure imaginable. Saltpeter had eaten so deeply into the walls that the authorities had been forced to line the dormitory vaults with wooden panels, because stones regularly came loose and fell onto prisoners in their beds. Even so, the authorities made the mistake of housing the most troublesome prisoners there, putting what prison slang calls "the hard cases" in the New Building.

The New Building had four dormitories stacked one above another, with a top floor known as the Bel-Air (Fine-Air). A large chimney flue, probably left from some old kitchen of the Dukes

de la Force, rose from the ground floor, passed through all four stories, split the dormitories into two sections where it appeared as a flattened pillar, and finally broke through the roof.

Guelemer and Brujon were in the same dormitory. As a precaution, they had been placed on the lowest floor. By chance, the heads of their beds stood against the chimney.

Thénardier was directly above them, in the top story called Fine-Air. A passerby who stops in the Rue Culture-Sainte-Catherine, after going past the firemen's barracks, in front of the porte-cochère of the bathing establishment, sees a courtyard filled with flowers and shrubs in wooden boxes. At the far end stands a small white rotunda with two wings, brightened by green shutters, a rustic dream worthy of Jean Jacques.

No more than ten years ago, an enormous black wall rose behind that rotunda, ugly and bare.

It was the outer wall of La Force.

Beside that rotunda, the wall looked like Milton seen through Berquin.

High as it was, the wall was still overshadowed by an even blacker roof visible beyond it. This was the roof of the New Building. Four dormer windows could be seen there, barred with iron; they were the windows of the Fine-Air.

A chimney rose through the roof; it was the same chimney that ran through the dormitories.

The Bel-Air, the top floor of the New Building, was a kind of large hall under a Mansard roof. It was secured with triple grilles and double sheet-iron doors covered with huge bolts. If you entered from the north end, the four dormer windows were on your left. On your right, facing the windows at regular intervals, were four square, fairly large cages. Narrow passageways separated them. They were built of masonry up to about elbow height, and from there to the roof they were made of iron bars.

Thénardier had been kept in solitary confinement in one of these cages since the night of February 3. No one ever managed to find out how, or with whose help, he got hold of and hid a bottle of wine—said to have been invented by Desrues—mixed with a narcotic, and made notorious by the band of the _Endormeurs_, or _Sleep_-compellers_.

In many prisons, there are corrupt employees—half jailer, half thief—who help prisoners escape, give the police dishonest service, and make money whenever they can.

That same night, while Little Gavroche was taking in the two lost children, Brujon and Guelemer—who knew that Babet, escaped that morning, was waiting for them in the street, along with Montparnasse—quietly got up. Using the nail Brujon had found, they began to bore through the chimney beside their beds. The debris fell onto Brujon's bed, which kept the noise from being heard. Bursts of rain mixed with thunder shook the doors on their hinges and filled the prison with a terrible but timely uproar. The prisoners who woke pretended to go back to sleep and left Guelemer and Brujon to do as they pleased. Brujon was skillful; Guelemer was strong. Before any sound reached the

guard, who was asleep in the grated cell opening onto the dormitory, they had broken through the wall, climbed the chimney, forced the iron grating over the top of the flue, and reached the roof. The wind and rain grew even stronger, and the roof was slippery.

“What a perfect night to make a run for it!” said Brujon.

A gap six feet wide and eighty feet deep separated them from the outer wall. At the bottom, they could make out a sentry’s musket glinting in the darkness. They tied one end of the rope Brujon had braided in his cell to the broken stumps of the iron bars they had just torn out, threw the other end over the outer wall, and cleared the gap in a single leap. Clinging to the top of the wall, they pulled themselves up, swung a leg over, and then lowered themselves one after another down the rope onto a small roof that adjoins the bath-house. They hauled the rope after them, jumped into the bath-house courtyard, crossed it, pushed open the porter’s little door, found his bell-rope hanging beside it, pulled it, opened the carriage gate, and stepped out into the street.

Less than three-quarters of an hour earlier, they had risen from their beds in the dark, nail in hand, with the whole plan already formed in their minds.

A few moments later, they had joined Babet and Montparnasse, who were wandering around the neighborhood.

They had snapped their rope while pulling it after them, and a piece of it was left hanging from the chimney on the roof. Aside from that, the only harm they suffered was that they had

scraped nearly all the skin from their hands.

That night, Thénardier was somehow warned, though no one could say how, and he stayed awake.

Toward one o'clock in the morning, on a very dark night, he saw two shadowy figures move across the roof through the rain and gusting wind, passing in front of the dormer window opposite his cage. One of them stopped at the window just long enough to glance inside. It was Brujon.

Thénardier recognized him and understood. That was enough.

Thénardier, classified as a burglar and held as a precaution on the charge of organizing an armed nighttime ambush, was kept under constant watch. A sentry, changed every two hours, paced in front of his cage with a loaded musket. The Fine-Air was lit by a skylight. The prisoner wore fetters on his feet that weighed fifty pounds. Every day at four in the afternoon, a jailer came into his cage with two dogs—this was still the practice at the time. He set down beside the bed a two-pound loaf of black bread, a jug of water, and a bowl of rather thin broth with a few Mayagan beans floating in it. Then he checked the irons and tapped the bars. This man and his dogs came twice during the night as well.

Thénardier had been allowed to keep a kind of iron spike, which he used to fasten his bread into a crack in the wall, "to keep it safe from the rats," as he put it. Since Thénardier was always under watch, no one had objected to his having this spike. Later, however, people remembered that one of the jailers had said, "It would have been better to give him only a wooden

spike."

At two in the morning, the sentry, an old soldier, was relieved and replaced by a conscript. A few moments later, the man with the dogs made his round and left without noticing anything unusual, except perhaps the extreme youth and "country look" of the "raw recruit." Two hours later, at four o'clock, when they came to relieve the conscript, they found him asleep on the floor, stretched out like a log near Thénardier's cage. Thénardier himself was gone. There was a hole in the ceiling of his cage and, above that, another hole in the roof. One of the planks from his bed had been torn off and was probably taken with him, since it was never found. They also found in his cell a half-empty bottle containing what was left of the drugged wine used to knock out the soldier. The soldier's bayonet was gone as well.

When this was discovered, everyone assumed that Thénardier was already beyond reach. In fact, he was no longer in the New Building, but he was still in very great danger.

When Thénardier reached the roof of the New Building, he found what was left of Brujon's rope still hanging from the bars over the upper chimney opening. But the broken piece was far too short, so he could not escape down the outer wall as Brujon and Guelemer had done.

If you turn from the Rue des Ballets into the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, you almost at once come upon a hideous ruin. In the last century, a house stood there; now only its back wall remains, a solid masonry wall rising as high as the third story

between the neighboring buildings. You can recognize the ruin by the two large square windows still visible in it. The middle one, nearest the right gable, is braced with a worm-eaten beam set there like a prop. Through those windows, one could once see a tall, gloomy wall, a fragment of the outer wall of La Force.

The gap on the street where the house was torn down is half blocked by a fence of rotting boards, supported by five stone posts. In this hollow, a small shack is hidden, leaning against the part of the ruin still left standing. The fence has a gate which, a few years ago, was secured only with a latch.

It was the top of this ruin that Thénardier managed to reach a little after one in the morning.

How had he gotten there? No one has ever been able to explain it or understand it. The lightning must somehow have both hindered him and helped him at the same time. Had he used the slaters' ladders and scaffolding to move from roof to roof, from enclosure to enclosure, from section to section, reaching the buildings of the Charlemagne court, then those of the Saint-Louis court, then the outer wall, and from there the hut on the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile? But that route had gaps in it that seemed to make it impossible. Had he laid the plank from his bed across the gap like a bridge from the roof of the Fine-Air to the outer wall, then crawled flat on his stomach along the coping of the outer wall all the way around the prison to the hut? But the outer wall of La Force ran in an uneven, crenellated line. It rose and fell. It dropped near the firemen's barracks. It climbed again toward the bath-house. Buildings cut across it. It was not even the same height by the Hotel Lamoignon as it was

on the Rue Pavée. Everywhere there were sudden drops and sharp corners. And besides, the sentries should have seen the fugitive's dark shape. So the route Thénardier took remains deeply puzzling. Escape seemed impossible in either of those two ways. Did Thénardier, driven by that thirst for freedom which turns precipices into ditches, iron bars into wicker hurdles, a legless man into an athlete, a gouty man into a bird, stupidity into instinct, instinct into intelligence, and intelligence into genius, invent a third way? No one has ever discovered it.

The wonders of escape cannot always be explained. The escaping man, we repeat, is inspired. There is something of the star and the lightning in the mysterious flash of flight. The struggle for freedom is no less astonishing than the ascent toward the sublime. People ask of the escaped thief, "How did he manage to climb that wall?" just as they ask of Corneille, "Where did he find the means of dying?_"

In any case, soaked with sweat, drenched by rain, his clothes hanging in rags, his hands stripped raw, his elbows bleeding, and his knees torn, Thénardier had reached what children, in their vivid language, call the edge_ of the wall of the ruin. There he stretched himself out full length, and there his strength gave out. A steep drop, three stories high, separated him from the street pavement.

The rope he had was too short.

There he waited—pale, exhausted, and driven to the edge by everything he had been through. Night still hid him, but he kept telling himself that dawn was about to break. He was terrified at

the thought of hearing the nearby clock of Saint-Paul strike four in a few minutes—the hour when the sentinel was relieved, and when the man would be found asleep beneath the broken roof. He stared in horror into the terrible drop below, at the light from the street lanterns, at the wet black pavement—that pavement he longed for and yet dreaded, because it meant death, and it meant freedom.

He wondered whether his three companions in escape had succeeded, whether they had heard him, and whether they would come to help him. He listened. Aside from the patrol, no one had passed through the street since he had been there. Almost all the market gardeners coming down from Montreuil, Charonne, Vincennes, and Bercy to the markets passed through the Rue Saint-Antoine.

Four o'clock struck. Thénardier shuddered. A few moments later, the frightened, confused uproar that follows the discovery of an escape burst through the prison. He heard doors opening and slamming shut, gratings creaking on their hinges, a commotion in the guardroom, the hoarse shouts of the jailers, and the thud of musket butts on the paving stones in the courtyards. Lights moved up and down past the barred windows of the dormitories. A torch ran along the ridge of the top story of the New Building. The firemen quartered in the barracks on the right had been called out. Their helmets, lit by the torch in the rain, moved back and forth along the roofs. At the same time, in the direction of the Bastille, Thénardier saw a pale whiteness sadly brightening the edge of the sky.

He was lying on top of a wall only ten inches wide, exposed to the pounding rain, with a drop on either side. He could not move. He was tormented both by the dizziness of possibly falling and by the terror of certain arrest. His thoughts swung back and forth like a clock pendulum: “If I fall, I’m dead; if I stay, I’m caught.” In the middle of this agony, while the street was still dark, he suddenly noticed a man slipping along the walls from the Rue Pavée. The man stopped in the recess directly below where Thénardier hung, as if suspended. A second man joined him, moving with the same caution, then a third, then a fourth. Once the four were together, one of them lifted the latch on the gate in the fence, and they all entered the enclosed lot where the shanty stood. They stopped directly beneath Thénardier. They had clearly chosen this empty space so they could confer without being seen by passersby or by the sentry guarding the wicket of La Force a few steps away. It should be added that the rain had kept the sentry shut up in his box. Since Thénardier could not make out their faces, he listened to their words with the desperate intensity of a man who feels himself lost.

Thenardier saw what looked like a flash of hope before his eyes: these men were speaking in slang.

The first said in a low but clear voice:

“Let’s clear out. What are we doing here?”

The second replied, “It’s raining hard enough to put out the devil’s own fire. And the police will be here any minute. There’s a soldier on guard over there. We’ll get nabbed if we stay here.”

Those two words, _icigo_ and _icicaille_, both meaning _ici_, were like flashes of light to Thénardier. The first belonged to the slang of the barriers, the second to the slang of the Temple. From _icigo_ he recognized Brujon, who prowled the barriers; from _icicaille_ he knew it was Babet, who, among his other occupations, had once been an old-clothes dealer at the Temple.

The old slang of the great century was no longer spoken anywhere except in the Temple, and Babet was really the only man who still spoke it in its pure form. Without the word _icicaille_, Thénardier would not have recognized him, because he had completely changed his voice.

Meanwhile, the third man spoke up.

“There’s no rush yet. Let’s wait a little. How do we know he doesn’t need us?”

From those words, which were pure French, Thénardier recognized Montparnasse, who prided himself on his elegance: he understood every kind of slang, but never spoke any of it.

As for the fourth man, he said nothing, but his massive shoulders gave him away. Thénardier had no doubt. It was Guelemer.

Brujon answered almost hotly, though still in a low voice:

“What are you babbling about? The tavern-keeper hasn’t managed to get away. He doesn’t understand the game, not at all! It takes a very sharp man to tear up his shirt, cut his sheet into a rope, punch holes in doors, get forged papers, make false keys, file through his irons, lower his rope, hide himself, and

disguise himself. The old fellow couldn't pull it off. He doesn't know how the business is done."

Babet added, still using that classic slang spoken by Poulailler and Cartouche, which stood to Brujon's bold, fresh, vivid, and dangerous argot as Racine's language stands to that of André Chénier:

"Your tavern-keeper must have been caught in the act. A man has to know what he's doing. He's only a beginner. He probably let himself get taken by a policeman, maybe even by an informer pretending to be his friend. Listen, Montparnasse, do you hear those shouts in the prison? You saw all those lights. He's been recaptured, that's what happened. He'll get twenty years at most. I'm not afraid, I'm no coward, but there's nothing more to be done, and if we stay, they'll make trouble for us. Don't be angry. Come with us. Let's go drink a bottle of good old wine together."

"You don't abandon your friends when they're in trouble," Montparnasse muttered.

"I'm telling you, he's been caught!" Brujon shot back. "Right now, the inn-keeper isn't worth half a penny. We can't do anything for him. Let's get out of here. Every minute, I feel as if a policeman is about to grab me."

Montparnasse was no longer putting up much resistance. The truth was that these four men, loyal in the way criminals can be when they refuse to abandon one another, had spent the whole night prowling around La Force, dangerous as it was, hoping to see Thénardier appear on top of some wall. But everything was

driving them to retreat: the night was turning too clear, even though the rain had been so heavy that it had emptied the streets; the cold was overwhelming them; their clothes were soaked; their shoes were full of holes; the alarming noise that had just erupted from the prison; the hours already gone by; the patrol they had run into; and the hope that was slipping away. Even Montparnasse, who was perhaps almost Thénardier's son-in-law, gave in. In another moment they would be gone. Thénardier, panting on his wall, was like the shipwrecked survivors of the _Méduse_ on their raft when they saw the ship that had appeared in sight disappear again on the horizon.

He did not dare call out to them; one shout might be heard and ruin everything. Then an idea came to him, a last idea, a sudden flash of inspiration. He pulled from his pocket the end of Brujon's rope, which he had detached from the chimney of the New Building, and threw it down into the space enclosed by the fence.

The rope landed at their feet.

"A widow," said Babet.

"My tortouse!" said Brujon.

"The tavern-keeper is up there," said Montparnasse.

They looked up. Thénardier stuck his head out just a little.

"Quick," said Montparnasse, "do you have the other end of the rope, Brujon?"

"Yes."

“Tie the two pieces together. We’ll throw him the rope. He can fasten it to the wall, and then he’ll have enough to climb down.”

Thénardier took the risk and spoke:

“I’m frozen stiff.”

“We’ll warm you up.”

“I can’t move.”

“Just slide down. We’ll catch you.”

“My hands are numb.”

“Just tie the rope to the wall.”

“I can’t.”

“Then one of us will have to climb up,” said Montparnasse.

“Three stories!” cried Brujon.

An old plaster flue, once used for a stove that had stood in the shanty years before, ran along the wall and rose almost to the exact spot where they could see Thénardier. It was already badly damaged then and full of cracks. It has since collapsed, though its traces can still be seen.

It was extremely narrow.

“A person could climb up with the help of that,” said Montparnasse.

“Up that flue?” cried Babet. “No grown man could do it! You’d need a kid.”

“Then we need to get a kid,” said Brujon.

“Where are we supposed to find one?” said Guelemer.

“Wait,” said Montparnasse. “I’ve got just the thing.”

He opened the fence gate as quietly as possible, checked that no one was passing in the street, slipped out carefully, closed the gate behind him, and ran off toward the Bastille.

Seven or eight minutes passed—eight thousand centuries for Thénardier. Babet, Brujon, and Guelemer said nothing. At last the gate opened again, and Montparnasse came back, out of breath, with Gavroche behind him. The rain still kept the street completely empty.

Little Gavroche stepped into the enclosure and looked calmly at the shapes of those ruffians. Water dripped from his hair. Guelemer spoke to him:

“Are you a man, boy?”

Gavroche shrugged and answered:

“A boy like me is a man, and men like you are babies.”

“The little brat has a sharp tongue!” exclaimed Babet.

“A Paris street kid isn’t made of straw,” added Brujon.

“What do you want?” asked Gavroche.

Montparnasse replied:

“Climb up that flue.”

“With this rope,” said Babet.

“And tie it,” continued Brujon.

“To the top of the wall,” Babet went on.

“To the window crossbar,” added Brujon.

“And then?” said Gavroche.

“That’s it,” said Guelemer.

The street boy looked over the rope, the chimney, the wall, and the windows, then made that hard-to-describe, scornful sound with his lips that meant:

“Is that all?”

“There’s a man up there you’re supposed to save,” Montparnasse went on.

“Will you do it?” Brujon began again.

“Amateur!” the boy shot back, as if the question were unbelievably foolish.

Then he took off his shoes.

Guelemer grabbed Gavroche by one arm, lifted him onto the roof of the shack, whose worm-eaten boards bent under the urchin’s weight, and handed him the rope Brujon had knotted together while Montparnasse was away. The street boy made his way toward the chimney, which was easy to get into because of a large crack that reached the roof. Just as he was about to climb, Thénardier, seeing life and safety coming toward him, leaned over the edge of the wall. The first light of dawn fell white across his sweat-soaked forehead, his livid

cheekbones, his sharp, savage nose, his bristling gray beard, and Gavroche recognized him.

“Well! It’s my father! Oh, that makes no difference.”

And with the rope between his teeth, he began climbing without hesitation.

He reached the top of the hut, straddled the old wall as if it were a horse, and tied the rope securely to the upper crossbar of the window.

A moment later, Thénardier was in the street.

The instant he touched the pavement, the instant he knew he was out of danger, he was no longer tired, cold, or shaking. The terrible things he had just escaped vanished like smoke. That strange, ferocious mind of his woke fully again and stood upright and free, ready to move on.

These were the first words he spoke:

“Now, who are we going to eat?”

There is no need to explain the meaning of this horribly clear remark. It means to kill, to murder, and to rob. _To eat_ in its literal sense: _to devour_.

“Let’s get well into a corner,” said Brujon. “Let’s settle it in three words and split up at once. There was a job that looked promising in the Rue Plumet: a deserted street, an isolated house, an old rotten gate opening onto a garden, and women alone.”

“Well, why not?” Thénardier demanded.

“Your daughter, Éponine, went to look into it,” Babet replied.

“And she brought Magnon a biscuit,” Guelemer added. “There’s nothing to be got there.”

“The girl’s no fool,” said Thénardier. “Still, we need to check it out.”

“Yes, yes,” said Brujon. “It needs to be looked into.”

Meanwhile, none of the men seemed to notice Gavroche. During this exchange, he had sat down on one of the fence posts. He waited a few moments, thinking that perhaps his father would turn toward him. Then he put his shoes back on and said:

“Is that all? You don’t need anything else, my men? Now that you’re out of your mess, I’m leaving. I have to go get my brats out of bed.”

And off he went.

The five men came out of the enclosure one after another.

After Gavroche disappeared around the corner of the Rue des Ballets, Babet drew Thénardier aside.

“Did you get a good look at that boy?” he asked.

“What boy?”

“The one who climbed the wall and brought you the rope.”

“Not really.”

“Well, I’m not sure, but it seems to me it was your son.”

“Bah!” said Thénardier. “Do you really think so?”

BOOK SEVENTH—SLANG

[Illustration: Slang]

CHAPTER I—ORIGIN

Pigritia is a terrible word.

It gives rise to a whole world, _la pègre_—that is, _theft_—and a hell, _la pègrenne_—that is, _hunger_.

So idleness is the mother.

She has a son, theft, and a daughter, hunger.

Where are we now? In the world of slang.

What is slang? It is both a nation and a dialect. It is theft in its two forms: a people and a language.

Thirty-four years ago, when the narrator of this serious and somber story introduced, in another work written with the same purpose as this one, a thief who spoke in argot, people reacted with astonishment and outrage. “What? How? Argot? Why, argot is horrible! It is the language of prisons, galleys, convicts—of everything most vile in society!” and so on, and so on.

We have never understood objections of that kind.

Since then, two great novelists—one a profound observer of the human heart, the other a fearless friend of the people, Balzac and Eugène Sue—have portrayed their criminals speaking their natural language, just as the author of _The Last Day of a Condemned Man_ did in 1828, and the same objections have been raised. People said again, “What do authors mean by using that disgusting dialect? Slang is hateful! Slang makes one shudder!”

Who denies it? Of course it does.

When the task is to examine a wound, an abyss, or a society, since when has it been wrong to go too far—to go all the way to the bottom? We have always believed that doing so can sometimes be an act of courage, or at the very least a plain and useful one, deserving the sympathetic respect owed to duty that is accepted and carried out. Why should we not explore everything and study everything? Why should we stop halfway? Where one stops depends on the depth being measured, not on the person taking the sounding.

Certainly, it is neither pleasant nor easy to investigate the very bottom of the social order, where solid ground ends and mud begins; to dig through those vague, murky depths; to track down, seize, and throw onto the pavement that degraded dialect, still quivering, dripping with filth when dragged into the light—that diseased vocabulary in which every word seems like a foul ring taken from some monster of the mire and the shadows. Nothing is more mournful than seeing slang exposed in its nakedness, under the full light of thought. It seems like some horrible creature made for the night, suddenly torn from its cesspool. One seems to see a frightful, living, bristling thicket that trembles, rustles, sways, slips back toward shadow, threatens, and glares. One word looks like a claw; another, like a bleeding eye gone dark; this or that phrase seems to move like a crab’s pincers. All of it lives with the hideous vitality of things shaped into order out of disorder.

But when has horror ever ruled out study? Since when has disease driven away medicine? Can anyone imagine a naturalist refusing to study the viper, the bat, the scorpion, the centipede, or the tarantula, and throwing them back into the darkness with the cry, “Oh, how ugly!” A thinker who turned away from slang would be like a surgeon turning his face from an ulcer or a wart. He would be like a philologist refusing to examine a fact of language, or a philosopher shrinking from examining a fact of humanity. For it must be said, for those who do not know it, that argot is both a literary phenomenon and a social result. What is slang, properly speaking? It is the language of misery.

Someone may object and put the point in broad terms—which is one way of softening it. We may be told that every trade and profession, and indeed every level of society and every kind of intelligence, has its own slang. The merchant who says, “Montpellier not active, Marseilles fine quality,” the broker on the exchange 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 cavalryman who says, “My turkey-cock,” the fencing-master who says, “Tierce, quarte, break,” and the printer who says, “My shooting-stick and

galley"—all of them, the printer, fencing-master, cavalry dragoon, infantryman, phrenologist, huntsman, philosopher, comedian, playwright, sheriff, gambler, stockbroker, and merchant, are speaking slang. The painter who says, "My grinder," the notary who says, "My Skip-the-Gutter," the hairdresser who says, "My mealyback," and the cobbler who says, "My cub," are speaking slang too. Strictly speaking, if one insists on it, all the different ways of saying right and left are slang as well: the sailor's _port_ and _starboard_, the scene-shifter's _court_-side_ and _garden_-side_, the beadle's _Gospel_-side_ and _Epistle_-side_. There is slang among affected ladies just as there is among the _précieuses_. The Hôtel Rambouillet stands very near the Cour des Miracles. Duchesses have their slang too. Take this phrase from a love letter written by a very great lady and very beautiful woman of the Restoration: "You will find in this gossip a fultitude of reasons why I should libertize."40 Diplomatic ciphers are slang. When the pontifical chancellery uses 26 for Rome, _grkztntgzyal_ for despatch, and _abfxustgrnogrkzu tu Xl_. for the Duc de Modena, it is speaking slang. The physicians of the Middle Ages, who used _Opoponach' perfroschinum, reptitalmus, dracatholicum, angelorum, postmegorum_ for carrot, radish, and turnip, were speaking slang. The sugar-manufacturer who says, "Loaf, clarified, lumps, bastard, common, burnt"—that honest manufacturer is speaking 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," was speaking slang. The poet, and the artist who with deep understanding would call M. de Montmorency "a bourgeois," if he were not a judge of verses

and statues, are speaking slang. The classical 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,” and the three-cornered hat “Mars’ triangle”—that classical academician is speaking slang. Algebra, medicine, and botany each have their own slang. The language used aboard ship—that marvelous language of the sea, so rich and vivid, spoken by Jean Bart, Duquesne, Suffren, and Duperré, mingling with the whistle of the rigging, the sound of the speaking-trumpets, the clash of the boarding-irons, the roll of the sea, the wind, the gale, and the cannon—is itself a wholly heroic and dazzling slang. Compared with the harsh slang of thieves, it is what the lion is to the jackal.

No doubt. But whatever we may say, not everyone accepts this broader way of understanding the word _slang_. For our part, we keep the word to its older, exact, clearly limited meaning, and we confine slang to slang. True slang—slang in the fullest sense, if those words may be joined—is the age-old slang that was once a whole kingdom in itself. It is nothing, we repeat, but the familiar, restless, cunning, treacherous, poisonous, cruel, ambiguous, vile, deep, fatal language of misery. At the furthest edge of degradation and misfortune, there is a final form of wretchedness that rebels and decides to fight against the whole weight of prosperity and established rights. It is a terrible struggle. Sometimes sly, sometimes violent, sickly and savage at once, it strikes at the social order with pinpricks through vice and with club-blows through crime. To meet the needs of that struggle, wretchedness invented a language of combat: slang.

To keep from sinking into oblivion, to hold above the abyss even a fragment of some language once spoken by man that would otherwise be lost—in other words, one of the good or bad elements that make up civilization, or add to its complexity—is to enlarge the record of social observation. And that is to serve civilization itself. Plautus did this, knowingly or not, when he made two Carthaginian soldiers speak Phœnician. Molière did it when he made so many of his characters speak Levantine and various dialects. But the objection immediately returns. Phœnician—certainly. Levantine—of course. Even dialect—let that pass. These are languages that belonged to nations or provinces. But slang? What is the point of preserving slang? What good is there in helping slang “survive”?

Our answer is only one word. Surely, if the language spoken by a nation or a province deserves interest, then the language spoken by misery deserves even more attention and study.

It is the language that has been spoken in France, for example, for more than four centuries—not only by one kind of misery, but by every kind of human misery.

And we insist on this: studying society's distortions and wounds, and pointing them out so they can be remedied, is not optional work. The historian of manners and ideas has a mission just as stern as the historian of events. One records the surface of civilization: struggles between crowns, the births of princes, the marriages of kings, battles, assemblies, great public figures, revolutions in full daylight—in short, everything visible on the outside. The other records the inside, the depths: the people who labor, suffer, and wait; the oppressed woman; the child in agony; the hidden war between one person and another; obscure cruelties; prejudices; carefully planned injustices; the underground world; the dim tremors of the masses; those who die of hunger; the law's retaliations; the secret development of souls; the barefoot, the bare-armed, the dispossessed, the orphans, the miserable, and the infamous—all the forms of human life that wander in the dark. He must go down into those impenetrable vaults with a heart full of both charity and severity, acting at once as brother and judge. There, in confusion, crawl those who bleed and those who strike the blow, those who weep and those who curse, those who go hungry and those who consume, those who suffer evil and those who inflict it. Do these historians of hearts and souls have duties any less serious

than historians of outward facts? Does anyone think Alighieri has less to say than Machiavelli? Is the underside of civilization any less important than the upper side simply because it lies deeper and in greater darkness? Do we really know a mountain if we know nothing of its cave?

Let us add, in passing, that nothing in what comes before should suggest a sharp division between these two kinds of historians; we do not see such a division. No one can write well about the open, visible, dramatic, public life of a people without also being, to some extent, a historian of its deeper, hidden life. And no one can write well about that inner life unless he also knows how, when necessary, to write about the outer life. The history of customs and ideas runs through the history of events, and the reverse is just as true. These are two different kinds of facts, but they correspond to one another, are always intertwined, and often produce results together. Every line that providence draws on the surface of a nation has a dark but clear counterpart in its depths, and every upheaval in those depths sends something boiling up to the surface. Since true history is a blend of everything, the true historian takes part in everything.

Man is not a circle with a single center; he is an ellipse with two focal points. Facts are one; ideas are the other.

Slang is nothing more than a dressing room where language, about to do something shameful, puts on a disguise. There it dresses itself in masked words and ragged metaphors. In that form, it becomes dreadful.

It is hard to recognize. Is this really the French language, that great human language? Here it is, ready to go on stage and answer crime, prepared for every use in the whole repertory of evil. It no longer walks; it hobbles. It limps on the crutch of the Court of Miracles, a crutch that can turn into a club. It is called vagrancy. All kinds of specters, acting as its dressers, have painted its face. It crawls and rears up, moving with the double gait of a reptile. From now on, it can play every role. The counterfeiter makes it suspect, the forger stains it with verdigris, the incendiary blackens it with soot, and the murderer puts rouge on its face.

When you stand beside decent people at society's gates, you can overhear the talk of those kept outside. You catch questions and answers. You hear, without quite understanding it, a hideous murmur that almost sounds human, yet comes closer to a howl than to speech. It is slang. The words are twisted and marked by a strange, fantastic brutality. It feels as though you are hearing hydras speak.

In the dark, it cannot be understood. It growls and whispers, adding mystery to the gloom. It is dark in misery, darker still in crime; and from those two darknesses together, slang is made. Darkness in the air, darkness in deeds, darkness in voices. A terrible, toad-like tongue that comes and goes, leaps, crawls, slobbers, and writhes monstrously through that vast gray fog made of rain and night, hunger, vice, falsehood, injustice, nakedness, suffocation, and winter—the blazing noon of the wretched.

Let us pity those who have been punished. Alas, who are we ourselves? Who am I, speaking to you now? Who are you, listening to me? And are you quite sure that we did nothing before we were born? The earth is not unlike a prison. Who knows whether man is not a recaptured offender before divine justice? Look closely at life. It is arranged so that everywhere we feel the presence of punishment.

Are you what people call a happy man? Even so, you are sad every day. Each day brings either some great sorrow or some small worry. Yesterday you trembled for the health of someone dear to you; today you fear for your own. Tomorrow it will be anxiety about money; the day after, the attack of a slanderer; then a friend’s misfortune; then the weather; then something broken or lost; then a pleasure for which both your conscience and your spine reproach you; then again the course of public affairs. And this does not even count the pains of the heart. So it goes. One cloud clears, another gathers. Hardly one day in a hundred is completely joyful and bright. And you belong to that small class called happy! As for the rest of mankind, a stagnant night lies over them.

Thoughtful minds make little use of the phrase "the fortunate and the unfortunate." In this world, which is plainly the vestibule of another, there are no fortunate people.

The true division among people is this: those who live in light and those who remain in shadow. The goal is to reduce the number in shadow and increase the number in light. That is why we call for education and science. Teaching someone to read is like lighting a fire; every syllable they sound out gives off a

spark.

But saying "light" does not always mean joy. People suffer in the light; too much of it can burn. The flame is the enemy of the wing. To keep burning without falling from flight—that is the miracle of genius.

Even after you have learned to understand and to love, you will still suffer. Day is born in tears. Those who live in the light weep, if only for those still left in darkness.

CHAPTER II—ROOTS

Slang is the language of those who sit in darkness.

In the presence of that mysterious dialect—at once degraded and defiant—thought is stirred in its darkest depths, and social philosophy is driven to its sharpest reflections. In it, punishment becomes visible. Every syllable seems branded. The words of common speech look wrinkled and shriveled there, as if the executioner's hot iron had passed over them. Some seem to smoke still. A certain phrase can strike you like the sight of a thief's shoulder suddenly laid bare, marked with the fleur-de-lys. Ideas almost resist being expressed in these nouns that seem like fugitives from justice. At times the metaphor is so brazen that you feel it once wore an iron collar.

And yet, despite all this—and because of it—this strange dialect rightfully has its own place in that vast, impartial cabinet of compartments where there is room for the rusty farthing as well as the gold medal, and which we call literature. Slang, whether the public admits it or not, has its own syntax and its own poetry. It is a language. Yes, the twisted shape of certain words shows that Mandrin chewed them over, and the brilliance of certain metonymies lets us feel that Villon spoke them.

That exquisite and famous line—

Mais où sont les neiges d'antan? But where are the snows of years gone by?

It is a line of slang. _Antan_—_ante annum_—is a word from Thunes slang that meant the past year, and by extension, _formerly_. Thirty-five years ago, when the great chain-gang departed, one of the cells at Bicêtre bore this maxim, scratched into the wall with a nail by a king of Thunes condemned to the galleys: _Les dabs d'antan trimaient siempre pour la pierre du Coësre_. This means, _Kings in former days always went to be anointed_. In that king's view, anointing meant the galleys.

The word _décarade_, which describes heavy vehicles setting off at a gallop, is attributed to Villon, and it is a word worthy of him. With the pounding force of all four hooves, it captures in one brilliant piece of onomatopoeia the whole of La Fontaine's admirable line:

Six forts chevaux tiraient un coche. Six strong horses were pulling a coach.

From a purely literary standpoint, few subjects could be more curious or rewarding than the study of slang. It is a whole language inside another language, a kind of diseased outgrowth, an unhealthy graft that has produced its own growth—a parasite rooted in the old Gallic trunk, whose dark foliage spreads across one side of the language. That is what might be called the first, the common view of slang. But for those who study language as it ought to be studied—that is, as geologists study the earth—slang looks like a true alluvial deposit. The deeper one digs into it, the more one finds beneath old popular French: Provençal, Spanish, Italian, Levantine—the language of the Mediterranean ports—English and German, the Romance tongue in its three forms, French, Italian, and

Romance Romance, then Latin, and finally Basque and Celtic. It is a deep and singular formation. A subterranean structure built jointly by all the wretched. Each accursed race has laid down its layer there. Each suffering has dropped its stone. Each heart has added its pebble. A crowd of evil, degraded, or embittered souls, who passed through life and vanished into eternity, still remain there, almost fully visible, in the form of some monstrous word.

Want Spanish? Old Gothic slang was full of it. Here is _boffete_, a box on the ear, derived from _bofeton_; _vantane_, window (later _vanterne_), from _vantana_; _gat_, cat, from _gato_; _acite_, oil, from _aceyte_. Want Italian? Here is _spade_, sword, from _spada_; _carvel_, boat, from _caravella_. Want English? Here is _bichot_, from _bishop_; _raille_, spy, from _rascal_, rascalion_; _pilche_, a case, from _pilcher_, a sheath. Want German? Here are _caleur_, the waiter, from _kellner_; and _hers_, the master, from _herzog_ (duke). Want Latin? Here is _frangir_, to break, from _frangere_; _affurer_, to steal, from _fur_; _cadene_, chain, from _catena_. One word appears in every language on the continent with a kind of mysterious force and authority: _magnus_. The Scotchman turns it into his _mac_, which marks the chief of the clan: Mac-Farlane, Mac-Callumore, the great Farlane, the great Callumore41. Slang makes it _meck_ and later _le meg_, that is to say, God. Would you like Basque? Here is _gahisto_, the devil, from _gaïztoa_, evil; _sorgabon_, good night, from _gabon_, good evening. Want Celtic? Here is _blavin_, a handkerchief, from _blavet_, gushing water; _ménesse_, a woman (in a bad sense), from _meinec_, full of stones; _barant_, brook, from _baranton_, fountain; _goffeur_, locksmith, from _goff_, blacksmith; _guedouze_, death, from _guenn-du_, black-white. Finally, want

history? Slang calls crowns _les maltèses_, a reminder of the coin once used on the galleys of Malta.

Besides the philological origins just described, slang has other roots as well—roots even more natural, which seem to rise directly from the human mind itself.

First, there is the direct creation of words. That is where the mystery of language lies. To paint with words, using images whose source and logic no one fully knows, is the primitive foundation of all human speech—the bedrock, one might say, of language itself.

Slang is full of words like these—immediate words, coined on the spot, with no one knowing where they came from or who invented them; words with no etymology, no related forms, no descendants; isolated, rough, sometimes ugly words that can still carry a remarkable force of expression and endure. The executioner is _le taule_; the forest, _le sabri_; fear or 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 hide and reveal. Some of them—_le rabouin_, for instance—are grotesque and terrifying at once, and strike you like the grimace of a Cyclops.

Second, there is metaphor. A language that wants to say everything while hiding everything naturally overflows with figurative speech. Metaphor becomes a riddle, a place of refuge for the thief planning a job and the prisoner arranging an escape. No form of speech is more metaphorical than slang: _dévisser le coco_ (to unscrew the nut) means to wring the neck;

tortiller_ (to wriggle) means to eat; _être gerbé_ means to be tried; a rat_ means a bread thief; il lansquine_ means it is raining. That last expression is a vivid old figure. It still carries the mark of its age, comparing the long slanting lines of rain to the thick, angled pikes of lancers, and compressing into a single word the popular phrase: it rains halberds. Sometimes, as slang moves from its first stage to its second, words shift from a primitive, savage meaning to a metaphorical one. The devil stops being le rabouin_ and becomes le boulanger_ (the baker), who puts the bread into the oven. This is cleverer, but less grand—something like Racine after Corneille, or Euripides after Æschylus. Some slang phrases belong to both stages at once, combining the barbaric and the metaphorical, and they resemble phantasmagoria. Les sorgueuers vont solliciter des gails à la lune_—the prowlers are going to steal horses by night—passes before the mind like a group of spectres. You do not know exactly what you are seeing.

Third, there is the makeshift method. Slang feeds on the language itself. It uses it however it pleases, grabs at it haphazardly, and often, when the need arises, simply twists it in a crude, sweeping way. Sometimes, by distorting ordinary words and mixing them with pure slang, it creates vivid phrases in which the two earlier elements can still be felt: direct invention and 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. Most often, to throw listeners off the

scent, slang simply adds to every word in the language, without distinction, a vulgar tail: a ending in aille–, orgue–, iergue–, or uche–. For example: Vousiergue trouvaille bonorgue ce gigotmuche?_ — Do you think that leg of mutton is good? Cartouche addressed this phrase to a turnkey to find out whether the sum offered for his escape was satisfactory.

The ending in mar– has been added more recently.

Slang is the language of corruption, and it quickly becomes corrupted itself. It is always trying to hide, so the moment it senses that people understand it, it changes shape. Unlike any other kind of growth, every ray of light that falls on it kills whatever it touches. So slang is constantly breaking down and rebuilding itself, in a dark, rapid process that never stops. In ten years it covers more ground than a language does in ten centuries. So 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 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." Between those two extremes, there have been twenty different expressions. Cartouche's speech would have been

Hebrew to Lacenaire. Every word in this language is always on the run, like the men who speak it.

Even so, from time to time, and because of this very movement, old slang reappears and becomes new again. It has strongholds where it keeps its power. 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 old Thuneurs' ending in _anche–. _Boyanches_-tu_ (_bois_-tu_), do you drink? But even so, constant movement remains its law.

If the philosopher manages to hold this language still for a moment, just long enough to study it, though it is always vanishing, he is led into sad but useful reflection. No study is more effective or more rich in instruction. There is not a metaphor or an analogy in slang that does not contain a lesson. Among these men, to beat means to pretend; one beats a sickness. Cunning is their strength.

For them, the idea of man cannot be separated from the idea of darkness. They call the night _la sorgue_; they call man _l'orgue_. Man is seen as something that comes out of the night.

They have fallen into the habit of thinking of society as a deadly atmosphere, a fatal force that destroys them, and they speak of liberty the way someone would speak of health. A man under arrest is a _sick man_; a man who has been sentenced is a _dead man_.

For the prisoner buried within those four walls, the most terrible thing is a kind of icy chastity, and he calls the dungeon the _castus–. In that funeral-like place, life outside always appears in

its brightest, most cheerful form. The prisoner wears irons on his feet; you might think he dwells on the fact that feet are for walking. No. He thinks of the fact that feet are for dancing. So when he has managed to cut through his chains, his first thought is that now he can dance, and he calls the saw the _bastringue_ (public-house ball). A name is a center; this is assimilation at its deepest level. The ruffian has two heads: one that plans his actions and guides him throughout his life, and the other, the one on his shoulders on the day he dies. He calls the head that advises him in crime _la sorbonne_, and the head that pays for it _la tronche_. When a man has nothing left on his body but rags and nothing in his heart but vice, when he has sunk to that double moral and material degradation that the word blackguard expresses in both its senses, he is ready for crime. He is like a well-sharpened knife; he has two cutting edges, his misery and his malice. So slang does not call him a blackguard; it calls him _un réguisé_. And what are the galleys? A brazier of damnation, a hell. The convict calls himself a _fagot_. Finally, what name do criminals give to their prison? The _college_. An entire penitentiary system could be drawn from that one word.

Does the reader want to know where most of the galley songs, those refrains known in the special vocabulary as _lirlonfa_, were born?

Let him listen to what comes next:

At the Châtelet in Paris, there was a large, long cellar. It lay eight feet below the level of the Seine. It had no windows or air vents; its only opening was the door. Men could go in, but air could not. The ceiling was a stone vault, and the floor was covered

with ten inches of mud. It was paved, but the paving had rotted and split under the constant seepage of water. Eight feet above the floor, a long, heavy beam ran across this underground chamber from one side to the other. From it hung chains, three feet long and set close together, each ending in an iron collar for the neck. In this vault, men sentenced to the galleys were kept until the day they were sent to Toulon. They were shoved beneath that beam, where each man found his shackles hanging in the dark, waiting for him.

The chains—those hanging arms—and the collars—those open hands—seized the miserable men by the throat. They were riveted in place and left there. Because the chain was too short, they could not lie down. They stayed motionless in that cavern, in that darkness, beneath that beam, almost suspended, straining in unimaginable ways just to reach their bread, their jug, or the stone vault above them. Mud rose to the middle of their legs. Filth ran up to their calves. They were crushed by exhaustion, their thighs and knees giving way. They clung to the chain with their hands to get a little rest. They could sleep only while standing upright, and every moment the collar choking them would wake them. Some never woke again. To eat, they had to drag the bread thrown to them into the mud along their leg with their heel until they could reach it with their hand.

How long did they stay like that? A month, two months, sometimes six months; one man remained there for a year. It was the waiting room of the galleys. Men were put there for stealing one of the king’s hares. In that tomb-hell, what did they do? What can a man do in a tomb? They went through the

agonies of death. And what can a man do in hell? They sang, because song remains even when hope is gone. In the waters off Malta, when a galley approached, people heard the singing before they heard the oars. Poor Survincent, the poacher who had endured the prison-cellar of the Châtelet, said, “It was the rhymes that kept me going.” The uselessness of poetry. What good is rhyme?

It was in this cellar that almost all the slang songs were born. From the dungeon of Paris’s Grand-Châtelet comes the mournful refrain of the Montgomery galley: _“Timaloumisaine, timaloumison.”_ Most of these songs are sad; some are cheerful; one is tender:—

Icicaille est la theatre Du petit dardant.

Here is the stage Of the little archer (Cupid).

Do what you like, you cannot wipe out that eternal remnant in the human heart: love.

In this world of dark deeds, people keep their secrets. The secret matters more than anything else. In the eyes of these wretches, it is the bond that holds them together, the foundation of their unity. To betray a secret is to tear away from each member of this savage community a part of his very self. In the forceful language of slang, to inform is called “to eat the bit.” It is as if the informer pulled a little substance from everyone and fed himself on a piece of each man’s flesh.

What does it mean to get a box on the ear? Everyday metaphor answers: “It is to see thirty-six candles.” Then slang steps in

and takes hold of the image: candle, _camoufle_. From that, ordinary language forms _camouflet42_ as a synonym for _soufflet_. So, by a kind of upward seepage, helped along by metaphor, that unpredictable, far-traveling slang rises from the underworld to the Academy; and while Poulailler says, "I light my _camoufle_," Voltaire writes, "Langleviel La Beaumelle deserves a hundred _camouflets_."

Research into slang brings discoveries at every step. To study and investigate this strange language is to be led to the mysterious point where respectable society meets the accursed one.

The thief, too, has his cannon fodder, his material to steal: you, me, whoever happens to pass by; _le pantre_. (_Pan_, everybody.)

Slang is language made convict.

It is enough to fill one with dread that the thinking part of man can be driven so low, dragged down and pinned there by the dark tyrannies of fate, bound by unknown chains in that abyss.

Oh, the poor thoughts of miserable wretches!

Alas, will no one come to help the human soul in that darkness? Is it her fate to wait there forever for the mind—the liberator, the mighty rider of Pegasi and hippogriffs, the fighter beside the heroes of dawn—who will descend from the blue sky between two wings, the radiant knight of the future? Will she go on calling in vain for the bright lance of the ideal to come to her aid? Is she doomed to hear Evil drawing near through the depths of the abyss, and to see, closer and closer beneath the hideous

water, that dragon’s head, that foam-streaked maw, and that twisting mass of claws, coils, and scales? Must she remain there without a ray of light, without hope, abandoned to that terrible approach, dimly tracked by the monster, trembling, disheveled, wringing her hands, forever chained to the rock of night—a dark Andromeda, white and naked in the shadows?

CHAPTER III—SLANG THAT WEEPS AND SLANG THAT LAUGHS

As the reader can see, slang as a whole—slang from four hundred years ago as much as slang today—is shot through with that dark, symbolic spirit that gives words a look that is sometimes mournful, sometimes threatening. You can feel in it the fierce, ancient sadness of the wanderers of the Court of Miracles, who played cards with decks of their own, some of which have survived. The eight of clubs, for example, showed a huge tree with eight enormous trefoil leaves, a kind of fantastical image of the forest. At the foot of the tree, a fire was burning, and on it three hares were roasting a huntsman on a spit; behind him, over another fire, hung a steaming pot from which a dog’s head emerged. Nothing is sadder than these painted acts of revenge on a pack of cards, set beside the stakes used to roast smugglers and the cauldrons used to boil counterfeiters. The many forms thought took in the world of slang—even in song, in mockery, in threats—all shared this defeated and desolate quality. All the songs, some of whose melodies have been preserved, were humble and mournful enough to bring tears. The _pègre_ is always the poor _pègre_; he is always the hare in hiding, the mouse on the run, the bird in flight. He scarcely complains; he is content to sigh. One of his laments 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

Whenever the wretch has time to think, he makes himself low before what is lowly, and weak before society; he throws himself flat on his face, begs, and appeals to pity. We can feel that he knows he is guilty.

Around the middle of the last century, a change took place. Prison songs and thieves' refrains took on, so to speak, an insolent, cheerful air. The plaintive _malur_é_ gave way to the _larifla_–. In the eighteenth century, nearly all the songs of the galleys and the prisons carry a diabolical, mysterious gaiety. We hear this shrill, lilting refrain, as if it had been lit by a phosphorescent glow and tossed 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 some corner of the forest while they cut a man's throat.

A grave sign. In the eighteenth century, the old melancholy of the downtrodden classes disappears. They begin to laugh. They mock the _grand_ meg_ and the _grand_ dab_. With Louis XV on the throne, they call the King of France "le Marquis de Pantin." And suddenly they seem almost cheerful. A kind of glimmer comes from these miserable wretches, as if their consciences no longer weighed so heavily on them. These pitiable tribes of darkness no longer have only the desperate boldness of their actions; they also have a reckless boldness of mind. It is a sign that they are losing their sense of criminality, and that, even among thinkers and dreamers, they feel some vague support

that those thinkers and dreamers do not themselves perceive. It is a sign that theft and plunder are beginning to seep into doctrines and sophistries, so that they lose some of their ugliness while passing much of that ugliness on to the doctrines and sophistries themselves. In short, it is a sign of some vast and imminent upheaval, unless some diversion arises.

Let us stop for a moment. Who exactly are we accusing? The eighteenth century? Philosophy? Certainly not. The work of the eighteenth century was sound, valuable, and deeply beneficial. The encyclopedists, led by Diderot; the physiocrats, led by Turgot; the philosophers, led by Voltaire; the Utopians, led by Rousseau—these were four sacred legions. Humanity's great advance toward the light is owed to them. They were the four vanguards of the human race, moving toward the four cardinal directions of progress: Diderot toward the beautiful, Turgot toward the useful, Voltaire toward the true, and Rousseau toward the just. But beside the philosophers, and even above them, there were also the sophists—a poisonous growth tangled in healthy vegetation, hemlock in the virgin forest. While the executioner was burning the great books of the century's liberators on the grand staircase of the court-house, writers now forgotten were publishing, with the King's approval, all kinds of strangely corrupting works, and the unfortunate devoured them eagerly. Some of these publications—strange as it may seem, and though they were supported by a prince—can be found in the Secret Library. These were important but little-known facts, almost invisible on the surface. Sometimes the very obscurity of a fact is what makes it dangerous. It is hidden because it works in secret. Of all these writers, the one

who probably dug the most unhealthy tunnel into the masses was Restif de La Bretonne.

This phenomenon, found across Europe, caused more destruction in Germany than anywhere else. In Germany, during a certain period—captured by Schiller in his famous drama _The Robbers_—theft and plunder rose up in rebellion against property and labor. They seized on a few plausible but false basic ideas which seemed fair on the surface but were absurd in reality. They wrapped themselves in those ideas, almost vanished inside them, took on an abstract name, became a theory, and in that form spread among hardworking, suffering, honest people. Even the reckless thinkers who had mixed this dangerous brew did not understand it, and neither did the masses who accepted it. Whenever something like this appears, the danger is serious. Suffering gives rise to anger; and while the prosperous classes blind themselves or drift into sleep—which amounts to the same thing—the hatred of the unfortunate lights its torch in some wounded or warped mind dreaming in a corner, and begins to examine society. The gaze of hatred is a terrible thing.

Then, if the misfortune of the age allows it, those dreadful upheavals once called _jacqueries_ can break out. Compared with them, purely political unrest is child's play. They are no longer a struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor, but a revolt of hardship against comfort. Then everything falls apart.

Jacqueries are earthquakes among the people.

It was this danger—perhaps close at hand near the end of the eighteenth century—that the French Revolution, that immense act of justice, brought to an end.

The French Revolution, which was nothing less than an idea armed with a sword, stood up straight and, in the same sudden motion, shut the door on evil and opened the door to good.

It ended torture, proclaimed truth, drove out corruption, made the century healthier, and crowned the common people.

It can be said that it created man a second time by giving him a second soul: right.

The nineteenth century inherited its work and benefited from it, and today the social catastrophe we mentioned a moment ago is simply impossible. Blind is the man who predicts it. Foolish is the man who fears it. Revolution is the vaccine against Jacquerie.

Thanks to the Revolution, social conditions have changed. Feudal and monarchical diseases no longer run in our blood. Nothing of the Middle Ages remains in our makeup. We no longer live in times when terrible forces from within burst out, when a dark, muffled rumbling seemed to move beneath our feet, when strange upheavals from mole-like tunnels broke through the surface of civilization, when the ground split open, cavern roofs gaped, and monstrous heads suddenly rose out of the earth.

The revolutionary spirit is a moral spirit. Once the sense of rights has awakened, it also awakens the sense of duty. The law

for everyone is liberty, which ends where another person's liberty begins, in Robespierre's admirable definition. Since '89, the whole people has been expanding into one sublime individual. There is no poor man who, once he possesses his rights, does not also possess his share of sunlight. The man dying of hunger still feels within himself the honesty of France. The dignity of the citizen is an inner armor. The man who is free is conscientious. The man who votes reigns. From this comes incorruptibility; from this comes the failure of unhealthy desires; from this come eyes heroically lowered before temptation. Such is the health of the Revolution that, on a day of deliverance—a 14th of July, a 10th of August—there is no mob anymore. The first cry of the enlightened, growing crowd is: death to thieves! Progress is an honest man; the ideal and the absolute do not steal pocket handkerchiefs. Who escorted the wagons carrying the wealth of the Tuileries in 1848? The rag-pickers of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. Rags stood guard over treasure. Virtue made those tatterdemalions shine. In those wagons, in chests barely closed and some even half-open, among a hundred glittering caskets, was that ancient crown of France, set with diamonds and topped by the carbuncle of royalty, by the Regent diamond, worth thirty millions. Barefoot, they guarded that crown.

So there will be no more Jacquerie. I regret that for the clever manipulators. The old fear has had its last effect in that area, and from now on it can no longer be used in politics. The main mechanism of the red specter is broken. Everyone knows it now. The scarecrow no longer frightens anyone. Birds take liberties with the dummy, filthy creatures perch on it, and the

bourgeois laugh at it.

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

So does that mean all social danger has disappeared? Certainly not. There is no Jacquerie; society can feel secure on that point. Blood will no longer rush to its head. But society should pay attention to how it breathes. Apoplexy is no longer the danger, but phthisis remains. Social phthisis is called misery.

A person can be destroyed by slow erosion just as surely as by a lightning strike.

We cannot repeat too often—and compassionate souls must never forget—that this is the first duty of brotherhood. Selfish hearts, too, must understand that the first political necessity is to think first of the disinherited and suffering crowds: to comfort them, give them air, enlighten them, love them, and widen their horizon magnificently; to pour out education to them in every form; to offer them the example of work, never the example of idleness; to lighten each person’s burden by enlarging the idea of a common purpose; to set limits on poverty without setting limits on wealth; to create vast fields of public and popular activity; to have, like Briareus, a hundred hands reaching in every direction toward the oppressed and the weak; to use collective power for the great duty of opening workshops for every pair of hands, schools for every aptitude, and laboratories for every degree of intelligence; to raise wages, lessen hardship, and bring what is into balance with what ought to

be—that is, to make enjoyment proportionate to effort and abundance proportionate to need. In a word, it is to draw from the social order more light and more comfort for the benefit of those who suffer and those who do not know.

And let us say it plainly: all this is only the beginning. The real question is this: labor cannot be a law unless it is also a right.

We will not press this point further; this is not the place for it.

If nature calls itself Providence, society should call itself foresight.

Intellectual and moral growth is just as necessary as material progress. To know is sacred; to think is the first necessity; truth nourishes us no less than grain. A mind starved of science and wisdom grows thin. We should protest equally against empty stomachs and empty minds. If anything is more heartbreaking than a body dying for lack of bread, it is a soul dying of hunger for the light.

All progress moves toward resolution. One day, we will be astonished. As humanity rises, those trapped in the deepest layers of suffering naturally emerge from that misery. Poverty will disappear simply because the whole level of life will be raised.

We would be wrong to doubt that blessed outcome.

It is true that the past is very powerful at the moment. It rebukes us. This revival of a corpse is astonishing. Look at it: it walks, it advances. It seems victorious; this dead body appears to conquer. It comes with its legions, its superstitions, its sword, its

despotism, its banner, its ignorance. A little while ago, it won ten battles. It advances, it threatens, it laughs, it stands at our door. But we must not despair. Let us sell the field on which Hannibal is encamped.

What do we have to fear, if we believe?

There is no such thing as ideas flowing backward, any more than a river can reverse its course.

But those who do not want a future should think carefully about this. When they say no to progress, they are not condemning the future; they are condemning themselves. They are giving themselves a miserable disease. They are infecting themselves with the past. There is only one way to reject tomorrow, and that is to die.

What we want is this: death of the body as late as possible, and death of the soul never.

Yes, the enigma will finally speak, the sphinx will give its answer, the problem will be solved.

Yes, the people outlined by the eighteenth century will be completed by the nineteenth. Anyone who doubts this is a fool! The coming flowering, the near arrival of universal well-being, is an inevitable and divine event.

Vast, combined forces shape human affairs and, over time, lead them toward a logical condition—that is, a state of balance, a state of fairness. A power made of earth and heaven arises from humanity and rules it. This power works miracles. Remarkable outcomes are no harder for it to produce than sudden,

extraordinary upheavals. With the help of science, which comes from one person, and of events, which come from another, it is not much troubled by the contradictions in the way problems present themselves—contradictions that seem impossible to the common crowd. It is just as capable of bringing a solution out of the reconciliation of ideas as it is of drawing a lesson from the reconciliation of facts. And we may expect anything from that mysterious power of progress which, one day, brought the East and the West face to face in the depths of a tomb, and made the imaums speak with Bonaparte inside the Great Pyramid.

Meanwhile, there must be no stopping, no hesitation, no pause in the great forward movement of human thought. Social philosophy is, at its core, a matter of science and peace. Its purpose is, and must remain, to dissolve anger through the study of conflicts. It examines, investigates, and analyzes; then it puts things back together. It moves by reducing and clarifying, casting aside all hatred.

More than once, societies have collapsed under forces unleashed on humanity. History is full of the wreckage of nations and empires. Manners, customs, laws, religions—and then one day that unknown power, the hurricane, sweeps through and carries everything away. The civilizations of India, Chaldea, Persia, Syria, and Egypt disappeared one after another. Why? We do not know. What caused these disasters? We do not know. Could these societies have been saved? Were they themselves to blame? Did they cling to the fatal vice that destroyed them? How much self-destruction was there in these terrible deaths of a nation and a people? There is no answer to

these questions. Darkness surrounds doomed civilizations. They sprang a leak, and then they sank. That is all we can say. And we look with a kind of terror into that sea called the past, beyond those enormous waves, at the wrecks of those vast vessels—Babylon, Nineveh, Tarsus, Thebes, Rome—beneath the dreadful gusts rising from every mouth of shadow. But the shadows are there, and the light is here. We do not know the diseases of those ancient civilizations, but we can know the weaknesses of our own. We have the right to shine light on every part of it. We can admire its beauty and expose its flaws. Where it is sick, we can examine it; and once the illness is diagnosed, studying its cause leads us to the remedy. Our civilization, the work and wonder of twenty centuries, is worth saving. It will be saved. It is already something to have brought it comfort; to enlighten it is another step further. All the work of modern social philosophy must come together at this point. The thinker of today has a great duty: to listen to the heartbeat of civilization.

We repeat: this examination gives reason for hope. It is with that steady insistence on hope that we want to end these pages, a severe pause in a sorrowful drama. Beneath society's mortality, we feel the imperishable nature of humanity. The globe does not die because it has wounds here and there—craters, eruptions, sulphur pits—or because a volcano throws out its pus. The illnesses of the people do not kill mankind.

And yet anyone who follows the course of society's ailments will sometimes shake his head. Even the strongest, the gentlest, and the most rational have their moments of weakness.

Will the future ever come? Looking at so much terrible darkness, we might almost ask that question. It is a bleak face-to-face meeting between the selfish and the miserable. On the side of the selfish, there are prejudices—the shadows cast by an expensive education—desires inflamed by indulgence, the dizzying effect of prosperity that numbs the mind, fear of suffering that in some people becomes a dislike of those who suffer, a merciless self-satisfaction, and an ego so swollen that it shuts out the soul. On the side of the miserable, there is greed, envy, resentment at seeing others enjoy what they lack, the deep animal urge to satisfy desire, hearts full of confusion, sorrow, need, fate, and a crude, unclouded ignorance.

Should we still lift our eyes to heaven? Is that bright point we can make out there one of those that disappears? The ideal is terrible to look at when it seems so lost in the depths—small, solitary, barely visible, shining, yet surrounded by vast black threats piled monstrously around it. And yet it is no more in danger than a star in the jaws of the clouds.

CHAPTER I—FULL LIGHT

The reader has probably understood that Éponine, after recognizing through the gate the person living in that house in the Rue Plumet—the one Magnon had sent her to—first kept the ruffians away from the Rue Plumet, and then led Marius there. After many days spent in rapture before that gate, Marius, pulled onward by the force that draws iron to a magnet and a lover to the very stones of the house where the woman he loves lives, finally entered Cosette's garden, just as Romeo entered Juliet's. In fact, it was easier for him than for Romeo. Romeo had to climb a wall; Marius only had to push a little on one of the bars of the broken-down gate, which wobbled in its rusty socket like an old person's tooth. Marius was slender and slipped through easily.

Since no one was ever in the street, and Marius entered the garden only at night, he ran no risk of being seen.

From that blessed, sacred moment when a kiss pledged these two souls to each other, Marius was there every evening. At that point in her life, if Cosette had fallen in love with a man who was even slightly unscrupulous or corrupt, she would have been lost. Some generous natures give themselves completely, and Cosette was one of them. One of woman's great acts of generosity is surrender. When love reaches the point where it is absolute, it is joined to a kind of heavenly, indescribable blindness in modesty. But what dangers noble souls face! So often you give your heart, and we take your body. Your heart remains with you, and you look at it in the darkness with a

shudder. Love has no middle ground: it either destroys or saves. All human destiny lies in that choice. No fate sets this dilemma before us more relentlessly than love does. If it is not death, love is life. A cradle, and also a coffin. The same feeling says both yes and no in the human heart. Of all the things God has made, the human heart is the one that gives off the most light—alas, and the most darkness.

God willed that Cosette's love should meet one of the loves that save.

Throughout May of 1832, every night, in that poor neglected garden, under the thicket that grew thicker and more fragrant with each passing day, two beings met there in perfect chastity and innocence, overflowing with heavenly happiness. They seemed closer to archangels than to ordinary human beings—pure, sincere, enraptured, radiant—and they shone for one another in the darkness. To Cosette, Marius seemed to wear a crown; to Marius, Cosette seemed haloed with light. They touched, looked at one another, held hands, and drew close; yet there was a boundary they never crossed. It was not that they consciously respected it; they did not even know it was there. Marius felt a barrier in Cosette's innocence, and Cosette felt a safeguard in Marius's honor. Their first kiss was also their last. After that, Marius never went further than pressing his lips to Cosette's hand, her handkerchief, or a lock of her hair. To him, Cosette was a fragrance, not a woman. He breathed her in. She refused him nothing, and he asked for nothing. Cosette was happy, and Marius was content. They lived in that ecstatic state that can only be described as one

soul dazzled by another. It was the inexpressible first embrace of two virginal souls in the realm of the ideal. Two swans meeting on the Jungfrau.

In that hour of love—an hour when sensual desire was completely silent under the overwhelming power of ecstasy—Marius, pure and angelic Marius, would sooner have gone to a prostitute than lifted Cosette's dress as high as her ankle. Once, in the moonlight, Cosette bent down to pick something up from the ground. Her bodice loosened and revealed the beginning of her throat. Marius turned his eyes away.

What happened between these two beings? Nothing. They adored each other.

At night, when they were there, the garden seemed alive and sacred. Every flower opened around them and offered them its incense, while they opened their souls and poured them out among the flowers. The lush, untamed vegetation trembled around these two innocents, full of vigor and intoxication, and the words of love they spoke made the trees shiver.

What were these words? Breaths, nothing more. And yet those breaths were enough to stir and move everything around them. They held a magical power that would be hard to understand if we only read them in a book—these conversations meant to drift away and scatter like wisps of smoke in the breeze under the leaves. Take away from the murmurs of two lovers that music which rises from the soul and follows them like a lyre, and what is left is only a shadow. You say, "What! Is that all?"

Yes—childish chatter, repeated phrases, laughter over nothing, nonsense, and yet also everything deepest and most sublime in the world. The only things truly worth saying and hearing.

The man who has never heard, and never spoken, these absurdities, these trivial remarks, is a fool and a cold-hearted one. Cosette said to Marius:

“Do you know—”

[In the midst of all this heavenly innocence, and without either of them being able to say how it had happened, they had begun to call each other thou.]

“Do you know? My name is Euphrasie.”

“Euphrasie? Why, no, your name is Cosette.”

“Oh! Cosette is a very ugly name that was given to me when I was very little. But my real name is Euphrasie. Do you 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 she added turned this exchange into an idyll worthy of a grove in heaven. On another occasion, she looked at him intently and exclaimed:

“Monsieur, you are handsome, you are good-looking, you are clever, you are not at all stupid, you know much more than I do—but I defy you to match me with this word: I love you!”

And Marius, there in the very heavens, thought he heard a melody sung by a star.

Or she would give him a gentle tap because he coughed, and say to him:

“Don’t cough, sir. I won’t allow people to cough in my domain without my permission. It’s very naughty to cough and disturb me. I want you to stay well, because first of all, if you were not well, I would be very unhappy. What would I do then?”

And this was simply heavenly.

Once, Marius said to Cosette:

“Just imagine—I once thought your name was Ursule.”

That made them both laugh all evening.

In the middle of another conversation, he happened to exclaim:

“Oh! One day at the Luxembourg, I was very close to finishing off a veteran!” But he broke off at once and said no more. To continue, he would have had to mention Cosette’s garter, and that was impossible. It touched on a strange subject—the body—before which their vast and innocent love drew back with a kind of sacred fear.

This was how Marius imagined life with Cosette, and nothing beyond it: to come every evening to the Rue Plumet; to move aside the old, obliging bar on the chief justice’s gate; to sit

beside her on that bench, shoulder to shoulder; to watch the first glimmering of night through the trees; to tuck a fold of his trouser knee into the wide fall of Cosette's dress; to stroke her thumbnail; to call her thou; to breathe in the scent of the same flower, one after the other, forever, without end. Meanwhile, clouds drifted above their heads. Whenever the wind blows, it carries away more of men's dreams than of the clouds in heaven."

This pure, almost shy love was not without gallantry at all. Paying compliments to the woman a man loves is the first way of giving caresses, and anyone who dares to do it is already halfway bold. A compliment is like a kiss through a veil. Desire is there, with its sweet little sting, even as it hides itself. The heart retreats from desire only so it can love more deeply. Marius's endearments, all filled with imagination, seemed, so to speak, sky-blue in color. The birds flying high above, toward the angels, must hear words like these. And yet they still contained life, humanity, and all the solid reality Marius was capable of. It was the kind of thing said in a bower, a prelude to what will be said in the chamber: a lyrical outpouring, strophe and sonnet mixed together, charming cooing exaggerations, every refinement of adoration gathered into a bouquet and breathing out a heavenly perfume, an inexpressible twittering from one heart to another.

"Oh!" murmured Marius, "how beautiful you are! I hardly dare look at you. I am lost whenever I gaze at you. You are pure grace. I do not know what is happening to me. The hem of your dress, when the tip of your shoe shows beneath it, overwhelms

me. And then, what a magical light appears when you open your mind even a little! You speak with astonishing good sense. At times you seem to me like a dream. Speak—I listen, I admire. Oh, Cosette, how strange and how lovely this is! I am truly beside myself. You are adorable, Mademoiselle. I study your feet with a microscope and your soul with a telescope."

And Cosette answered:

"I have loved you a little more with every moment that has passed since this morning."

In this conversation, questions and answers came naturally, and by unspoken agreement it always turned back to love, just as those little pith figures always turn on their peg.

Cosette's whole being was innocence, cleverness, transparency, purity, candor, and radiance. You might have said that Cosette was clear. She gave everyone who saw her the feeling of April and daybreak. There was dew in her eyes. Cosette was the light of dawn gathered and condensed into the form of a woman.

It was only natural that Marius should admire her, since he adored her. But the truth is that this little schoolgirl, fresh from the convent, spoke with remarkable insight and sometimes said things that were both true and delicate. Her chatter was real conversation. She was never wrong about anything, and she saw things clearly. A woman feels and speaks with the tender instinct of the heart, and that instinct does not fail.

No one understands better than a woman how to say things that are both sweet and profound at once. Sweetness and depth make up the whole of woman; in them lies the whole of heaven.

In the midst of this complete happiness, tears rose to their eyes at every moment. A crushed ladybug, a feather fallen from a nest, a broken hawthorn branch stirred their pity, and their joy, gently mixed with sadness, seemed to want nothing more than to weep. The highest sign of love is a tenderness that can sometimes feel almost unbearable.

And along with this—for all these contradictions are the quick flashes of love—they loved to laugh. They laughed easily, with a delightful freedom, and so familiarly that they sometimes seemed like two boys.

Still, though hearts intoxicated with purity do not know it, nature is always there and cannot be forgotten. She remains present with her brutal and sublime purpose; and however innocent two souls may be, in the most modest private meeting one can still feel the adorable and mysterious shadow that separates two lovers from two friends.

They worshipped each other.

What is lasting and unchanging endures. People live, smile, laugh, make little movements with the corners of their mouths, lace their fingers together, call each other thou, and none of that stops eternity.

Two lovers hide themselves away in the evening, in the twilight, in the unseen world, among the birds and the roses. In the

darkness they enchant each other with the hearts shining through their eyes; they murmur and whisper, while meanwhile the vast motions of the planets fill the infinite universe.

CHAPTER II—THE DAZE OF PERFECT HAPPINESS

They moved through life in a kind of haze, almost afraid of how happy they were. They did not even notice the cholera that was devastating Paris during that very month. They had told each other as much as they could, though that had not gone much beyond their names. Marius had told Cosette that he was an orphan, that his name was Marius Pontmercy, that he was a lawyer, and that he earned his living by writing for publishers. He told her that his father had been a colonel and a hero, and that he, Marius, was on bad terms with his wealthy grandfather. He had also mentioned that he was a baron, but that meant nothing to Cosette. She did not know what the word meant. Marius was simply Marius. For her part, she had told him that she had been raised at the Petit-Picpus convent, that her mother, like his, was dead, that her father's name was M. Fauchelevent, and that he was very kind. He gave a great deal to the poor, though he was poor himself, and he denied himself everything while denying her nothing.

Strangely enough, in the kind of music Marius had been living in ever since he began seeing Cosette, the past, even the very recent past, had grown so blurred and distant that what Cosette told him satisfied him completely. It never even crossed his mind to tell her about the nighttime adventure in the hovel, about Thénardier, about the burn, or about her father's strange behavior and sudden flight. For the moment, Marius had forgotten all of it. By evening, he hardly knew there had been a

morning. He did not know what he had done, where he had eaten breakfast, or who had spoken to him. Songs filled his ears and drowned out every other thought. He existed only during the hours when he saw Cosette. And since he was in heaven, it was only natural that he should forget the earth. Both of them languidly carried the vague burden of pleasures too delicate to name. So lived these sleepwalkers we call lovers.

Alas! Who has not felt all this? Why does there come a moment when one rises out of this blue heaven, and why must life go on afterward?

Love almost takes the place of thought. To love is to forget everything else with fierce intensity. So ask passion to be logical, if you like. The human heart follows no more perfect a logic than the heavens form a perfect geometric pattern. For Cosette and Marius, nothing existed but Marius and Cosette. The world around them had dropped away into emptiness. They lived inside a golden moment. There was nothing ahead of them and nothing behind. Marius barely even remembered that Cosette had a father. His mind was dazzled, wiped blank. What did these lovers talk about? We have seen: flowers, swallows, the setting sun, the rising moon, and all sorts of very important things. They had told each other everything except the one thing that was truly everything. For lovers, that everything is nothing. But the father, the hard facts, that den, the ruffians, that whole adventure—what was the point of thinking about any of it? And was he even sure that nightmare had really happened? There were two of them, and they adored each other, and beyond that there was nothing. Nothing else existed.

It is likely that this fading of hell behind us comes naturally with the arrival of paradise. Did we really see demons? Are there even any? Did we tremble? Did we suffer? We no longer know. A rosy cloud covers it all.

So these two lived like this, lifted high above ordinary life, with all the impossibility that nature itself contains: neither at the lowest point nor the highest, somewhere between human beings and angels; above the mud, below the pure sky, in the clouds; scarcely flesh and blood anymore, but soul and ecstasy through and through; already too exalted to walk the earth, yet still too burdened with humanity to vanish into the blue; hanging there like particles waiting to fall. They seemed beyond the reach of fate, unaware of the worn track of yesterday, today, and tomorrow; astonished, enraptured, drifting, soaring; at times so light they seemed ready to fly into the infinite, almost ready to rise away forever. They slept while awake, gently rocked in that sweetness. Oh, the splendid trance in which the ideal overwhelms the real.

Sometimes, beautiful as Cosette was, Marius closed his eyes when she was near. The best way to see a soul is with your eyes shut.

Marius and Cosette never asked themselves where all this would lead. They felt they had already arrived. It is a strange demand people make of love, to expect it to lead somewhere.

CHAPTER III—THE BEGINNING OF SHADOW

Jean Valjean suspected nothing.

Cosette, who was less dreamy than Marius, was cheerful, and that was enough to make Jean Valjean happy. The thoughts she kept to herself, her tender distractions, the image of Marius filling her heart—none of it took anything away from the perfect purity of her beautiful, innocent, smiling face. She was at that age when a maiden carries her love the way an angel carries a lily. So Jean Valjean felt completely at ease. Besides, once two lovers understand each other, things usually run smoothly. The third person who might interfere is kept perfectly blind by a small set of precautions, and lovers are always much the same in this. So Cosette never objected to anything Jean Valjean suggested. Did he want to go for a walk? "Yes, dear little father." Did he want to stay home? Very well. Did he want to spend the evening with Cosette? She was delighted. Since he always went to bed at ten o'clock, Marius did not come into the garden on those evenings until after that hour, when he heard from the street Cosette opening the long glass door onto the veranda. Of course, no one ever saw Marius there during the day. Jean Valjean no longer even imagined that Marius existed. Only once, one morning, he happened to say to Cosette, "Why, you have whitewash on your back!" The evening before, in a rush of feeling, Marius had pressed Cosette against the wall.

Old Toussaint, who went to bed early, thought of nothing but sleep and knew no more about the whole affair than Jean Valjean did.

Marius never entered the house. When he was with Cosette, they hid in a nook near the steps so they could neither be seen nor heard from the street. There they sat, often satisfied, instead of talking, to press each other's hands twenty times a minute while they looked up at the tree branches. At such moments, a thunderbolt could have struck thirty paces away and they would not have noticed, so completely was each one's dream absorbed in the other's.

Clear, radiant purity. Hours of perfect whiteness, almost all the same. This kind of love leaves behind memories of lily petals and dove feathers.

The whole garden stretched between them and the street. Every time Marius came in or went out, he carefully set the gate's bar back in place so that nothing looked disturbed.

He usually left around midnight and went back to Courfeyrac's rooms. Courfeyrac said to Bahorel:

"Would you believe it? These days Marius doesn't get home until one in the morning."

Bahorel replied:

"What do you expect? There's always some explosive charge hidden in a seminary type."

Sometimes Courfeyrac would fold his arms, put on a grave expression, and say to Marius:

“Young man, your habits are becoming irregular.”

Courfeyrac was a practical man, and he did not much enjoy seeing this reflection of some invisible paradise shining over Marius. He was not used to hidden passions. It irritated him, and from time to time he urged Marius to come back to reality.

One morning he tossed out this warning:

“My dear fellow, you give me the impression that you’re living on the moon—in the kingdom of dreams, the province of illusions, capital city: soap bubble. Come now, be a good boy. What’s her name?”

But nothing could make Marius talk. They could have torn out his nails before they got from him either of the two sacred syllables that made up that ineffable name, Cosette. True love is as radiant as dawn and as silent as the grave. Still, Courfeyrac did notice one change in Marius: his silence had become bright with happiness.

During that sweet month of May, Marius and Cosette came to know those immense delights: arguing and using “you” instead of “thou,” only so they could say “thou” all the more sweetly afterward; talking at great length, and in the tiniest detail, about people they did not care about in the least—a further proof that in that enchanting opera called love, the libretto matters almost not at all;

For Marius, listening to Cosette talk about clothes;

For Cosette, listening to Marius talk about politics;

Listening, knee against knee, to the carriages rumbling along the Rue de Babylone;

Looking at the same planet in the sky, or the same glowworm shining in the grass;

Sitting in silence together—a greater delight still than conversation;

And so on, and so on.

Meanwhile, various complications were drawing near.

One evening, Marius was on his way to the meeting place by way of the Boulevard des Invalides. He usually walked with his head bowed. Just as he was about to turn the corner into the Rue Plumet, he heard someone very close to him say:

“Good evening, Monsieur Marius.”

He looked up and recognized Éponine.

The effect on him was strange. He had not thought of that girl once since the day she had led him to the Rue Plumet. He had not seen her again, and she had completely passed out of his mind. He had every reason to feel grateful to her. He owed his happiness to her. And yet meeting her embarrassed him.

It is a mistake to think that passion, when it is pure and happy, brings a man to a state of perfection. It simply brings him, as we have already noted, to a state of forgetfulness. In such a condition, a man forgets how to be bad, but he also forgets how to be good. Gratitude, duty, and the essential, important things

one ought to remember all disappear. At any other time, Marius would have behaved very differently toward Éponine. Lost in Cosette, he had not even clearly realized that this Éponine was Éponine Thénardier, and that she bore the name written in his father's will—that name for which, only a few months earlier, he would have eagerly sacrificed himself. We present Marius as he was. Even his father was beginning to fade somewhat from his soul beneath the radiance of his love.

He answered awkwardly:

"Ah! So it's you, Éponine?"

"Why are you calling me 'you'? Have I done something to you?"

"No," he answered.

He certainly had nothing against her. Quite the opposite. But now that he used the familiar 'thou' with Cosette, he felt he could do nothing but address Éponine with the formal 'you.'

When he said nothing, she cried out:

"Say—"

Then she stopped. It seemed as though words failed this creature who had once been so careless and so bold. She tried to smile and could not. Then she went on:

"Well?"

Then she paused again and stood there with her eyes lowered.

"Good evening, Mr. Marius," she said suddenly and sharply; and she went away.

CHAPTER IV—A CAB GOES BY IN ENGLISH AND BARKS IN SLANG

The next day was June 3, 1832, a date that must be noted because grave events were then gathering over Paris like storm clouds heavy with lightning. At nightfall, Marius was taking the same route as the evening before, with the same joyful thoughts in his heart, when he caught sight of Éponine coming toward him through the boulevard trees. Two days in a row—this was too much. He quickly turned away, left the boulevard, changed direction, and went to Rue Plumet by way of Rue Monsieur.

This led Éponine to follow him to Rue Plumet, something she had not done before. Until then, she had been content to watch him as he passed along the boulevard, without ever trying to meet him. It was only the evening before that she had tried to speak to him.

So Éponine followed him without his suspecting it. She saw him move the bar and slip into the garden.

She went up to the railing, felt the bars one by one, and easily recognized the one Marius had moved.

She murmured in a low, gloomy voice:

“None of that, Lisette!”

She sat down on the base of the railing, right beside the bar, as if she were guarding it. It was exactly where the railing met the

neighboring wall. There was a dark corner there, and Éponine was completely hidden in it.

She stayed there for more than an hour, without moving, almost without breathing, lost in her thoughts.

Toward ten o'clock that evening, one of the two or three people who passed through Rue Plumet—an old, belated bourgeois hurrying to get away from this deserted place with its bad reputation—was walking along the garden railings and reached the corner where they met the wall when he heard a low, threatening voice say:

"I'm not surprised anymore that he comes here every evening."

The passerby glanced around, saw no one, did not dare look into the black recess, and was badly frightened. He quickened his pace.

The passerby had good reason to hurry, because only a few moments later six men entered the Rue Plumet. They had been walking separately, some distance apart, along the wall, and might have been mistaken for a gray patrol.

The first man to reach the garden railing stopped and waited for the others; a second later, all six were together again.

The men began speaking in low voices.

"This is the place," said one of them.

"Is there a $_{\text{cab}}$– [dog] in the garden?" asked another.

“I don’t know. But in any case, I brought a ball to make him swallow.”

“Do you have some putty to break the pane?”

“Yes.”

“The railing is old,” put in a fifth man, whose voice sounded like a ventriloquist’s.

“So much the better,” said the second speaker. “It won’t squeal under the saw, and it won’t be hard to cut.”

The sixth man, who had not spoken yet, now began examining the gate, just as Éponine had done an hour earlier. He took hold of each bar in turn and shook it carefully.

In this way he came to the bar Marius had loosened. Just as he was about to grab it, a hand suddenly came out of the darkness and seized his arm. He felt himself shoved sharply aside by a push in the middle of his chest, and a hoarse voice said to him, though not loudly:

“There’s a dog.”

At the same moment, he saw a pale girl standing in front of him.

The man felt the jolt that always comes with the unexpected. He drew back in a hideous start; nothing is more frightening to see than savage beasts when they are uneasy. Their terror inspires terror in others.

He recoiled and stammered:

“What hussy is this?”

“Your daughter.”

It was indeed Éponine speaking to Thénardier.

At the sight of Éponine, the other five—Claquesous, Guelemer, Babet, Brujon, and Montparnasse—had silently come closer, without hurrying and without saying a word, with the sinister slowness peculiar to these men of the night.

They had some horrible tools in their hands, impossible to describe. Guelemer was holding one of those curved pincers that prowlers call _fanchons_.

“Hey, look here, what are you doing? What do you want with us? Are you crazy?” Thénardier exclaimed, as loudly as he could while still keeping his voice low. “Why have you come here to get in our way?”

Éponine burst out laughing and threw her arms around his neck.

“I’m here, little father, because I’m here. Isn’t a person allowed to sit on the stones these days? You’re the one who shouldn’t be here. What did you come for, if it’s a dead loss? I told Magnon that. There’s nothing to do here. But give me a hug, my dear little father! It’s been such a long time since I saw you! So you’re out?”

Thénardier tried to pull free from Éponine’s arms and grumbled:

“Fine. You’ve hugged me. Yes, I’m out. I’m not in. Now go away.”

But Éponine did not let go, and only became more affectionate.

“But how did you do it, little pa? You must have been very clever to get out of that. Tell me all about it! And my mother? Where is mother? Tell me about mamma.”

Thénardier replied:

“She’s well. I don’t know. Leave me alone, and go away, I tell you.”

“I won’t go, and that’s that,” Éponine said with the sulky air of a spoiled child. “You’re sending me away, and it’s been four months since I saw you, and I’ve barely had time to kiss you.”

And she wrapped her arms around her father’s neck again.

“Come on now, this is ridiculous!” said Babet.

“Hurry up,” said Guelemer. “The cops might come by.”

The ventriloquist’s voice repeated his couplet:

“Nous n’ sommes pas le jour de l’an, A bécoter papa, maman.”

“This isn’t New Year’s Day for kissing pa and ma.”

Éponine turned toward the five ruffians.

“Why, it’s Monsieur Brujon. Good day, Monsieur Babet. Good day, Monsieur Claquesous. Don’t you recognize me, Monsieur Guelemer? How are things, Montparnasse?”

“Yes, they recognize you!” Thénardier burst out. “But good day, good evening—now clear off! Leave us alone!”

“This is the hour for foxes, not chickens,” said Montparnasse.

“You can see the business we have here,” Babet added.

Éponine seized Montparnasse's hand.

"Careful," he said. "You'll cut yourself. I've got an open knife."

"My dear little Montparnasse," Éponine replied very gently, "you must trust people. I am my father's daughter, perhaps. Monsieur Babet, Monsieur Gueulemer, I'm the one who was sent to look into this matter."

It is striking that Éponine did not speak in slang. Ever since she had known Marius, that dreadful language had become impossible for her.

She clasped Gueulemer's huge, rough fingers in her own small, bony, fragile hand, thin as a skeleton's, and went on:

"You know perfectly well I'm no fool. People usually believe me. I've helped you more than once. Well, I've made inquiries, and you'd be risking yourselves for nothing, you see. I swear to you, there is nothing in this house."

"There are women living alone there," said Gueulemer.

"No, they've moved away."

"The candles haven't, at any rate!" Babet burst out.

And across the tops of the trees, he pointed out to Éponine a light moving about in the pavilion's attic room. It was Toussaint, who had stayed up to spread some linen out to dry.

Éponine made one last effort.

"Well," she said, "they're very poor people, and it's a shack with not a sou in it."

“Go to the devil!” Thénardier cried. “When we’ve turned the house upside down and put the cellar on top and the attic below, then we’ll tell you what’s inside, and whether it’s francs or sous or half-farthings.”

And he shoved her aside, meaning to go in.

“My good friend, Monsieur Montparnasse,” said Éponine, “I beg you, you’re a good fellow, don’t go in.”

“Careful, you’ll cut yourself,” Montparnasse replied.

Thénardier went on in a firm tone:

“Be off, girl, and leave men to their own business!”

Éponine let go of Montparnasse’s hand, which she had seized again, and said:

“So you’re planning to go into this house?”

“Absolutely!” the ventriloquist said with a grin.

Then she planted her back against the gate, faced the six armed ruffians—who looked like demons in the night—and said in a firm, low voice:

“Well, I have no intention of letting you.”

They stopped short in astonishment. The ventriloquist, however, kept grinning. She went on:

“Listen, all of you. This is not what you want. I’m the one speaking now. First of all, if you come into this garden, if you touch this gate, I’ll scream, I’ll pound on the door, I’ll wake everyone up, I’ll have all six of you arrested, I’ll call the police.”

“She would, too,” Thénardier muttered to Brujon and the ventriloquist.

She shook her head and added:

“Starting with my father!”

Thénardier stepped closer.

“Not so close, my good man!” she said.

He backed away, growling through his teeth:

“What’s got into her?”

Then he added:

“Bitch!”

She began to laugh in a terrible way:

“Call me what you like, but you’re not coming in here. I’m no daughter of a dog, since I’m the daughter of a wolf. There are six of you—what do I care? You’re men. Well, I’m a woman. You don’t frighten me. I’m telling you, you will not enter this house, because I won’t allow it. If you come any closer, I’ll bark. I told you, I’m the dog, and I don’t care a straw for any of you. Be on your way—you bore me! Go wherever you like, but don’t come here. I forbid it! You can use your knives. I’ll use my kicks. It’s all the same to me. Come on!”

She took a step toward the ruffians. She was terrifying. Then she burst out laughing:

“Pardine! I’m not afraid. I’ll be hungry this summer, and I’ll be cold this winter. Aren’t they absurd, these foolish men, thinking

they can frighten a girl! What—frighten me? Oh yes, very much indeed! Because you have dainty little mistresses who hide under the bed when you raise your voice, do you? I'm not afraid of anything, not a bit!"

She fixed her intense gaze on Thénardier and said:

"Not even you, father!"

Then she went on, sweeping her bloodshot, ghostlike eyes over the ruffians one by one:

"What do I care if they pick me up tomorrow morning on the pavement of the Rue Plumet, beaten to death by my father's club, or if they find me a year from now in the nets at Saint-Cloud or the Isle of Swans among rotten old corks and drowned dogs?"

She had to stop. A dry cough seized her, and her breath rattled out of her weak, narrow chest like the sound of death.

She began again:

"All I have to do is scream, and people will come. Then smack, bang! There are six of you; I stand for the whole world."

Thénardier moved toward her.

"Don't come any closer!" she cried.

He stopped and said gently:

"All right, no, I won't come closer. But don't talk so loud. So you mean to get in our way, my daughter? Still, we have to earn our living. Have you no feeling left for your father?"

“You’re annoying me,” said Éponine.

“But we have to live, we have to eat—”

“Drop dead!”

With that, she sat down on the base 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 rested her elbow on her knee and her chin in her hand, swinging her foot with an air of indifference. Her ragged dress left her thin shoulder blades exposed. The nearby streetlamp lit up her profile and the way she sat. Nothing could have looked more determined or more startling.

The six scoundrels, silent and sullen at being held off by a girl, backed into the shadow cast by the lamp and conferred with furious, humiliated shrugs.

Meanwhile, she kept her eyes on them with a stern yet calm expression.

“There’s something wrong with her,” said Babet. “Some reason for it. Is she in love with the dog? It’s a pity to pass this up, anyway. Two women, an old man lodging out in the back yard, and decent enough curtains in the windows. The old fellow must be a Jew. I think it’s a good job.”

“Well then, the rest of you go in,” cried Montparnasse. “Do the job. I’ll stay here with the girl, and if she lets us down—”

He flicked open the knife in his hand and held it up in the lantern light.

Thénardier said nothing and seemed ready to go along with whatever the others wanted.

Brujon, who was something of an oracle and who had, as the reader knows, set up the job, still had not spoken. He seemed deep in thought. He had a reputation for stopping at nothing, and people knew that he had robbed a police post simply for the bravado of it. On top of that, he wrote verses and songs, which gave him great authority.

Babet questioned him:

“You’re not saying anything, Brujon?”

Brujon stayed silent a moment longer. Then he shook his head in several different ways and finally decided to speak:

“Look here. This morning I ran into two sparrows fighting, and this evening I bumped into a woman who was quarreling. That’s all bad luck. Let’s leave.”

They went away.

As they left, Montparnasse muttered:

“Never mind. If they’d wanted to, I’d have cut her throat.”

Babet answered,

“I wouldn’t. I don’t strike a lady.”

At the street corner they stopped and exchanged the following cryptic conversation in low voices:

“Where are we going to sleep tonight?”

“Under Pantin [Paris].”

“Do you have the key to the gate, Thénardier?”

“Of course.”

Éponine, who had never taken her eyes off them, watched them withdraw along the road they had come by. She got up and began creeping after them along the walls and houses. She followed them like that as far as the boulevard.

There they split up, and she saw the six men disappear into the darkness, where they seemed to melt away.

CHAPTER V—THINGS OF THE NIGHT

After the ruffians left, Rue Plumet settled back into its quiet nighttime stillness. What had just happened in that street would not have surprised a forest. Tall trees, thickets, heath, tangled branches, and high grass all have a dark life of their own. The wild creatures that move there catch sudden glimpses of invisible things. What lies below man senses, through the mist, what lies beyond man. And in the night, things we living beings know nothing about seem to meet face to face. Nature, rough and untamed, grows uneasy at certain presences when she thinks she feels the supernatural nearby. The powers of darkness recognize one another, and hold each other in a strange balance. Teeth and claws fear what they cannot seize. Bloodthirsty savagery, ravenous hunger, the instinct to hunt, the armed impulses of fang and claw, all driven by the belly, stare and sniff in unease at the calm spectral shapes wandering under a shroud, upright in their vague, trembling robes, seeming to live with a dead and terrible life. These brutal forces, which are nothing but matter, dimly fear that they may be confronting the vast obscurity gathered into some unknown being. A black figure blocking the path can stop a wild beast cold. What comes out of the cemetery frightens and unsettles what comes out of the cave; the ferocious fear the sinister; wolves draw back when they meet a ghoul.

CHAPTER VI—MARIUS BECOMES PRACTICAL AGAIN, AT LEAST ENOUGH TO GIVE COSETTE HIS ADDRESS

While this dog-like creature with a human face stood guard at the gate, and while the six ruffians were giving way before a girl, Marius was at Cosette's side.

Never had the sky been more thickly strewn with stars or more beautiful. Never had the trees trembled more softly, or the scent of the grass been more intense. Never had the birds fallen asleep among the leaves with sweeter sounds. Never had all the harmonies of universal peace answered so completely to the inner music of love. Never had Marius been more enchanted, more happy, more carried away with joy.

But he found Cosette sad. She had been crying. Her eyes were red.

It was the first shadow to fall across that wonderful dream.

Marius's first words were: "What is the matter?"

And she replied: "This."

Then she sat down on the bench near the steps, and as he nervously took his place beside her, she went on:

"My father told me this morning to be ready, because he has business to attend to, and we may have to leave this place."

Marius trembled from head to foot.

When you are at the end of life, dying means going away; when you are at the beginning of it, going away means dying.

Over the past six weeks, Marius had gradually, day by day, made Cosette his own. As we have already said, in first love the soul is won long before the body. Later, the body is often taken long before the soul; sometimes the soul is never won at all. Faublas and the Prudhommes add, “Because there is no soul”; but that sarcasm is, fortunately, a kind of blasphemy. So Marius possessed Cosette in the way spirits possess: he wrapped her in his whole soul and held her with jealous, astonishing certainty. He possessed her smile, her breath, her fragrance, the deep light of her blue eyes, the softness of her skin when he touched her hand, the lovely little mark on her neck, all her thoughts. And so he possessed all of Cosette’s dreams.

He kept staring at the short hairs at the nape of her neck, and sometimes he barely brushed them with his breath. He told himself that every one of those little hairs belonged to him, to Marius. He looked at and adored everything she wore—her ribbon bow, her gloves, her sleeves, her shoes, her cuffs—as if they were sacred objects over which he had rights. He imagined himself the master of the pretty shell combs in her hair, and he even told himself, in confused, silent stammerings of desire that never fully reached expression, that not a ribbon on her dress, not a stitch in her stockings, not a fold in her bodice, was anything but his. Beside Cosette, he felt that he was beside something that was his own, his own possession, something over which he was both tyrant and slave. It seemed as if their

souls had become so completely mingled that, if they had wanted to separate them again, it would have been impossible to tell which was whose.—"This is mine." "No, it is mine." "I tell you, you are mistaken. This belongs to me." "What you think is yours is myself."—Marius was part of Cosette, and Cosette was part of Marius. Marius felt Cosette within himself. To have Cosette, to possess Cosette, was for him no different from breathing. He was in the middle of that faith, that intoxication, that pure and absolute first possession, that sense of sovereignty, when the words, "We are going away," suddenly struck him, and the harsh voice of reality cried out: "Cosette is not yours!"

Marius woke up. For six weeks, as we have said, he had been living outside ordinary life; those words, going away!, dragged him back into it with brutal force.

He could not find a word to say. Cosette only noticed that his hand had turned very cold. Then she asked him, "What is the matter?"

He answered so softly that Cosette could barely hear him:

"I did not understand what you said."

She repeated herself:

"This morning my father told me to put all my little things in order and be ready. He said he would give me his linen to pack in a trunk, that he has to go on a journey, that we are going away, that we need a large trunk for me and a small one for him, and that everything must be ready a week from now, and that

we may go to England.”

“But this is outrageous!” Marius cried.

At that moment, Marius truly believed that no abuse of power, no act of violence, none of the crimes of the worst tyrants—not Busiris, not Tiberius, not Henry VIII—could be more monstrous than this: M. Fauchelevent taking his daughter to England because he had business there.

In a faint voice, he asked:

“And when are you leaving?”

“He didn’t say when.”

“And when will you come back?”

“He didn’t say when.”

Marius stood up and said coldly:

“Cosette, are you going?”

Cosette turned her beautiful, grief-filled eyes toward him and answered, almost in confusion:

“Where?”

“To England. Are you going?”

“Why are you saying _you_ to me?”

“I’m asking whether you’re going.”

“What do you expect me to do?” she said, clasping her hands.

“Then you are going?”

“If my father goes.”

“Then you are going?”

Cosette took Marius’s hand and squeezed it without answering.

“Very well,” said Marius. “Then I will go somewhere else.”

Cosette sensed the meaning of those words more than she understood it. She turned so pale that her face seemed to glow white in the darkness. She stammered:

“What do you mean?”

Marius looked at her, then lifted his eyes to heaven and answered, “Nothing.”

When he looked at her again, he saw Cosette smiling at him. The smile of the woman one loves gives off a kind of visible light, even at night.

“How foolish we are! Marius, I have an idea.”

“What is it?”

“If we leave, then you should come too! I’ll tell you where! Come join me wherever I am.”

Marius was fully awake now. He had come back to reality. He cried out to Cosette:

“Go on, be serious! Are you out of your mind? I’d need money for that, and I have none. Go to England? I’m already in debt. I owe—I don’t even know how much—more than ten louis to Courfeyrac, a friend of mine you don’t know. I have an old hat that isn’t worth three francs. My coat is missing its front buttons.

My shirt is in rags, my elbows are worn through, and my boots leak. For the past six weeks I haven't even thought about it, and I haven't told you. You only see me at night, and you give me your love; if you saw me in daylight, you'd give me a sou! Go to England? Why, I don't even have enough to pay for a passport!"

He threw himself against a nearby tree and stood upright with his forehead pressed to the bark. He felt neither the wood scraping his skin nor the fever pounding in his temples. He stayed there motionless, on the verge of collapsing, like a statue of despair.

He stayed like that for a long time. In such depths, one could remain forever. At last he turned around. Behind him he heard a faint, muffled sound, gentle and sad.

It was Cosette, sobbing.

She had been crying beside Marius for more than two hours while he sat lost in thought.

He went to her, dropped to his knees, and slowly bent all the way down. Then he took the tip of her foot, just visible beneath her dress, and kissed it.

She let him do it in silence. There are moments when a woman accepts the religion of love like a dark, resigned goddess.

"Don't cry," he said.

She murmured:

"How can I not, when I may be going away and you cannot come?"

He went on:

“Do you love me?”

Still sobbing, she answered with that word from paradise, never more beautiful than when spoken through tears:

“I adore you!”

He continued in a tone that was like an indescribable caress:

“Don’t cry. Tell me—will you do this for me and stop crying?”

“Do you love me?” she said.

He took her hand.

“Cosette, I’ve never given anyone my word of honor, because that kind of promise frightens me. I feel as though my father is standing beside me. But I give you my most sacred word of honor: if you go away, I will die.”

“Now listen,” he said. “Don’t expect me tomorrow.”

“Why?”

“Don’t expect me until the day after tomorrow.”

“Oh! Why?”

“You’ll see.”

“A whole day without seeing you! That’s impossible!”

“Let’s give up one day so that we may gain the rest of our lives, perhaps.”

And Marius added in a low voice, aside:

“He’s a man who never changes his habits, and he has never received anyone except in the evening.”

“What man are you talking about?” Cosette asked.

“Me? I said nothing.”

“What are you hoping for, then?”

“Wait until the day after tomorrow.”

“You want me to?”

“Yes, Cosette.”

She took his head in both hands, rose onto her tiptoes to bring herself level with him, and tried to read the hope in his eyes.

Marius went on:

“Now that I think of it, you should know my address. Something might happen; you never know. I’m staying with that friend of mine, Courfeyrac, at No. 16 Rue de la Verrerie.”

He searched his pocket, pulled out his penknife, and used the blade to write on the plaster wall:

“16 Rue de la Verrerie.”

Meanwhile, Cosette had begun looking into his eyes again.

“Tell me what you’re thinking, Marius; you have some plan. Tell me. Oh, tell me, so I can get through the night happily.”

“My thought is this: it cannot be God’s will to separate us. Wait for me; expect me the day after tomorrow.”

“What am I supposed to do until then?” said Cosette. “You’re outside; you can go and come back! How lucky men are! I’ll be left completely alone! Oh, I’ll be so sad! What are you going to do tomorrow evening? Tell me.”

“I’m going to try something.”

“Then I will pray to God, and I will think of you here, so that you may succeed. I will ask you no more questions, since you do not want that. You are my master. Tomorrow evening I shall spend the time singing that music from _Euryanthe_– that you love, the music you once came to hear outside my shutters. But the day after tomorrow you must come early. I shall expect you at dusk, at exactly nine o’clock, I warn you. Mon Dieu! how sad it is that the days are so long! At the stroke of nine, do you understand, I shall be in the garden.”

“And so will I.”

And though neither of them said it, the same thought moved them both. Driven by those electric currents that keep lovers in constant communication, and drunk with joy even in their sorrow, they fell into each other’s arms. Without realizing it, their lips met, while their upturned eyes, shining with rapture and full of tears, gazed at the stars.

When Marius went out, the street was deserted. At that very moment, Éponine was following the ruffians toward the boulevard.

While Marius had been dreaming with his head against the tree, an idea had come to him—an idea that, alas, he himself thought

senseless and impossible. He had made a desperate decision.

CHAPTER VII—THE OLD HEART AND THE YOUNG HEART FACE TO FACE

At that time, Father Gillenormand was well past ninety-one. He still lived with Mademoiselle Gillenormand at No. 6 Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, in the old house he owned. As the reader will remember, he was one of those very old men who wait for death standing perfectly upright, whom age weighs down without making them bend, and whom even sorrow cannot bow.

Even so, his daughter had been saying for quite a while, “My father is failing.” He no longer slapped the maids. He no longer pounded the landing with his cane when Basque was slow to open the door. The July Revolution had irritated him for only about six months. He had looked almost calmly at those words printed together in the _Moniteur_: M. Humblot-Conté, peer of France. The truth was that the old man was deeply downcast. He did not bend or give in; that was no more part of his moral nature than his physical one. But inwardly, he felt himself weakening. For four years he had been waiting for Marius, standing firm—that is exactly the right phrase—in the certainty that the good-for-nothing young rascal would one day ring his bell. Now he had reached the point where, in certain dark hours, he said to himself that if Marius kept him waiting much longer— It was not death he found unbearable. It was the thought that he might never see Marius again. Until then, the idea of never seeing Marius again had never entered his mind. Now it began to return again and again, and it chilled him. As so often

happens with real and natural feelings, absence had only made the grandfather love the ungrateful child who had vanished so suddenly all the more. It is on December nights, when the cold drops to ten degrees, that one thinks most often of one's son.

M. Gillenormand was—or believed himself to be—incapable, above all else, of taking a single step toward his grandson, he the grandfather. "I would rather die," he said to himself. He did not think he was in the least at fault. Yet he thought of Marius only with deep tenderness, and with the silent despair of a kind old man who feels himself about to disappear into the dark.

He began to lose his teeth, which only made him sadder.

M. Gillenormand, though he would never have admitted it to himself—because it would have filled him with anger and shame—had never loved a mistress as much as he loved Marius.

He had an old portrait of his other daughter, the late Madame Pontmercy, placed in his room opposite the head of his bed, so that it would be the first thing he saw when he woke. The portrait had been made when she was eighteen. He looked at it constantly. One day, while gazing at it, he happened to say:

"I think the resemblance is strong."

"To my sister?" asked Mademoiselle Gillenormand. "Yes, certainly."

The old man added:

"And to him as well."

Once, while he sat with his knees drawn together and his eyes nearly shut, looking utterly dejected, his daughter ventured to say:

“Father, are you still as angry with him as ever?”

She stopped there, not daring to go on.

“With whom?” he demanded.

“With that poor Marius.”

He lifted his aged head, placed his thin, shriveled fist on the table, and cried out in his most irritated, trembling voice:

“Poor Marius, you say! That gentleman is a rogue, a miserable scoundrel, a vain little ingrate, a heartless, soulless, arrogant, wicked man!”

Then he turned away so his daughter would not see the tear in his eye.

Three days later, he broke a silence that had lasted four hours and said abruptly to his daughter:

“I had the honor of asking Mademoiselle Gillenormand never to mention him to me.”

Aunt Gillenormand gave up all further effort and delivered this sharp diagnosis: “My father never cared much for my sister after her folly. It is clear that he hates Marius.”

“After her folly” meant: “after she married the colonel.”

As the reader has probably guessed, Mademoiselle Gillenormand had failed in her attempt to replace Marius with

her favorite, the lancer officer. The replacement, Théodule, had not worked out. M. Gillenormand would not accept the exchange. An empty place in the heart cannot be filled by a mere stand-in. For his part, although Théodule caught the scent of an inheritance, he disliked the effort of trying to please. The old gentleman bored the lancer, and the lancer offended the old gentleman. Lieutenant Théodule was cheerful, certainly, but he talked too much; lighthearted, but coarse; fond of pleasure, but too often in bad company. He had mistresses, that was true, and he had plenty to say about them, that was also true; but he spoke of them badly. Every one of his good qualities came with some flaw. M. Gillenormand grew tired of hearing him go on about his love affairs around the barracks in the Rue de Babylone. And then Lieutenant Gillenormand sometimes arrived in uniform, wearing the tricolored cockade. That made him completely unbearable. At last Father Gillenormand said to his daughter: “I’ve had enough of that Théodule. I have little taste for soldiers in peacetime. See him if you like. For all I know, I prefer men who slash with swords to those who only drag them about. The clash of blades in battle is less dreary, after all, than the clatter of a scabbard on the pavement. And puffing out your chest like a braggart while lacing yourself up like a girl, with stays under your cuirass, is ridiculous twice over. A real man keeps equally clear of swagger and affectation. He is neither a boaster nor a delicate dandy. Keep your Théodule for yourself.”

It was no use for his daughter to say, “But he is still your grandnephew.” It turned out that although M. Gillenormand was a grandfather to the tips of his fingers, he was not at all an indulgent great-uncle.

In fact, because he had good sense and had compared the two, Théodule only made him miss Marius all the more.

One evening—it was June 24, which did not stop Father Gillenormand from having a blazing fire in the hearth—he had sent away his daughter, who had been sewing in the next room. He was alone in his chamber, surrounded by its pastoral decorations, with his feet resting on the andirons and half hidden behind his huge nine-paneled coromandel lacquer screen. His elbow leaned on a table where two candles burned beneath a green shade. He sat sunk deep in his tapestry armchair, holding a book he was not reading. As usual, he was dressed like an incroyable– and looked like an old portrait by Garat. People would have stared and followed him in the street if his daughter had not wrapped him, whenever he went out, in a huge padded bishop’s cloak that hid his clothes. At home, he never wore a dressing gown except when getting up or going to bed. “It makes one look old,” he said.

Father Gillenormand was thinking about Marius with both love and bitterness, and, as usual, the bitterness won. Whenever his affection turned sour, it always ended by flaring up into indignation. He had reached the point where a man tries to resign himself to what breaks his heart. He was telling himself that there was no reason any longer to expect Marius to return; that if he had meant to come back, he would have done so long

ago; that he must give up the idea. He was trying to get used to the thought that it was all over, and that he would die without seeing “that gentleman” again. But everything in him rebelled; his old fatherly heart would not accept it. “Well!” he said—this was his mournful refrain—“he will not return!” His bald head had sunk onto his chest, and he stared at the ashes in the hearth with a look of grief and irritation.

Right in the middle of his thoughts, his old servant Basque came in and asked:

“Can Monsieur receive M. Marius?”

The old man jerked upright, pale as a corpse suddenly raised by a galvanic shock. All the blood seemed to rush back to his heart. He stammered:

“M. Marius who?”

“I don’t know,” Basque replied, intimidated and flustered by his master’s expression. “I haven’t 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.”

He stayed in the same position, his head trembling, his eyes fixed on the door. It opened again. A young man came in. It was Marius.

Marius stopped at the doorway, as if waiting to be invited farther in.

In the dim light cast by the shade, his nearly shabby clothes could not be made out. All that was visible was his calm, serious, and strangely sorrowful face.

For several minutes, Father Gillenormand, stunned by amazement and joy, could see nothing clearly except a kind of radiance, as if he were looking at an apparition. He was almost fainting. He saw Marius through a blinding glow. It was truly him. It was truly Marius.

At last—after four years. In a single glance, he seemed to take him in completely. He found him noble, handsome, distinguished, fully grown, every inch a man, with a proper bearing and a charming manner. He longed to open his arms, call to him, and rush forward. His heart softened with joy. Loving words rose and pressed against his chest. At last all his tenderness reached his lips—and yet, by the contradiction at the very core of his nature, what came out was harshness. He said abruptly:

"What have you come here for?"

Marius answered awkwardly:

"Monsieur—"

M. Gillenormand wanted Marius to throw himself into his arms. He was annoyed with Marius and with himself. He knew he was being abrupt, and that Marius was being cold. It filled the old man with an unbearable, exasperating distress to feel so tender and desolate inside, and yet be able to show only hardness on the outside. His bitterness returned. He cut Marius off in an

irritable tone:

“Then why did you come?”

That “then” meant: if you did not come to embrace me. Marius looked at his grandfather, whose paleness made his face look like marble.

“Monsieur—”

“Have you come to ask my forgiveness? Do you admit your faults?”

He thought he was guiding Marius onto the right path, and that “the child” would give in. Marius shuddered; what was being demanded of him was a denial of his father. He lowered his eyes and replied:

“No, sir.”

“Then,” the old man burst out, overcome with grief and anger, “what do you want from me?”

Marius clasped his hands, stepped forward, and said in a weak, trembling voice:

“Sir, have pity on me.”

Those words struck M. Gillenormand deeply. If Marius had spoken them a little sooner, they would have softened him, but now they came too late. The grandfather stood up. He leaned on his cane with both hands. His lips had gone white, his brow trembled, yet his tall figure still loomed over the bowed Marius.

“Pity on you, sir! So youth asks pity from a man of ninety-one! You are just entering life; I am leaving it. You go to the theater, to balls, to cafés, to billiard halls. You are clever, women like you, you are a fine-looking young man. As for me, even in the middle of summer I warm myself over the fire. You have the only riches that truly matter, while I have all the poverty of old age: weakness and loneliness. You have all thirty-two teeth, a good digestion, bright eyes, strength, appetite, health, cheerfulness, a whole forest of black hair. I no longer have even white hair. I have lost my teeth, I am losing the use of my legs, I am losing my memory. There are three street names I constantly mix up—Rue Charlot, Rue du Chaume, and Rue Saint-Claude. That is what I have come to. You have your whole future ahead of you, full of sunlight, while I am beginning to lose my sight, so far have I gone into the night. You are in love—that is only natural. I am loved by no one in the world. And you ask me for pity! Upon my word, Molière forgot that one. If this is how you joke at the law courts, gentlemen lawyers, then I sincerely congratulate you. You are very amusing.”

And the old man went on in a grave, angry voice:

“Now then, what do you want from me?”

“Sir,” said Marius, “I know my presence displeases you, but I have come only to ask one thing of you, and then I will leave at once.”

“You fool!” said the old man. “Who said you had to leave?”

This was what the tender words at the bottom of his heart really meant:

“Ask my forgiveness! Throw your arms around my neck!”

M. Gillenormand felt that Marius was about to leave him, that his harsh welcome had driven the boy away, and that his own coldness was pushing him out the door. He kept telling himself this, which only deepened his grief. And because his grief immediately turned into anger, it made him even harsher. He wanted Marius to understand him, and Marius did not, which infuriated the old man.

He began again:

“What! You abandoned me, your grandfather. You left my house and went off God knows where. You drove your aunt to despair. You went away—plainly enough—to live like a bachelor. It’s more convenient, isn’t it? To play the dandy, come home at all hours, and amuse yourself. You gave me no sign that you were alive. You ran up debts without even telling me to pay them. You turned into a breaker of windows and a loudmouthed bully. And now, after four years, you come back to me, and that is all you have to say!”

This fierce way of trying to force tenderness out of a grandson produced nothing but silence from Marius. M. Gillenormand folded his arms—a gesture that, with him, was especially commanding—and addressed Marius bitterly:

“Let’s have done with this. You say you’ve come to ask me for something? Well then, what is it? Speak!”

“Sir,” said Marius, looking like a man who feels himself falling over a cliff, “I have come to ask your permission to marry.”

M. Gillenormand rang the bell. Basque opened the door halfway.

“Call my daughter.”

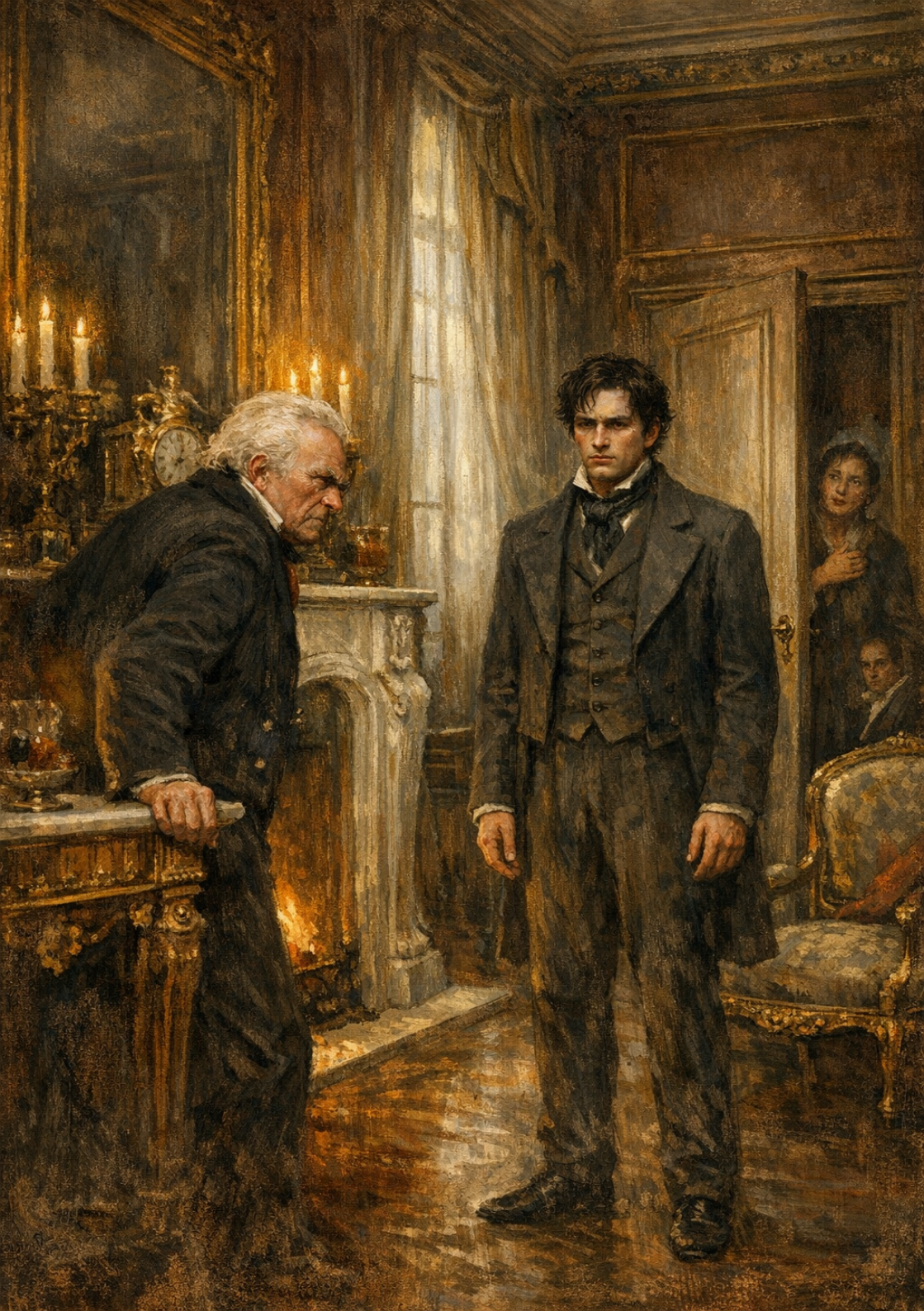
A moment later, the door opened again. Mademoiselle Gillenormand did not come in, but appeared in the doorway. Marius stood there speechless, his arms hanging at his sides, with the face of a criminal. M. Gillenormand was pacing the room. He turned to his daughter and said:

“Nothing. It is Monsieur Marius. Say good day to him. Monsieur wishes to marry. That is all. Go away.”

The old man’s short, hoarse voice revealed an extraordinary level of agitation. The aunt looked at Marius in alarm and hardly seemed to recognize him. She did not let a single gesture or word escape her, and at her father’s breath she vanished more quickly than a straw before a hurricane.

Meanwhile, Father Gillenormand had come back and once again stood with his back against the mantelpiece.

“You’re getting married! At twenty-one! You’ve already settled it, have you? All that’s left is to ask permission—a mere formality. Sit down, sir. Well, a revolution has happened since I last had the honor of seeing you. The Jacobins came out on top. You must have been thrilled. Aren’t you a Republican now that you’re a Baron? You seem quite capable of making those two fit together. The Republic makes a fine sauce for a barony. Were



you one of those decorated in July? Did you help take the Louvre, sir? Very near here, in the Rue Saint-Antoine, opposite the Rue des Nonamdières, there's a cannonball embedded in the wall on the third floor of a house, with this inscription: 'July 28th, 1830.' Go and look at it. It makes quite an impression. Ah, your friends do such fine things. By the way, aren't they putting up a fountain where the monument to M. le Duc de Berry used to stand? So you want to marry. Whom? May one ask without being indiscreet?"

He paused, and before Marius had time to answer, he added sharply:

"Well then, do you have a profession? Have you made a fortune? How much do you earn in your work as a lawyer?"

"Nothing," said Marius, with a firmness and resolve that was almost fierce.

"Nothing? Then all you have to live on is the twelve hundred livres I give you?"

Marius did not answer. M. Gillenormand went on:

"Then I take it the girl is rich?"

"As rich as I am."

"What! No dowry?"

"No."

"Prospects?"

"I don't think so."

“Completely penniless! Who is her father?”

“I don’t know.”

“And what is her name?”

“Mademoiselle Fauchelevent.”

“Fauche-what?”

“Fauchelevent.”

“Pttt!” the old gentleman spat out.

“Sir!” cried Marius.

M. Gillenormand cut him off in the tone of a man talking to himself:

“That’s right—twenty-one years old, no profession, twelve hundred livres a year, and Madame la Baronne de Pontmercy is going to buy a couple of sous’ worth of parsley from the fruit seller.”

“Sir,” Marius repeated, in the despair of seeing his last hope slip away, “I beg you! I implore you, in Heaven’s name. With folded hands, sir, I throw myself at your feet—let me marry her!”

The old man broke into a harsh, mournful laugh, coughing and laughing at the same time.

“Ah! ah! ah! You said to yourself: ‘By God! I’ll go find that old fool, that ridiculous idiot! What bad luck that I’m not twenty-five! How I’d serve him with a fine respectful summons! How well I could do without him! It’s all the same to me. I’d say to him: “You ought to be delighted to see me, you old imbecile. I want to get married. I mean to wed Mademoiselle So-and-so, daughter of Monsieur What’s-his-name. I have no shoes, she has no chemise, which suits us perfectly. I want to throw my career, my future, my youth, my life to the dogs. I want to plunge into misery with a woman hanging around my neck—that’s my idea—and you must agree to it!” and the old fossil will consent.’ Go on, my boy, do as you please, tie your paving-stone to yourself, marry your Pousselevent, your Coupelevent—never, sir, never!”

“Father—”

“Never!”

At the way that “never” was spoken, Marius lost all hope. He crossed the room slowly, his head bowed, staggering like a dying man rather than someone simply leaving. M. Gillenormand watched him. Just as the door opened and Marius was about to go out, he took four quick steps forward with the impulsive energy of a spoiled old man, grabbed Marius by the collar, pulled him firmly back into the room, threw him into an armchair, and said:

“Tell me everything!”

That single word, “father,” had brought about this complete change.

Marius stared at him in confusion. M. Gillenormand’s expressive face now showed nothing but rough, indescribable kindness. The grandsire had yielded to the grandfather.

“Come here, look, talk to me. Tell me about your love affairs—babble on, tell me everything! Sapristi! how foolish young people are!”

“Father—” Marius repeated.

The old man’s whole face lit up with an indescribable radiance.

“Yes, that’s it—call me father, and you’ll see!”

There was something so kind, so gentle, so open, and so fatherly in this brusque manner that Marius, thrown in an instant from despair to hope, felt dazed and almost drunk with it. He was sitting near the table, and the candlelight revealed how worn and shabby his clothes were, which Father Gillenormand stared at in astonishment.

“Well, father—” said Marius.

“Ah, by the way,” M. Gillenormand interrupted, “you really don’t have a penny, then? You’re dressed like a pickpocket.”

He rummaged in a drawer, pulled out a purse, and set it on the table. “Here are a hundred louis. Buy yourself a hat.”

“Father,” Marius went on, “my dear father, if you only knew! I love her. You can’t imagine it. The first time I saw her was at the Luxembourg; she used to come there. At first I hardly noticed

her, and then, I don't know how it happened, I fell in love with her. Oh, how miserable it made me! Now at last I see her every day, at her own home. Her father knows nothing about it. Just imagine—they are going away. We meet in the garden, in the evening. Her father means to take her to England. So I said to myself, 'I'll go see my grandfather and tell him the whole story. I'll go mad first, I'll die, I'll fall ill, I'll throw myself into the water. I absolutely must marry her, because otherwise I'll go mad.' That is the whole truth, and I don't think I've left anything out. She lives in a garden with an iron fence, in the Rue Plumet. It's near the Invalides."

Father Gillenormand had sat down beside Marius, his face glowing. As he listened and drank in the sound of his voice, he also savored a long pinch of snuff. At the words "Rue Plumet," he stopped short and let the rest of the snuff fall onto his knees.

"Rue Plumet, Rue Plumet, did you say? Let me think. Aren't there barracks around there? Why yes, that's it. Your cousin Théodule mentioned it to me. The lancer, the officer. A lively girl, my dear fellow, a lively girl! Pardieu, yes, Rue Plumet. It used to be called Rue Blomet. Now I remember it all. I've heard about that little girl by the iron railing in Rue Plumet. In a garden, like a Pamela. Your taste is not bad. They say she's a very neat little thing. Between ourselves, I think that fool of a lancer has done a bit of courting there himself. I don't know where he managed it. Still, that's beside the point. Besides, he's not to be trusted. He boasts, Marius! I think it's perfectly proper for a young man like you to be in love. It suits your age. I like you much better as a lover than as a Jacobin. I'd rather see you in love with a petticoat,

sapristi! with twenty petticoats, than with Monsieur de Robespierre. As for me, I'll give myself credit for this: among the sans-culottes, I never loved anyone but women. Pretty girls are pretty girls, the deuce! There's nothing wrong with that. As for this little one, she sees you without her father knowing. That's the natural order of things. I've had adventures like that myself. More than one. Do you know what one does then? One does not turn the matter into something savage. One does not rush headlong into tragedy. One does not immediately decide on marriage and Monsieur le Maire with his sash. One simply behaves like a man of spirit. One uses common sense. Move along, mortals; don't marry. You come to your grandfather, who is a good-natured old fellow underneath it all, and who always has a few rolls of louis in an old drawer. You say to him: 'Look here, grandfather.' And the grandfather says: 'That's simple enough. Youth must enjoy itself, and old age must wear itself out. I was young, and you will be old. Come, my boy, you can pass it on to your grandson. Here are two hundred pistoles. Enjoy yourself, the devil take it!' Nothing could be better. That's how the matter ought to be handled. You don't marry, and no harm is done. You understand me?"

Marius, frozen with shock and unable to say a word, shook his head to show that he did not.

The old man burst into laughter, winked his old eye, slapped him on the knee, looked him straight in the face with a mysterious, radiant expression, and said, with the gentlest shrug of his shoulders:

“Booby! Make her your mistress.”

Marius went pale. He had understood nothing his grandfather had just said. All that nonsense about Rue Blomet, Pamela, the barracks, and the lancer had passed before him like a blur. None of it could possibly have had anything to do with Cosette, who was pure as a lily. The old man was rambling. But his rambling ended with words Marius did understand, and they were a deadly insult to Cosette. The words “make her your mistress” pierced the heart of the stern young man like a sword.

He stood up, picked up his hat from the floor, and walked to the door with a steady, deliberate step. There he turned, bowed deeply to his grandfather, straightened again, and said:

“Five years ago you insulted my father; today you have insulted my wife. I ask nothing more of you, sir. Farewell.”

Father Gillenormand, completely stunned, opened his mouth, stretched out his arms, and tried to rise. But before he could say a word, the door had closed again, and Marius was gone.

For several minutes the old man stood motionless, as if struck by lightning, unable to speak or even breathe, as though a clenched fist were gripping his throat. At last he tore himself from his armchair, hurried—as much as a man of ninety-one can hurry—to the door, opened it, and cried:

“Help! Help!”

His daughter appeared, then the servants. He began again, his voice breaking pitifully: “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 overlooking the street, flung it open with his old, trembling hands, leaned more than halfway out while Basque and Nicolette held him from behind, and shouted:

“Marius! Marius! Marius! Marius!”

But Marius could no longer hear him, because at that moment he was turning the corner of the Rue Saint-Louis.

The old man lifted his hands to his temples two or three times, his face twisted with anguish. He staggered backward and collapsed into an armchair, without pulse, voice, or tears. His head trembled, and his lips moved stupidly. His eyes were empty, and in his heart there was nothing left but a dark, deep feeling like night.

CHAPTER I—JEAN VALJEAN

That same day, at about four in the afternoon, Jean Valjean was sitting alone on the far side of one of the loneliest slopes in the Champ-de-Mars. Whether out of caution, a wish to think, or simply because of one of those subtle changes in habit that gradually work their way into everyone's life, he now rarely went out with Cosette. He was wearing his workman's vest and gray linen trousers, and his long-visored cap hid his face.

Now that he was beside Cosette, he was calm and happy; what had frightened and troubled him for a time had passed away. But over the last week or two, new worries had arisen. One day, while walking on the boulevard, he had caught sight of Thénardier. Thanks to his disguise, Thénardier had not recognized him. But since then, Jean Valjean had seen him several times, and he was now certain that Thénardier was lurking around their neighborhood.

That alone had been enough to make him decide.

Besides, Paris was not calm. Political unrest had this dangerous side for anyone with something to hide in his past: the police had become extremely uneasy and suspicious, and while trying to track down a man like Pépin or Morey, they might easily uncover a man like Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean had decided to leave Paris, and even France, and go to England.

He had warned Cosette. He wanted to leave before the end of the week.

He had sat down on the slope in the Champ-de-Mars, turning over all kinds of thoughts in his mind—Thénardier, the police, the journey, and the difficulty of getting a passport.

All of this weighed on him.

Finally, one baffling detail had just caught his attention, and he was still shaken by it. It only deepened his alarm.

That very morning, when he was the only person in the house awake, he was walking in the garden before Cosette had opened her shutters. All at once, he noticed the following line scratched into the wall, probably with a nail:

16 Rue de la Verrerie.

It had clearly been made very recently. The cuts in the old black mortar were white, and a clump of nettles at the base of the wall was dusted with fine, fresh plaster.

It had most likely been written the night before.

What did it mean? Was it a signal to someone else, or a warning for him?

Whatever it was, one thing was clear: someone had entered the garden, and strangers had gotten inside.

He thought back to the strange incidents that had already disturbed the household.

His mind was now filling in the whole picture.

He was careful not to mention the writing on the wall to Cosette, because he did not want to frighten her.

In the middle of these anxious thoughts, he noticed from a shadow cast by the sun that someone had stopped at the top of the slope just behind him.

He was about to turn around when a sheet of paper, folded into four, fell onto his knees, as if a hand had dropped it over his head.

He picked up the paper, unfolded it, and read these words, written in large pencil letters:

“Move Away From Your House.”

Jean Valjean jumped quickly to his feet. No one was on the slope. He looked all around and caught sight of a figure larger than a child but smaller than a man, dressed in a gray blouse and dust-colored cotton-velvet trousers, leaping over the parapet and slipping down into the moat of the Champ-de-Mars.

Jean Valjean went back into the house at once, deep in thought.

CHAPTER II—MARIUS

Marius had left M. Gillenormand in despair. He had gone into the house with little hope, and he came out of it overwhelmed with despair.

Yet anyone who has looked into the depths of the human heart will understand this: the officer, the lancer, the fool, Cousin Théodule, had left no mark on his mind. Not the slightest one. A playwright might seem to find dramatic complications in the grandfather's blunt revelation to the grandson. But whatever drama might gain, truth would lose. Marius was at an age when people believe no evil; later comes the age when they believe everything. Suspicion is nothing but a wrinkle, and early youth has none. What destroyed Othello passed harmlessly over Candide. Suspect Cosette? Marius would sooner have committed any number of crimes.

He began wandering the streets, as suffering people do. Later, he could not remember thinking of anything at all. At two in the morning, he returned to Courfeyrac's room and threw himself onto his mattress without undressing. The sun was already shining brightly when he fell into that dreadful, heavy sleep in which thoughts drift in and out of the mind. When he woke, he saw Courfeyrac, Enjolras, Feuilly, and Combeferre standing in the room with their hats on, ready to leave.

Courfeyrac said to him:

"Are you coming to General Lamarque's funeral?"

It sounded to him as if Courfeyrac were speaking Chinese.

He went out some time after they did. He put into his pocket the pistols Javert had given him during the affair of February 3, which had remained in his possession. The pistols were still loaded. It would be hard to say what vague idea was in his mind when he decided to take them with him.

He wandered all day without knowing where he was going. Now and then it rained, and he did not notice. For dinner, he bought a penny roll from a baker, put it in his pocket, and forgot about it. It seems he even bathed in the Seine without realizing it. There are times when a man feels as though a furnace is burning inside his skull. Marius was going through one of those times. He no longer hoped for anything; he had reached that point the night before. He waited for night with feverish impatience. Only one thought stood clearly in his mind: at nine o'clock he would see Cosette. That final happiness now made up his whole future; beyond it, there was only darkness. From time to time, as he wandered along the emptiest boulevards, he thought he heard strange sounds in Paris. He shook himself out of his trance and said, "Is there fighting about to begin?"

At nightfall, at exactly nine o'clock, as he had promised Cosette, he was in the Rue Plumet. As he came near the gate, he forgot everything else. It had been forty-eight hours since he had seen Cosette, and he was about to see her again. Every other thought vanished, and he felt only a deep, unheard-of joy. Those moments in which one seems to live through centuries always have this supreme and marvelous quality: while they are passing, they fill the whole heart.

Marius moved the bar aside and rushed into the garden. Cosette was not in the place where she usually waited for him. He crossed the grove and went toward the nook near the steps. "She is waiting for me there," he said to himself. Cosette was not there. He looked up and saw that the shutters of the house were closed. He went all around the garden. It was empty. Then he came back to the house and, made frantic by love, dizzy, terrified, and wild with grief and anxiety, like a master returning home at a disastrous hour, he tapped on the shutters. He knocked, then knocked again, risking the chance that the window might open and her father's dark face might appear and ask, "What do you want?" That danger was nothing compared with what he vaguely sensed. After knocking, he raised his voice and called for Cosette. "Cosette!" he cried. "Cosette!" he repeated insistently. There was no answer. It was all over. No one in the garden; no one in the house.

Marius fixed his despairing eyes on that bleak house, black and silent as a tomb, and even emptier. He looked at the stone bench where he had spent so many wonderful hours with Cosette. Then he sat down on the steps. His heart was full of

tenderness and resolve. In the depths of his thoughts, he blessed his love and told himself that, now that Cosette was gone, the only thing left for him was to die.

Suddenly he heard a voice from the street calling to him through the trees:

"Monsieur Marius!"

He jumped to his feet.

"What?" he said.

"Monsieur Marius, are you there?"

"Yes."

"Monsieur Marius," the voice went on, "your friends are waiting for you at the barricade in the Rue de la Chanvrerie."

The voice was not entirely unfamiliar. It sounded like Éponine's hoarse, rough voice. Marius hurried to the gate, pushed aside the movable bar, stuck his head through the opening, and caught sight of someone who seemed to be a young man running off into the darkness.

CHAPTER III—M. MABEUF

Jean Valjean's purse was no help to M. Mabeuf. In his venerable, childlike austerity, M. Mabeuf had not accepted the gift of the stars; he could not believe that a star might turn itself into louis d'or. He had not guessed that what had fallen from heaven had come from Gavroche. He took the purse to the local police commissioner as lost property, to be held for anyone who might claim it. The purse really was lost. Needless to say, no one claimed it, and it brought M. Mabeuf no relief.

Meanwhile, M. Mabeuf had continued to sink deeper into poverty.

His experiments with indigo had gone no better at the Jardin des Plantes than they had in his garden at Austerlitz. The year before, he had been behind on his housekeeper's wages; now, as we have seen, he owed three quarters of his rent. After thirteen months had passed, the pawnshop sold the plates for his _Flora_. Some coppersmith turned them into stew pans. With his copper plates gone, and unable even to finish the unfinished copies of his _Flora_ still in his possession, he sold the text itself for a pitiful sum as waste paper to a second-hand bookseller. Nothing of his life's work remained to him now. He then began living on the money he had received for those copies. When he saw that this miserable resource was running out, he gave up his garden and let it go wild. Long before that, he had already given up the two eggs and the small piece of beef he used to eat now and then. He lived on bread and potatoes. He sold the last of his furniture, then all extra bedding, his clothes, and his

blankets, then his herbariums and prints. But he still kept his most precious books, many of them extremely rare: _Les Quadrins Historiques de la Bible_, edition of 1560; _La Concordance des Bibles_, by Pierre de Besse; _Les Marguerites de la Marguerite_, by 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, bearing this magnificent inscription: _Venetiis, in ædibus Manutianis_; and finally, a Diogenes Laertius, printed at Lyons in 1644, containing the famous variant from Vatican manuscript 411, of the thirteenth century, along with those from the two Venice manuscripts, 393 and 394, which Henri Estienne had consulted to such fruitful effect, and all the passages in the Doric dialect found only in the celebrated twelfth-century manuscript belonging to the Naples Library. M. Mabeuf never had a fire in his room, and he went to bed at sundown so he would not have to burn candles. It was as if he no longer had any neighbors: people avoided him when he went out, and he noticed it. A child's misery stirs a mother, a young man's misery stirs a young girl, but an old man's misery stirs no one. Of all forms of suffering, it is the coldest. Even so, Father Mabeuf had not completely lost his childlike serenity. His eyes brightened a little when they rested on his books, and he smiled when he looked at the Diogenes Laertius, which was a unique copy. His glass-fronted bookcase was the only piece of furniture he had kept beyond what was absolutely necessary.

One day, Mother Plutarque said to him:

"I don't have any money to buy dinner."

What she meant by dinner was a loaf of bread and four or five potatoes.

“On credit?” M. Mabeuf suggested.

“You know perfectly well people refuse me.”

M. Mabeuf opened his bookcase and looked long at all his books, one by one, like a father forced to sacrifice some of his children before choosing which. Then he quickly took one, tucked it under his arm, and went out. He came back two hours later with nothing under his arm, set thirty sous on the table, and said:

“You can get something for dinner.”

From that moment on, Mother Plutarque saw a dark shadow fall over the old man’s open, innocent face, and it never lifted again.

The next day, and the day after that, and the day after that, the same thing had to be done again.

M. Mabeuf went out with a book and came back with a coin. Once the second-hand booksellers realized he was being forced to sell, they gave him twenty sous for books he had paid twenty francs for, sometimes in the very same shops. One volume after another, the whole library went the same way. He would sometimes say, “But I am eighty,” as if he secretly hoped he would reach the end of his life before he reached the end of his books. His sadness deepened. Once, however, he had a moment of pleasure. He went out with a Robert Estienne, which he sold for thirty-five sous under the Quai Malaquais, and came back with an Aldus, which he bought for forty sous in the Rue

des Grès. “I owe five sous,” he said, glowing with delight at Mother Plutarque. That day he had no dinner.

He was a member of the Horticultural Society, and they learned how poor he had become. The society’s president came to see him, promised to speak to the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce on his behalf, and did.—“Why, of course!” the Minister exclaimed. “An old scholar! A botanist! A harmless man! Something must be done for him!” The next day, M. Mabeuf received an invitation to dine with the Minister. Shaking with joy, he showed the letter to Mother Plutarque. “We are saved!” he said. On the appointed day, he went to the Minister’s house. He could tell that his shabby cravat, his long, square-cut coat, and his polished shoes surprised the ushers. No one spoke to him, not even the Minister. Around ten o’clock that evening, while he was still waiting for a single word, he heard the Minister’s wife—a beautiful woman in a low-cut gown, whom he had not dared approach—ask, “Who is that old gentleman?” He walked home at midnight through pouring rain. He had sold an Elzevir to pay for the carriage that took him there.

He had gotten into the habit of reading a few pages of his Diogenes Laertius every night before bed. He knew enough Greek to appreciate the special qualities of the copy he owned. Now he had no other pleasure. Several weeks passed. Then, all at once, Mother Plutarque fell ill. There is something sadder than having no money to buy bread from the baker: having no money to buy medicine from the apothecary. One evening, the doctor prescribed a very expensive potion. The illness was getting worse, and a nurse was needed. M. Mabeuf opened his

bookcase; there was nothing left in it. The last volume was gone. All he still had was Diogenes Laertius. He tucked this one remaining 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 came back with one hundred francs. He set the stack of five-franc pieces on the old servant woman's bedside table and returned to his room without a word.

At dawn the next morning, he sat down on the overturned post in his garden. From above the hedge, he could be seen there all morning, motionless, his head bowed, his eyes fixed vaguely on the dried-up flowerbeds. Rain came and went, but the old man seemed not to notice.

That afternoon, strange noises erupted across Paris. They sounded like gunshots and the shouting of a crowd.

Father Mabeuf lifted his head. He saw a gardener passing by and asked:

"What is it?"

The gardener, with his spade over his shoulder, answered in a completely unconcerned tone:

"It's the riots."

"What riots?"

"Yes, they're fighting."

"Why are they fighting?"

"Ah, good heavens!" the gardener exclaimed.

“In what direction?” M. Mabeuf went on.

“Near the Arsenal.”

Father Mabeuf went to his room, took his hat, and mechanically looked for a book to tuck under his arm. Finding none, he said, “Ah! truly!” and went out looking bewildered.

CHAPTER I—THE SURFACE OF THE QUESTION

What is revolt made of? Of nothing and of everything. Of electricity building little by little, of a flame that suddenly leaps out, of a wandering force, of a passing breath. That breath meets heads that speak, minds that dream, souls that suffer, passions that burn, misery that howls, and sweeps them along.

Where?

At random. Across the state, across the laws, across prosperity and the insolence of others.

Resentful convictions, bitter enthusiasms, stirred-up outrage, warlike instincts that have been held back, youthful courage worked up to a fever pitch, generous blindness; curiosity, a taste for change, a hunger for the unexpected, the impulse that makes people enjoy reading posters for a new play, and love hearing the prompter’s whistle in the theater; vague hatreds, grudges, disappointments, every kind of vanity that feels destiny has cheated it; hardship, empty dreams, blocked ambitions, anyone hoping for a collapse, for some kind of outcome—in short, at the very bottom, the mob, that mud that can catch fire—these are the elements of revolt. Both what is greatest and what is lowest feed into it: the people who live outside all limits, waiting for an opportunity; bohemians, drifters, road wanderers; those who sleep at night in a wasteland of houses with no roof but the cold clouds of heaven; those who each day ask chance, not labor, for their bread; the unknown

people of poverty and nothingness, the bare-armed, the barefooted—all belong to revolt. Anyone who carries in his soul a secret rebellion against anything done by the state, by life, or by fate is ready for riot, and as soon as it appears, he begins to tremble and feel himself swept away in the whirlwind.

Revolt is like a waterspout in the social atmosphere, forming suddenly under certain conditions. As it spins, it rises, falls, thunders, tears, levels, crushes, destroys, and uproots, sweeping along both great natures and small, the strong man and the weak mind, the tree trunk and the straw. Woe to the one it carries off, and to the one it strikes. It smashes them against each other.

It gives those it seizes an extraordinary, indescribable power. It fills the first person who comes along with the force of events. It turns everything into a projectile. It makes a cannonball out of a rough stone, and a general out of a porter.

If we are to believe certain shrewd political prophets, a small revolt is useful from the standpoint of power. Their theory is simple: a revolt strengthens any government it does not topple. It tests the army, sanctifies the bourgeoisie, hardens the police, and displays the strength of the social order. It is a kind of workout, almost a form of hygiene. After a revolt, power is healthier, just as a man feels better after a vigorous rubdown.

Thirty years ago, revolt was viewed in other ways as well.

There is a theory for everything, and it always calls itself “good sense”: Philintus set against Alcestis; mediation offered between what is false and what is true; explanation and

admonition; a rather arrogant indulgence that, because it mixes blame with excuse, imagines itself wisdom, though it is often nothing more than pedantry. An entire political school, known as “the golden mean,” grew out of this. Between cold water and hot water, it is the party of lukewarm water. With its false depth that never goes below the surface, this school analyzes effects without tracing them back to first causes, and from the lofty perch of its half-knowledge, it scolds the unrest of the public square.

If we listen to this school, it says: “The riots that complicated the events of 1830 took away some of that great moment’s purity. The Revolution of July had been a splendid popular gust, suddenly followed by clear skies. The riots brought the clouds back. They caused that revolution, which at first had been so striking for its unity, to sink into a quarrel. In the Revolution of July, as in all progress made by sudden advances, there had been hidden cracks; these riots made them visible. One might have said, ‘Ah! this is broken.’ After the Revolution of July, people felt only deliverance; after the riots, they felt a catastrophe.”

“Every revolt shuts the shops, drives down the markets, throws the Exchange into panic, halts trade, jams up business, and triggers bankruptcies. Money dries up. Private fortunes become insecure, public credit is shaken, industry is thrown off balance, capital pulls back, labor is devalued, and fear spreads everywhere. Every town feels the aftershocks. From that come abysses. It has been calculated that the first day of a riot costs France twenty million, the second forty, the third sixty. A

three-day uprising costs one hundred and twenty million. If you look only at the financial result, it equals a disaster, a shipwreck, or a lost battle that wipes out a fleet of sixty ships of the line."

"No doubt, in historical terms, uprisings have their own beauty. The war fought on the paving stones is no less grand and no less tragic than the war fought in the thickets. In one there is the soul of the forests; in the other, the heart of the cities. One has Jean Chouan; the other has a Jeanne. Revolts have cast a red glow over the most distinctive features of the Parisian character: generosity, devotion, turbulent gaiety, students proving that bravery is part of intelligence, the National Guard unconquerable, shopkeepers camping out, street urchins building fortresses, and ordinary passers-by showing contempt for death. Schools and regiments collided. In the end, the fighters differed only in age; they were of the same race. They were the same stoic men, dying at twenty for their ideas and at forty for their families. The army, always a sorrowful thing in civil wars, set prudence against audacity. Uprisings, while showing the people's fearlessness, also trained the courage of the bourgeois."

"All that is true. But is any of it worth the bloodshed? And beyond the bloodshed, add the darkness that follows: progress put at risk, the best men troubled, honest liberals driven to despair, foreign absolutism delighted by these wounds that revolution has inflicted on itself, and the defeated men of 1830 triumphantly saying, 'We told you so!' Add Paris perhaps enlarged, but France certainly diminished. Add too—for everything must be said—the massacres that have too often

disgraced the victory of order turned savage over liberty gone mad. In short, uprisings have been disastrous."

That is how that imitation of wisdom speaks—the kind of wisdom with which the bourgeoisie, itself an imitation of the people, so willingly satisfies itself.

For our part, we reject the word _uprisings_ as too broad and therefore too convenient. We distinguish one popular movement from another. We do not ask whether an uprising costs as much as a battle. Why compare it to a battle in the first place? That immediately raises the question of war. Is war any less of a scourge than an uprising is of a disaster? And are all uprisings disasters? What if the July revolt did cost a hundred and twenty million? The establishment of Philip V in Spain cost France two billion. Even at the same price, we would still prefer the 14th of July. Still, we reject these figures. They seem like arguments, but they are only words. Given an uprising, we examine it on its own terms. In everything said by the doctrinaire objection presented above, the only issue is the effect; we are looking for the cause.

We will speak plainly.

CHAPTER II—THE ROOT OF THE MATTER

There is such a thing as an uprising, and there is such a thing as insurrection; they are two different stages of anger. One is wrong, and the other is right. In democratic states—the only states founded on justice—it sometimes happens that a minority seizes power. Then the whole people rise, and the rightful defense of their rights may go so far as taking up arms. In every question that comes from collective sovereignty, the war of the whole against the minority is insurrection; the attack of the minority against the whole is revolt. Depending on whether the Tuileries holds a king or the Convention, attacking it is either just or unjust. The same cannon aimed at the people is wrong on the 10th of August and right on the 14th of Vendémiaire. Outwardly the situations look alike, but in reality they are completely different: the Swiss defend what is false, Bonaparte defends what is true. What universal suffrage has established in freedom and sovereignty cannot be undone by the street. The same is true in matters of civilization itself. The instinct of the masses, clear-sighted today, may be confused tomorrow. The same fury is legitimate when turned against Terray and absurd when turned against Turgot. The destruction of machines, the looting of warehouses, the tearing up of rails, the demolition of docks, the false turnings of crowds, the people’s unjust refusal of progress, Ramus murdered by students, Rousseau driven out of Switzerland and stoned—these are revolt. Israel against Moses, Athens against Phocion, Rome against Cicero—these

are uprisings; Paris against the Bastille—that is insurrection. The soldiers against Alexander, the sailors against Christopher Columbus—this too is revolt, an impious revolt. Why? Because Alexander is doing for Asia with the sword what Christopher Columbus is doing for America with the compass: Alexander, like Columbus, is discovering a world. These gifts of a world to civilization add so much light that any resistance to them is blameworthy. Sometimes the crowd imitates loyalty to itself. The masses betray the people. Is anything stranger, for example, than that long and bloody protest of the smugglers in salt—a legitimate, chronic revolt—which, at the decisive moment, on the day of salvation, at the very hour of popular victory, takes the side of the throne, turns into chouannerie–, and, after being an insurrection against, becomes an uprising for those dark masterpieces of ignorance? The smuggler escapes the king's gallows and, with the rope still around his neck, puts on the white cockade. "Death to the salt tax" gives birth to "Long live the King!" The killers of Saint-Barthélemy, the slaughterers of September, the butchers of Avignon, the murderers of Coligny, the murderers of Madam Lamballe, the murderers of Brune, Miquelets, Verdets, Cadenettes, the companions of Jéhu, the chevaliers of Brassard—there you have an uprising. La Vendée is a great Catholic uprising. The sound of right in motion can be recognized, but it does not always come from the trembling of an excited crowd. There are mad outbursts; there are cracked bells; not every alarm bell rings with the sound of bronze. The clash of passions and ignorance is something entirely different from the shock of progress. Show me which way you are going. Rise, if you must,

but rise in order to become greater. There is no insurrection except in the forward direction. Any other kind of rising is evil; every violent step backward is revolt. To retreat is to commit violence against the human race. Insurrection is truth in a fit of anger; the paving stones that an insurrection tears up strike sparks of justice. Those same paving stones leave revolt nothing but their mud. Danton against Louis XIV is insurrection; Hébert against Danton is revolt.

It follows, then, that while insurrection may, in some cases, be, as Lafayette says, the holiest of duties, an uprising may also be the most disastrous of crimes.

There is also a difference in intensity: insurrection is often a volcano, while revolt is often nothing more than a straw fire.

As we have said, revolt is sometimes found among those in power. Polignac is a rioter; Camille Desmoulins is part of the governing power.

Insurrection is sometimes a form of resurrection.

Universal suffrage as the answer to everything is an entirely modern fact. Before it, for four thousand years, history was filled with violated rights and the suffering of peoples. So each age produced whatever form of protest it could. Under the Cæsars, there was no insurrection, but there was Juvenal.

The _facit indignatio_ takes the place of the Gracchi.

Under the Cæsars, there is exile to Syene; there is also the man of the _Annales_. We are not speaking of the great exile of Patmos, who also overwhelms the real world with a protest made in the

name of the ideal world, who turns his vision into a vast satire, and casts over Rome-Nineveh, Rome-Babylon, Rome-Sodom, the fiery glow 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 wrote the _Annales_ belongs to the Latin race; better still, he is a Roman.

Since the Neros rule in darkness, they must be portrayed in kind. The graving tool alone would be too faint; the channel must be filled with a concentrated, biting prose.

Tyranny forces a writer into a tighter, more concentrated style, one that hits harder. The long Ciceronian sentence, which was barely enough for Verres, would lose its edge against Caligula. The less spread there is in the phrasing, the more force there is in the strike. Tacitus thinks with his full strength.

The honesty of a great heart, distilled into justice and truth, strikes with the force of lightning.

It should be noted, in passing, that Tacitus does not stand historically over Cæsar. The Tiberii were kept for him. Cæsar and Tacitus are two successive phenomena, and some mystery seems to prevent their meeting, arranged by the One who, when He sets the centuries on the stage, directs the entrances and exits. Cæsar is great, and Tacitus is great; God spares these two forms of greatness by not letting them collide. The guardian of justice, in striking Cæsar, might strike too hard and become unjust. God does not will that. The great wars in Africa and Spain, the pirates of Sicily destroyed, civilization brought into Gaul, into Britanny, into Germany—all this glory covers the

Rubicon. There is, in this, a kind of delicacy in divine justice, hesitating to unleash the formidable historian upon the illustrious usurper, sparing Cæsar from Tacitus, and granting mitigating circumstances to genius.

Certainly, despotism is still despotism, even when the despot is a genius. There is corruption under every famous tyrant, but the moral plague is even more hideous under disgraceful ones. In such reigns, nothing hides the shame; and those who hold it up as an example—Tacitus as much as Juvenal—more usefully slap this dishonor, which cannot answer back, across the face before all humanity.

Rome reeks more under Vitellius than under Sylla. Under Claudius and Domitian, there is a deformity of baseness that matches the ugliness of the tyrant. The villainy of slaves is a direct product of the despot. A miasma rises from these cringing consciences in which the master is reflected. Public powers are filthy. Hearts are petty. Consciences are numb, and souls are like vermin. So it is under Caracalla, under Commodus, and under Heliogabalus, while from the Roman Senate under Cæsar there comes only the smell of dung, the smell proper to the eyries of eagles.

That is why writers like Tacitus and Juvenal seem to arrive late: the one who proves the case appears when the time for evidence has come.

But Juvenal and Tacitus, like Isaiah in biblical times and Dante in the Middle Ages, stand for the individual human being; riot and insurrection are the crowd, which is sometimes right and

sometimes wrong.

In most cases, a riot grows out of some material fact; an insurrection is always a moral phenomenon. Riot is Masaniello; insurrection is Spartacus. Insurrection touches the mind, while riot begins with the stomach; Gaster becomes angry, and yet Gaster is certainly not always wrong. In times of famine, a riot—Buzançais, for example—can begin from a true, moving, and just cause. Even so, it remains a riot. Why? Because, though right at its core, it was wrong in its form. Timid though justified, violent though powerful, it struck blindly. It moved like a blind elephant. It left behind the bodies of old men, women, and children. It demanded the blood of harmless and innocent people without knowing why. Feeding the people is a worthy aim; massacring them is a terrible means.

Every armed uprising, even the most legitimate ones—even that of the 10th of August, even that of July 14th—begins with the same disorder. Before right breaks free, there is froth and uproar. At first, insurrection is a riot, just as a river begins as a torrent. Usually it ends in that ocean: revolution. Sometimes, however, descending from those high mountains that rise over the moral horizon—justice, wisdom, reason, right—formed from the pure snow of the ideal, after a long plunge from rock to rock, after reflecting the sky in its clarity and swelling with a hundred tributaries in the majestic bearing of triumph, insurrection suddenly loses itself in some quagmire, as the Rhine is lost in a swamp.

All that belongs to the past; the future is something else. Universal suffrage has this admirable power: it dissolves riot at its very beginning, and by giving insurrection the vote, it takes away its weapons. The disappearance of war—street war as well as war on the frontiers—is the inevitable course of events. Whatever today may be, tomorrow will be peace.

However, when it comes to insurrection, riot, and the differences between the two, the bourgeois—in the strict sense of the word—understands none of these distinctions. To him, it is all sedition, rebellion in the simplest sense: the dog rising against its master, trying to bite the hand that must punish it with chain and kennel, snarling and snapping until the day when the dog's head, suddenly grown larger, appears dimly in the darkness, face to face with the lion.

Then the bourgeois cries, "Long live the people!"

With that explanation in place, what does the movement of June 1832 mean in historical terms? Was it a revolt? Was it an insurrection?

As we set this formidable event on the stage, we may sometimes use the word revolt, but only to describe surface appearances, while always keeping clear the distinction between revolt, which is the form, and insurrection, which is the substance.

In its sudden outbreak and its sorrowful end, the movement of 1832 had such greatness that even those who see it as nothing more than an uprising still speak of it with respect. To them, it is like a surviving fragment of 1830. Heated minds, they say,

cannot be quieted in a single day. A revolution cannot simply be stopped at once. Before it comes to rest, it must pass through a few aftershocks, like a mountain range sinking into the plain. There are no Alps without the Jura, no Pyrenees without the Asturias.

This moving crisis in contemporary history, which Parisians remember as “the time of the riots,” is certainly one of the defining moments among the turbulent hours of this century. One last word before we begin the account.

The facts we are about to tell belong to that vivid, dramatic reality that historians sometimes pass over because they lack the time or space to include it. Yet that is where life truly is—its pulse, its human tremor. Small details, as we have already said, are in a sense the foliage of great events, and they disappear in the distance of history. The period known as “the riots” is full of details like these. Official investigations did not uncover them all, and perhaps did not even reach the bottom of things, for reasons different from those that limit history. So, alongside the known and published facts, we will bring forward things that have not been known until now—facts buried by some people’s forgetfulness and others’ deaths. Most of the people who took part in these immense scenes are gone; from the very next day, they fell silent. But of what we are about to relate, we can say: “We saw this.” We have changed a few names, because history tells what happened and does not denounce individuals, but the event we are about to portray is real. In keeping with the design of this book, we will show only one side and one episode—indeed, the least known one—of the two days of the

5th and 6th of June, 1832. But we will show it in such a way that the reader may glimpse, beneath the dark veil we are about to lift, the true shape of this terrible public event.

CHAPTER III—A BURIAL; A MOMENT FOR REBIRTH

In the spring of 1832, although cholera had been casting a chill over every mind for the previous three months and had spread a strange, gloomy calm over the general unrest, Paris had long been ready for upheaval. As we have said, the great city is like a cannon: once it is loaded, all it takes is a spark, and the shot is fired. In June 1832, that spark was the death of General Lamarque.

Lamarque was a famous man of action. Under both the Empire and the Restoration, he showed the kind of courage each age demanded: courage on the battlefield and courage in the public arena. He was as eloquent as he had been brave; you could hear the sword in his words. Like Foy, who came before him, after defending authority he went on to defend liberty. He sat between the left and the extreme left, loved by the people because he accepted the risks of the future, loved by the masses because he had served the Emperor well. Along with Comtes Gérard and Drouet, he was one of Napoleon's marshals in petto. The treaties of 1815 cast him aside as though it were a personal insult. He hated Wellington with a blunt hatred that pleased the crowd, and for seventeen years he solemnly kept alive the sorrow of Waterloo, paying little attention to the events in between. In his final agony, in his last hour, he pressed to his chest a sword that the officers of the Hundred Days had given him. Napoleon died with the word army on his lips; Lamarque died with the word country.

His death, though expected, was feared by the people as a loss and by the government as an opportunity. This death brought grief. And like all bitter grief, it could turn into revolt. That is what happened.

On the evening before, and again on the morning of June 5, the day set for Lamarque's burial, the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, where the procession was to pass, took on a threatening look. Rumors ran through that restless maze of streets. People armed themselves however they could. Joiners carried off the heavy weights from their shops "to break down doors." One man had made himself a dagger from a stocking-weaver's hook by snapping off the hook and sharpening what remained. Another, burning "to attack," slept fully dressed for three days. A carpenter named Lombier ran into a comrade, who asked him, "Where are you going?" "Well, I have no weapons." "So?" "I'm going to my timber-yard to get my compasses." "What for?" "I don't know," said Lombier. A man named Jacqueline, quick and energetic, stopped some artisans who were passing by. "Come here, you!" he said. He bought them ten sous' worth of wine and then asked, "Do you have work?" "No." "Go to Filspierre's, between the Barrière Charonne and the Barrière Montreuil, and you'll find work there." At Filspierre's they found cartridges and weapons. Certain well-known leaders were making the rounds, going from house to house to gather their men. At Barthélemy's, near the Barrière du Trône, and at Capel's, near the Petit-Chapeau, the drinkers spoke to one another with grim faces. They were heard saying, "Do you have 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 the tool-maker Bernier's, groups stood whispering together. Among them was a man named Mavot, who never stayed more than a week in any shop, because the masters always dismissed him "since they had to argue with him every day." Mavot was killed the next day at the barricade in the Rue Ménilmontant. Pretot, who was also destined to die in the fighting, supported Mavot, and when asked, "What is your object?" he answered: _"Insurrection."_ Workmen gathered at the corner of the Rue de Bercy and waited for a certain Lemarin, the revolutionary agent for the Faubourg Saint-Marceau. Passwords were exchanged almost openly.

On June 5, a day of alternating rain and sunshine, General Lamarque's funeral procession moved through Paris with official military ceremony, increased somewhat as a precaution. Two battalions, with drums draped in black and weapons reversed, and ten thousand National Guards with their swords at their sides, escorted the coffin. Young men drew the hearse. Right behind it came the officers of the Invalides, carrying laurel branches. Then came a countless, strange, restless crowd: members of the Friends of the People, students from the law school and the medical school, refugees of every nationality, and Spanish, Italian, German, and Polish flags; horizontal tricolor banners; every kind of banner imaginable; children waving green branches; stonecutters and carpenters who were on strike at the time; printers, recognizable by their paper caps, marching in pairs and threes, shouting, almost all of them brandishing sticks, some waving sabers. There was no order, yet they seemed driven by a single spirit—at one moment a

chaotic mob, at another a column. Groups chose their own leaders. A man openly armed with a pair of pistols seemed to review the crowd, and the ranks parted before him. In the side streets off the boulevards, in the tree branches, on balconies, in windows, and on rooftops, the heads of men, women, and children swarmed everywhere. Every face showed anxiety. An armed crowd was passing by, and a frightened crowd was watching.

The Government, for its part, was watching closely. It watched with its hand on its sword. In the Place Louis XV, four squadrons of carabineers could be seen mounted in the saddle, with their trumpeters at their head, cartridge boxes full and muskets loaded, ready to move at once. In the Latin Quarter and at the Jardin des Plantes, the Municipal Guard was posted from street to street. At the Halle-aux-Vins there was a squadron of dragoons. At the Grève stood half of the 12th Light Infantry, with the other half at the Bastille. The 6th Dragoons were at the Célestins, and the courtyard of the Louvre was filled with artillery. The rest of the troops remained in their barracks, not counting the regiments stationed around Paris. Uneasy and on edge, the authorities held twenty-four thousand soldiers over the threatening crowd in the city, and thirty thousand more in the suburbs.

All sorts of rumors were circulating through the procession. People hinted at Legitimist plots. They spoke of the Duc de Reichstadt, whom God had chosen for death at the very moment when the people were naming him for the Empire. One figure, whose name has never been known, declared that at a

certain hour two bribed overseers would open the doors of an arms factory to the crowd. What showed most clearly on the uncovered faces of the majority there was enthusiasm mixed with despair. Here and there, too, in that multitude swept up in such violent yet noble feelings, you could see the true faces of criminals and vile mouths saying, “Let us plunder!” There are upheavals that stir the bottom of marshes and send clouds of mud rising through the water. It is a phenomenon with which “well-drilled” policemen are quite familiar.

The procession moved on with feverish slowness from the dead man’s house, along the boulevards as far as the Bastille. Rain fell now and then, but the crowd did not care. Many incidents marked the passage of the funeral train: the coffin was carried around the Vendome Column; stones were thrown at the Duc de Fitz-James, who was seen on a balcony with his hat on; the Gallic cock was torn from a popular flag and dragged through the mud; a policeman was wounded by a sword blow at the Porte Saint-Martin; an officer of the 12th Light Infantry said aloud, “I am a Republican”; and the Polytechnic School appeared unexpectedly, despite orders to stay at home, to cries of “Long live the Polytechnique! Long live the Republic!” At the Bastille, long lines of curious and threatening people came down from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine and joined the procession, and a certain terrible ferment began to stir the crowd.

One man was heard saying to another, “Do you see that fellow with the red beard? He’s the one who will give the signal when it is time to fire.” It seems that this red-bearded man had been

present at another riot, the Quénisset affair, where he had been entrusted with the same role.

The hearse passed the Bastille, crossed the small bridge, and reached the open space by the Austerlitz bridge. There it stopped. Seen from above at that moment, the crowd would have looked like a comet, with its head on the esplanade and its tail spreading over the Quai Bourdon, covering the Bastille, and stretching along the boulevard as far as the Porte Saint-Martin. A circle was formed around the hearse. The huge crowd fell silent. Lafayette spoke and said farewell to Lamarque. It was a moving, solemn moment: every head was bare, and every heart was stirred.

Suddenly, a man on horseback dressed in black appeared in the middle of the group, carrying a red flag—or, as others said, a pike topped with a red liberty cap. Lafayette turned his head away. Exelmans left the procession.

The sight of that red flag set off a storm of feeling, and then it vanished in the turmoil. From the Boulevard Bourdon to the Austerlitz bridge, a roar like breaking waves ran through the crowd. Two tremendous cries rose up: “Lamarque to the Pantheon!—Lafayette to the Town Hall!” Some young men, amid the crowd’s shouting speeches and cries, put themselves to the task like draft animals and began pulling Lamarque in the hearse across the Austerlitz bridge, and Lafayette in a hired carriage along the Quai Morland.

Among the crowd surrounding Lafayette and cheering him, people noticed a German named Ludwig Snyder. He later died

at the age of one hundred. He had also served in the war of 1776 and had fought at Trenton under Washington and at Brandywine under Lafayette.

Meanwhile, the municipal cavalry on the left bank had been put in motion and came to block the bridge. On the right bank, the dragoons came out from the Célestins and spread out along the Quai Morland. The men pulling Lafayette suddenly saw them at the corner of the quay and shouted, “The dragoons!” The dragoons moved forward at a walk, in silence, with pistols in their holsters, swords in their scabbards, and guns hanging in their leather buckets, wearing an air of dark expectation.

They stopped two hundred paces from the little bridge. The carriage carrying Lafayette moved toward them. Their ranks opened to let it through, then closed again behind it. At that moment, the dragoons and the crowd came into contact. The women ran off in terror. What happened during that fatal minute? No one can say. It was one of those dark moments when two storm clouds collide. Some say a trumpet call to charge sounded from the direction of the Arsenal. Others say a child stabbed a dragoon with a dagger. What is certain is that three shots were suddenly fired. The first killed Cholet, the commander of the squadron. The second killed an old deaf woman as she was shutting her window. The third grazed an officer’s shoulder. A woman cried out, “They are beginning too soon!” Then, all at once, a squadron of dragoons that had remained in the barracks until then came galloping out with drawn swords through the Rue Bassompierre and the Boulevard Bourdon, cutting through everything in its path.

Then everything follows at once. The storm breaks loose. Stones pour down. Gunfire erupts. Many people throw themselves to the bottom of the embankment and cross the narrow arm of the Seine, now filled in. The timber-yards of the Isle Louviers, that vast stronghold close at hand, bristle with fighters. Stakes are ripped up. Pistols are fired. A barricade begins to rise. The young men who are driven back race across the Austerlitz Bridge with the hearse. The municipal guard and the carabineers rush forward. The dragoons swing their swords. The crowd scatters in every direction. A rumor of war flies to all four corners of Paris. Men shout, “To arms!” They run, fall, flee, and resist. Anger spreads the riot the way wind spreads fire.

CHAPTER IV—THE UPRISINGS OF FORMER DAYS

Nothing is more startling than the first outbreak of a riot. Everything erupts everywhere at once. Was it anticipated? Yes. Was it organized? No. Where does it rise from? The streets. Where does it descend from? The sky. In one place, the uprising takes on the look of a conspiracy; in another, it feels completely spontaneous. The first person to step forward catches the movement of the crowd and leads it wherever he wants. It is a terrifying beginning, mixed with a kind of grim excitement. First come the shouts. The shops close, and the merchants' displays vanish. Then come scattered gunshots. People run. Rifle butts pound on carriage gates, and in the courtyards of houses servants can be heard laughing and saying, "There's going to be a fight!"

Within a quarter of an hour, this was happening in twenty different places in Paris at the same time.

In the Rue Sainte-Croix-de-la-Bretonnerie, twenty young men, bearded and long-haired, went into a dram-shop and came out a moment later carrying a horizontal tricolored flag draped in crape. At their head were three armed men, one with a sword, one with a gun, and the third with a pike.

In the Rue des Nonaindières, a very well-dressed bourgeois with a prominent belly, a booming voice, a bald head, a high brow, a black beard, and one of those stiff moustaches that refuse to lie flat, openly offered cartridges to passers-by.

In the Rue Saint-Pierre-Montmartre, men with bare arms carried a black flag bearing this inscription in white letters: “Republic or Death!” In the Rue des Jeûneurs, Rue du Cadran, Rue Montorgueil, and Rue Mandar, groups appeared waving flags marked with the word _section_ in gold letters, followed by a number. One of these flags was red and blue, with an almost invisible stripe of white between them.

They looted a small-arms factory on the Boulevard Saint-Martin and three gunsmiths’ shops: the first in the Rue Beaubourg, the second in the Rue Michel-le-Comte, and the third in the Rue du Temple. In a few minutes, the thousand hands of the crowd had grabbed and carried off two hundred and thirty guns, nearly all double-barrelled, sixty-four swords, and eighty-three pistols. To arm more people, one man took the gun and another took the bayonet.

Across from the Quai de la Grève, young men with muskets took positions in the homes of several women so they could fire from there. One of them carried a flintlock. They knocked, went in, and began making cartridges. One of the women later said, “I did not know what cartridges were; it was my husband who told me.”

One group broke into a curiosity shop on the Rue des Vieilles-Haudriettes and took yataghans and other Turkish weapons.

The body of a mason who had been killed by a gunshot lay in the Rue de la Perle.

Then, on the right bank and the left bank, along the quays and the boulevards, in the Latin Quarter and the Halles district, breathless men—workers, students, and members of the sections—read proclamations and shouted, “To arms!” They smashed street lanterns, unharnessed carriages, tore up the paving stones, broke down house doors, uprooted trees, searched cellars, rolled out hogsheads, piled up paving stones, rough slabs, furniture, and planks, and built barricades.

They forced the bourgeois to help them. They entered women’s homes and made them hand over the swords and guns of their absent husbands. Then they wrote on the door in chalk, “The arms have been delivered.” Some of them signed receipts for the guns and swords with “their names” and said, “Send for them to-morrow at the Mayor’s office.” They disarmed isolated sentries and National Guardsmen they met in the streets on their way to the Townhall. They ripped the epaulets from officers. In the Rue du Cimitière-Saint-Nicholas, an officer of the National Guard, chased by a crowd armed with clubs and foils, barely managed to take refuge in a house, and he could only get out again at nightfall, in disguise.

In the Quartier Saint-Jacques, students poured out of their lodgings and went up the Rue Saint-Hyacinthe to the Café du Progrèss, or down to the Café des Sept-Billards on the Rue des Mathurins. There, in front of the door, young men standing on the stone corner-posts handed out weapons. They looted the timber yard on the Rue Transnonain to get materials for barricades. In only one place did the residents fight back: at the corner of the Rue Sainte-Avoye and the Rue Simon-Le-Franc,

where they tore down the barricade with their own hands. And in only one place did the insurgents give way: they abandoned a barricade they had begun in the Rue de Temple after firing on a detachment of the National Guard, then fled through the Rue de la Corderie. The detachment found a red flag, a packet of cartridges, and three hundred pistol balls in the barricade. The National Guardsmen ripped up the flag and carried away its torn scraps on the tips of their bayonets.

Everything we are describing here step by step was happening at the same time across the city, in the middle of an immense uproar, like a whole mass of lightning flashes inside a single clap of thunder. In less than an hour, twenty-seven barricades seemed to rise out of the ground in the Halles quarter alone. At the center stood the famous house No. 50, the stronghold of Jeanne and her six hundred companions. With a barricade at Saint-Merry on one side and another in the Rue Maubuée on the other, it controlled three streets facing it: the Rue des Arcis, the Rue Saint-Martin, and the Rue Aubry-le-Boucher. The barricades set at right angles fell back, one from the Rue Montorgueil onto the Grande-Truanderie, the other from the Rue Geoffroy-Langevin onto the Rue Sainte-Avoye. And this does not even count the countless barricades in twenty other parts of Paris, in the Marais and at Mont-Sainte-Geneviève; one in the Rue Ménilmontant, where a porte-cochère could be seen torn from its hinges; another near the little bridge of the Hôtel-Dieu, made from an “écossais” that had been unharnessed and overturned, three hundred paces from the Prefecture of Police.

At the barricade on Rue des Ménétriers, a well-dressed man was handing out money to the workers. At the barricade on Rue Grenetat, a man on horseback appeared and gave the person who seemed to be in command what looked like a roll of silver. “Here,” he said, “this is for expenses, wine, and so on.” A fair-haired young man, without a cravat, moved from barricade to barricade carrying passwords. Another, with a drawn sword and a blue police cap on his head, posted sentries. Inside the barricaded area, wine shops and porters’ lodges had been turned into guardhouses. In every other respect, the riot was carried out with highly methodical military tactics. The narrow, uneven, winding streets, full of corners and turns, had been chosen perfectly; the Halles district in particular was a maze of streets more tangled than a forest. It was said that the Society of the Friends of the People had taken charge of directing the insurrection in the Quartier Sainte-Avoye. A man killed in Rue du Ponceau was searched, and a map of Paris was found on him.

What had really taken command of the uprising was a kind of strange, driving force in the air. The insurrection had suddenly thrown up barricades with one hand and, with the other, seized almost all the garrison’s positions. In less than three hours, like a line of gunpowder catching fire, the insurgents had swept in and occupied, on the right bank, the Arsenal, the mayoralty of the Place Royale, the whole Marais, the Popincourt arms factory, la Galiote, the Château-d’Eau, and all the streets near the Halles; on the left bank, the barracks of the Veterans, Sainte-Pélagie, Place Maubert, the powder magazine of the Deux-Moulins, and all the barriers. By five o’clock in the evening, they controlled the Bastille, the Lingerie, and the

Blancs-Manteaux; their scouts had reached the Place des Victoires and were threatening the Bank, the Petits-Pères barracks, and the Post Office. A third of Paris was in the hands of the rioters.

The fighting had begun on a vast scale everywhere. Because of house-to-house searches for weapons and the hurried looting of gunsmiths' shops, a battle that had started with stones soon continued with gunfire.

At about six in the evening, the Passage du Saumon turned into a battlefield. The uprising held one end, and the troops held the other. They fired from gate to gate. An onlooker—a dreamer, the author of this book—had gone there to see this volcano up close and found himself trapped in the passage between the two lines of fire. The only cover he had from the bullets was the bulge of the two half-columns that separated the shops, and he stayed in that precarious position for nearly half an hour.

Meanwhile, the call to arms was sounded. The National Guard armed itself in haste, the legions came out from the mayoral offices, and the regiments marched from their barracks. Opposite the Passage de l'Ancre, a drummer was stabbed with a dagger. Another, in the Rue du Cygne, was attacked by thirty young men, who smashed his drum and took his sword. Another was killed in the Rue Grenier-Saint-Lazare. In the Rue Michel-le-Comte, three officers fell dead one after another. In the Rue des Lombards, many Municipal Guards, once wounded, withdrew.

In front of the Cour-Batave, a detachment of National Guards found a red flag bearing the words: _Republican_ revolution, No. 127_. Was this truly a revolution?

The insurrection had turned the center of Paris into a vast, twisting, almost impenetrable citadel.

That was the heart of it; clearly, that was where the real issue lay. Everything else was only skirmishing. The proof that everything would be decided there was that no fighting had begun there yet.

In some regiments, the soldiers were unsure of themselves, which made the crisis even more frightening and uncertain. They remembered the public applause that had greeted the neutrality of the 53rd of the Line in July 1830. Two fearless men, tested in major wars, were in command: Marshal Lobau and General Bugeaud, with Bugeaud serving under Lobau. Huge patrols, made up of battalions of the Line surrounded by full companies of the National Guard and led by a police commissioner wearing his official sash, went out to scout the rebellious streets. The insurgents, for their part, posted lookouts at the corners of every open space and boldly sent patrols beyond the barricades. Each side watched the other. The Government, though it had an army at its disposal, hesitated. Night was almost falling, and the Saint-Merry alarm bell was beginning to ring. The Minister of War at the time, Marshal Soult, who had seen Austerlitz, looked on grimly.

These old soldiers of war, used to orderly maneuvers and relying only on tactics, that battlefield compass, are completely

thrown off when they face that vast, surging force called public anger.

The National Guards from the suburbs came rushing in, hurried and disorganized. A battalion of the 12th Light came running from Saint-Denis, the 14th of the Line arrived from Courbevoie, the batteries from the Military School had taken up position on the Carrousel, and cannons were coming down from Vincennes.

An emptiness spread around the Tuileries. Louis Philippe remained perfectly calm.

CHAPTER V—THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER OF PARIS

During the previous two years, as we have said, Paris had seen more than one insurrection. In general, nothing is stranger than how calm Paris looks during an uprising outside the rebellious districts. Paris gets used to anything very quickly—it is only a riot—and Paris has so many concerns of its own that it does not trouble itself much over so small a matter. Only cities of this size can present such scenes. Only such vast enclosed spaces can hold, at the same time, civil war and a strange, almost indescribable calm. Usually, when an insurrection begins, when the shopkeeper hears the drum, the call to arms, the general alarm, he is content to say:

“It seems there’s some sort of disturbance in the Rue Saint-Martin.”

Or simply:

“In the Faubourg Saint-Antoine.”

Often he adds, carelessly:

“Or somewhere around there.”

Later, when the heartbreaking, mournful uproar of musket fire and platoon volleys can be heard, the shopkeeper says:

“It’s heating up! Hallo, it’s heating up!”

A moment later, as the riot draws nearer and grows more intense, he hurriedly closes his shop and quickly puts on his uniform. In other words, he puts his goods out of danger and risks his own life.

Men fire in a square, in a passage, in a dead-end alley. They capture the barricade and lose it, then capture it again. Blood runs in the streets. Grape-shot tears through the fronts of houses. Bullets kill people in their beds. Corpses clog the roadway. A few streets away, you can hear billiard balls clicking in the cafés.

The theatres open and put on vaudevilles. Curious people laugh and chat only a few steps from streets filled with war. Hired carriages keep moving along. Passers-by are on their way to some dinner elsewhere in the city. Sometimes even in the very neighborhood where the fighting is happening.

In 1831, gunfire was halted to let a wedding party pass.

During the insurrection of 1839, in the Rue Saint-Martin, a frail little old man pushed a handcart topped with a scrap of tricolored cloth. In it were carafes filled with some kind of drink. He went back and forth from the barricade to the troops and from the troops to the barricade, offering glasses of cocoa to both sides with perfect impartiality—now to the Government, now to anarchy.

Nothing could be stranger, and this is the distinctive character of uprisings in Paris, something found in no other capital. It requires two things: the size of Paris and its gaiety. The city of Voltaire and Napoleon is needed for it.

On this occasion, however, during the armed uprising of June 5, 1832, the great city felt something that was perhaps stronger than itself. It was afraid.

Everywhere, even in the most distant and supposedly uninvolved quarters, doors, windows, and shutters were closed. The brave took up arms; the cowards hid. The busy, careless passer-by vanished. By four o'clock in the morning, many streets were empty.

Alarming reports were being shouted everywhere, and dire news spread from mouth to mouth: they were said to control the Bank; there were said to be six hundred of them in the Cloister of Saint-Merry alone, dug in and ready for battle inside the church; the line troops could not be trusted; Armand Carrel had gone to see Marshal Clausel, and the Marshal had told him, "Get a regiment first"; Lafayette was ill, but had still said to them, "I am with you. I will follow you wherever there is room for a chair"; everyone had to stay on guard; during the night, people would supposedly loot isolated houses in the deserted parts of Paris—here one could clearly recognize the imagination of the police, that Anne Radcliffe strain mixed into the Government; a battery had been set up in the Rue Aubry le Boucher; Lobau and Bugeaud were conferring, and at midnight, or at the latest by daybreak, four columns would march at once on the center of the uprising, the first from the Bastille, the second from the

Porte Saint-Martin, the third from the Grève, the fourth from the Halles; perhaps the troops would even evacuate Paris and fall back to the Champ-de-Mars; no one knew what was going to happen, but everyone agreed that this time it was serious.

People were preoccupied with Marshal Soult's hesitation. Why was he not attacking at once? He was clearly deep in thought. The old lion seemed to sense some unknown monster in the darkness.

Evening fell, and the theaters did not open. Patrols moved through the streets with an air of irritation. Passers-by were searched, and suspicious people were arrested. By nine o'clock, more than eight hundred people had been taken into custody. The Prefecture of Police was crowded with them; so were the Conciergerie and La Force.

At the Conciergerie in particular, the long vaulted passage called the Rue de Paris was covered with bundles of straw, and on them lay a mass of prisoners, to whom the man from Lyons, Lagrange, spoke boldly. All that straw stirred by all those men made a sound like a heavy rainstorm. Elsewhere, prisoners slept out in the open fields, heaped on top of one another.

Anxiety was everywhere, along with a kind of tremor that Paris was not used to.

People shut themselves inside their houses. Wives and mothers were anxious. Everywhere, you heard the same cry: "Ah! My God! He hasn't come home!" There was barely even the faint rumble of a carriage in the distance.

People stood in their doorways, listening to the rumors, the shouting, the uproar, the dull, confused noises, and the things people were saying: “It’s cavalry,” or, “Those are the caissons racing by,” along with the trumpets, the drums, the gunfire, and, above all, that mournful alarm bell from Saint-Merry.

They waited for the first cannon shot. Men suddenly appeared at street corners and vanished again, shouting, “Go home!” People hurried to bolt their doors. They asked, “How will all this end?” And as the darkness deepened, Paris seemed, moment by moment, to grow more mournful in the terrible glow of the revolt.

BOOK ELEVENTH—THE ATOM JOINS FORCES WITH THE HURRICANE

CHAPTER I—SOME EXPLANATIONS ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF GAVROCHE'S POETRY. THE INFLUENCE OF AN ACADEMICIAN ON THAT POETRY

At the moment when the insurrection, set off by the clash between the crowd and the military in front of the Arsenal, sent a surge both forward and backward through the mass of people following the hearse—the same mass that had, so to speak, pressed on the head of the procession all along the boulevards—a terrible recoil began. The crowd was thrown into confusion. Its ranks broke apart. Everyone ran, fled, scattered—some shouting for attack, others pale with fear. The great river of people that filled the boulevards split in an instant, spilled right and left, and poured through two hundred streets at once with the roar of a burst sewer.

At that moment, a ragged child was coming down Rue Ménilmontant with a branch of blooming laburnum in his hand, which he had just picked on the heights of Belleville, when he spotted an old holster pistol in the window of a bric-a-brac dealer's shop.

"Mother What's-your-name, I'm going to borrow your machine."

And he ran off with the pistol.

Two minutes later, a stream of frightened bourgeois fleeing through Rue Amelot and Rue Basse came upon the boy, waving his pistol and singing:

At night you can't see a thing; by day you see perfectly well. A bourgeois gets all worked up over some apocryphal writing. Practice virtue—tutu, pointed hat!44

It was little Gavroche, on his way to war.

On the boulevard, he noticed that the pistol had no trigger.

Who wrote that couplet that marked the rhythm of his march, and all the other songs he liked to sing now and then? We do not know. Who does know? Perhaps he did. In any case, Gavroche knew all the popular tunes going around, and he mixed in little bits of his own. A sharp-eyed street boy and a rascal, he made a potpourri out of the sounds of nature and the sounds of Paris. He blended the repertoire of the birds with the repertoire of the workshops. He knew thieves, a tribe close to his own. It seems he had spent three months apprenticed to a printer. One day he had carried out an errand for M. Baour-Lormian, one of the Forty. Gavroche was a street urchin with a taste for letters.

What is more, Gavroche had no idea that, when he offered the shelter of his elephant to two little boys on that wretchedly rainy night, he was playing Providence to his own brothers. His brothers in the evening, his father in the morning—that was what his night had been. At daybreak, after leaving the Rue des Ballets, he hurried back to the elephant, skillfully got the two boys out, shared with them a sort of breakfast he had managed

to invent, and then went off, leaving them in the care of that good mother, the street, which had raised him almost entirely. As he left them, he told them to meet him in the same place that evening, and gave them this farewell speech: “I’m breaking a cane—in other words, I’m cutting my stick, or, as they say at court, I’m clearing off. If you don’t find papa and mamma, youngsters, come back here tonight. I’ll rustle up some supper for you and give you a place to sleep.” The two children, picked up by some policeman and taken to a shelter, or stolen by some mountebank, or simply lost in that immense Chinese puzzle of Paris, did not come back. The lowest depths of the real social world are full of traces lost like these. Gavroche never saw them again. Ten or twelve weeks had passed since that night. More than once he scratched the back of his head and said, “Where the devil are my two children?”

Meanwhile, he had reached the Rue du Pont-aux-Choux, pistol in hand. He saw that only one shop in the street was still open, and, significantly enough, it was a pastry shop. It seemed like a heaven-sent chance to eat another apple turnover before stepping into the unknown. Gavroche stopped, felt around in his watch pocket, turned his pocket inside out, found nothing—not even a sou—and began to shout, “Help!”

It is difficult to resist the last cake.

Even so, Gavroche kept going.

Two minutes later he was in the Rue Saint-Louis. As he crossed the Rue du Parc-Royal, he felt obliged to make up for the apple turnover he had been unable to get, and treated himself to the

enormous pleasure of tearing down theatre posters in broad daylight.

A little farther on, when he caught sight of a group of well-fed people who looked like landowners, he shrugged his shoulders and tossed out this bitter philosophical comment as they went by:

“How fat those rich men are! They’re drunk! They do nothing but stuff themselves with fine dinners. Ask them what they do with their money. They don’t know. They eat it, that’s what they do! As much as their bellies can hold.”

CHAPTER II—GAVROCHE ON THE MOVE

Waving a pistol with no trigger in his hand out in the street felt so much like performing a public duty that Gavroche grew more excited by the minute. In between scraps of the Marseillaise that he was singing, he shouted:

“Everything’s going splendidly. My left paw hurts terribly, I’m completely wrecked with rheumatism, but I’m satisfied, citizens. All the bourgeois have to do is behave themselves, and I’ll sneeze subversive verses all over them. What are police spies? Dogs. And I’d love to have one of them at the end of my pistol. I’ve just come from the boulevard, my friends. It’s heating up there, it’s starting to boil, it’s simmering. Time to skim the pot. Forward march, men! Let impure blood flood the furrows! I give my days to my country; I shall never see my concubine again—Nini, finished, yes, Nini? But never mind! Long live joy! Let’s fight, crebleu! I’ve had enough of despotism.”

At that moment, a lancer of the National Guard was thrown when his horse fell. Gavroche set his pistol down on the pavement, helped the man up, and then helped get the horse back on its feet. After that, he picked up his pistol again and went on his way. In the Rue de Thorigny, everything was quiet and still. This indifference, so typical of the Marais, stood in sharp contrast to the huge uproar all around it. Four gossips were talking in a doorway.

Scotland has its trios of witches; Paris has its quartets of old gossips. And “Thou shalt be King” could have been flung at Bonaparte just as grimly in the Carrefour Baudoyer as it was at Macbeth on the heath of Armuyr. The croaking would have sounded almost the same.

The women gossiping in the Rue de Thorigny were concerned only with their own affairs. Three were portresses, and the fourth was a rag-picker with her basket on her back.

All four seemed to stand at the four corners of old age: feebleness, decline, ruin, and sadness.

The rag-picker was humble. In this little open-air society, the rag-picker is the one who greets others, and the portress is the one who acts superior. That is because of the refuse corner, which is rich or poor depending on the portresses’ wishes and the mood of whoever makes the heap. Even a broom can show kindness.

This rag-picker was a grateful soul, and she smiled—what a smile she gave!—at the three portresses. They were saying things like this:

“Ah, by the way, is your cat still bad-tempered?”

“Good heavens, cats are naturally dogs’ enemies, you know. It’s the dogs that suffer.”

“And people too.”

“But cat fleas don’t go after people.”

“That’s not the problem. Dogs are dangerous. I remember one year when there were so many dogs that they had to put notices in the newspapers. That was when there were those big sheep at the Tuileries pulling the little carriage of the King of Rome. Do you remember the King of Rome?”

“I liked the Duc de Bordeaux better.”

“I knew Louis XVIII. I prefer Louis XVIII.”

“Meat is terribly expensive, isn’t it, Mother Patagon?”

“Ah, don’t mention it. The butcher’s shop is dreadful. Absolutely dreadful—you can’t afford anything now except the cheapest cuts.”

At this point the rag-picker cut in:

“Ladies, business is slow. The trash heaps are pitiful. No one throws anything away anymore. They eat everything.”

“There are people poorer than you, la Vargoulême.”

“Ah, that’s true,” the rag-picker replied respectfully. “I have a trade.”

A pause followed, and then the rag-picker, giving in to that human urge to boast, added:

“When I get home in the morning, I go through my basket and sort everything. It makes piles all over my room. I put the rags in one basket, the cores and stalks in a bucket, the linen in my cupboard, the woolens in my chest of drawers, the old papers in the window corner, the things that are still 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," he said, "what do you mean by talking politics?"

A full broadside hit him at once: a fourfold howl.

"Here's another rascal."

"What's he got in his paw? A pistol?"

"I'd like to know what kind of beggar's brat this is."

"That kind of creature is never happy unless he's upsetting the authorities."

With scornful restraint, Gavroche limited his revenge to thumbing his nose at them.

The rag-picker cried out:

"You spiteful little barefoot wretch!"

The one called Patagon clasped her hands in horror.

"There's going to be trouble, that's for sure. The errand boy next door has a little pointed beard. I've seen him go by every day with a young woman in a pink bonnet on his arm. Today I saw him pass again, and he had a gun under his arm. Mame Bacheux says that last week there was a revolution at—at—at—where's the calf?—at Pontoise. And then there's that horrible rascal, right there, with his pistol! It seems the Célestins are full of pistols. What can the Government possibly do with good-for-nothings who can do nothing except invent ways to turn the world upside down, just when we had finally

begun to get a little peace again after all the disasters that have happened—good Lord!—to that poor queen whom I saw go by in the tumbril! And all this is going to make tobacco more expensive. It's outrageous! And I certainly mean to go and see him beheaded on the guillotine, the wretch!"

"You've got the sniffles, old lady," said Gavroche. "Blow your nose."

And he went on. When he reached the Rue Pavée, the ragpicker came back to mind, and he gave himself this little speech:

"You're wrong to insult the revolutionaries, Mother Dust-Heap-Corner. This pistol is for your benefit. It's so you can have better things to eat in your basket."

All at once he heard a shout behind him. It was the porter's wife, Patagon, who had followed him. From a distance she was shaking her fist at him and crying:

"You're nothing but a bastard."

"Oh, come now," said Gavroche, "I don't care a brass farthing about that!"

A little later he passed the Hôtel Lamoignon. There he made this appeal:

"Forward to battle!"

Then he was suddenly overcome by melancholy. He looked at his pistol with a reproachful expression, as though trying to calm it:

“I’m going away,” he said, “but you won’t!”

One dog can distract attention from another.45 Just then a very gaunt poodle came along. Gavroche felt sorry for him.

“My poor little dog,” he said, “you must have swallowed a barrel, because all the hoops are showing.”

Then he headed toward l’Orme-Saint-Gervais.

CHAPTER III—A HAIRDRESSER'S RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION

The respectable hairdresser who had chased the two little boys out of his shop—the same boys Gavroche had invited into the elephant's fatherly interior—was in his shop at that moment shaving an old Legion soldier who had served under the Empire. They were talking. As was only natural, the hairdresser had begun with the riot, then moved on to General Lamarque, and from Lamarque they had come to the Emperor. Out of that grew a conversation between barber and soldier that Prudhomme, had he been there, would no doubt have decorated with flourishes and titled: "Dialogue Between the Razor and the Sword."

"How did the Emperor ride, sir?" the barber asked.

"Badly. He didn't know how to fall, so he never fell."

"Did he have fine horses? He must have had magnificent horses!"

"The day he gave me my cross, I took notice of his mount. It was a racing mare, pure white. Her ears were set very wide apart, her saddle was deep, and she had a fine head marked with a black star, a very long neck, strong knees, prominent ribs, sloping shoulders, and powerful hindquarters. She stood a little over fifteen hands high."

“A handsome horse,” the hairdresser remarked.

“It was His Majesty’s mount.”

The hairdresser felt that, after that remark, a brief silence was appropriate, so he observed one, then continued:

“The Emperor was only wounded once, wasn’t he, sir?”

The old soldier answered in the calm, authoritative tone of a man who had been there:

“In the heel. At Ratisbon. I never saw him better dressed than he was that day. He was as neat as a brand-new coin.”

“And you, Mr. Veteran—you must have been wounded many times?”

“Me?” said the soldier. “Ah, nothing much. At Marengo I took two saber cuts to the back of the neck; at Austerlitz, a bullet in the right arm; at Jena, another in the left hip. At Friedland, a bayonet thrust—there. At the Moskowa, seven or eight lance wounds, wherever they happened to land. At Lutzen, a piece of shell crushed one of my fingers. Ah, and then at Waterloo, a biscaïen ball in the thigh. That’s all.”

“How splendid that is!” cried the hairdresser in lofty, dramatic tones. “To die on the battlefield! Honestly, instead of dying in bed from some illness, slowly, little by little every day, with drugs, poultices, syringes, and medicines, I’d rather take a cannonball in the belly!”

“You’re not very particular,” said the soldier.

He had barely finished speaking when a terrible crash shook the shop. The display window had suddenly shattered.

The wigmaker went pale.

“Ah, good God!” he cried. “It’s one of them!”

“What?”

“A cannonball.”

“Here it is,” said the soldier.

He picked up something rolling across the floor. It was a pebble.

The hairdresser ran to the broken window and saw Gavroche running away at full speed toward the Marché Saint-Jean. As he passed the hairdresser’s shop, Gavroche, still thinking about the two brats, had not been able to resist the urge to greet him, and had thrown a stone through his windowpanes.

“You see!” shrieked the hairdresser, who had gone from white to blue. “That boy comes back just to cause trouble for the sheer fun of it. What has anyone ever done to that gamin?”

CHAPTER IV—THE CHILD IS AMAZED AT THE OLD MAN

Meanwhile, in the Marché Saint-Jean, where the guard post had already been disarmed, Gavroche had just joined up with a band led by Enjolras, Courfeyrac, Combeferre, and Feuilly. They were armed, after a fashion. Bahorel and Jean Prouvaire had found them and added to the group. Enjolras carried a double-barreled hunting gun. Combeferre had a National Guard musket marked with his legion number, and two pistols in his belt, visible beneath his unbuttoned coat. Jean Prouvaire had an old cavalry musket, Bahorel a rifle, and Courfeyrac was waving a sword-cane with the blade drawn. Feuilly marched at their head with a bare sword in his hand, shouting, “Long live Poland!”

They reached the Quai Morland—without cravats, without hats, out of breath, drenched by the rain, and with lightning in their eyes. Gavroche calmly called out to them:

“Where are we going?”

“Come on,” said Courfeyrac.

Behind Feuilly came Bahorel—really, he didn’t so much march as leap along. In a riot, he was completely in his element. He wore a scarlet waistcoat and tossed out the kind of words that smash everything in their path. His waistcoat so startled one passer-by that the man cried out in confusion:

“Here come the reds!”

“The reds, the reds!” Bahorel shot back. “What a strange thing for a bourgeois to be afraid of. As for me, a poppy doesn’t make me tremble, and a little red cap doesn’t frighten me in the least. Take my advice, bourgeois: leave fear of red to horned cattle.”

He noticed, on a corner of the wall, the most harmless notice imaginable: a permission to eat eggs, a Lenten instruction addressed by the Archbishop of Paris to his “flock.”

Bahorel exclaimed:

“‘Flock’—a polite way of saying geese.”

And he tore the notice from the nail. That won Gavroche over completely. From that moment on, Gavroche began studying Bahorel.

“Bahorel,” said Enjolras, “you’re wrong. You should have left that notice alone. He isn’t the one we’re dealing with, and you’re wasting your anger for nothing. Save your ammunition. You must not fire outside the ranks with the soul any more than with a gun.”

“Each man in his own way, Enjolras,” Bahorel replied. “This bishop’s prose offends me; I want to eat eggs without needing permission. Your style is hot and cold; I’m enjoying myself. Besides, I’m not wasting my strength, I’m warming up; and if I tore down that notice, Hercle! it was only to sharpen my appetite.”

That word, Hercle, struck Gavroche. He looked for every chance to learn, and this tearer-down of posters had won his respect. He asked him:

“What does Hercle mean?”

Bahorel answered:

“It means ‘cursed name of a dog’ in Latin.”

Just then Bahorel spotted, at a window, a pale young man with a black beard watching them go by, probably a Friend of the A B C. He shouted to him:

“Quick, cartridges, para bellum.”

“A fine fellow, that’s certain,” said Gavroche, who now understood Latin.

A wild crowd went with them—students, artists, young men connected with the Cougourde of Aix, workers, dock laborers—armed with clubs and bayonets; some, like Combeferre, had pistols tucked into their trousers.

An old man, who looked extremely aged, was walking with the group.

He carried no weapon, and he hurried along so he would not fall behind, though he still had a thoughtful expression.

Gavroche noticed him:

“Keksekça?” he said to Courfeyrac.

“He’s an old fool.”

It was M. Mabeuf.

CHAPTER V—THE OLD MAN

Let us tell what had happened.

Enjolras and his friends had been on the Boulevard Bourdon, near the public warehouses, when the dragoons charged. Enjolras, Courfeyrac, and Combeferre were among those who turned into the Rue Bassompierre, shouting, “To the barricades!” In the Rue Lesdiguières they came upon an old man walking along. What caught their attention was that the good old fellow was weaving from side to side as if he were drunk. He was also carrying his hat in his hand, even though it had been raining all morning and was still coming down fairly hard at that moment. Courfeyrac recognized Father Mabeuf. He knew him because he had often gone with Marius as far as his door. Since he knew the old churchwarden-book-collector to be peaceful and more than timid, he was astonished to see him in the middle of that uproar, only a few steps from the cavalry charges, almost in the middle of a fusillade, bareheaded in the rain, wandering among the bullets. So he spoke to him, and the following exchange took place between the fiery insurgent and the eighty-year-old man:

“M. Mabeuf, go home.”

“Why?”

“There’s going to be trouble.”

“Good.”

“Sword thrusts and gunfire, M. Mabeuf.”

“Good.”

“Cannon fire.”

“Good. Where are the rest of you going?”

“We’re going to bring down the government.”

“Good.”

And he had gone after them. From that moment on, he did not say a word. His step suddenly grew steady. Workmen offered him their arms, but he refused with a shake of the head. He moved almost to the front of the column, walking like a man on the march, with the face of a man asleep.

"What a fierce old man!" the students muttered. Word spread through the group that he had once been a member of the Convention—an old regicide. The crowd had turned into the Rue de la Verrerie.

Little Gavroche marched in front, singing that deafening song that made him seem like a kind 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 headed toward Saint-Merry.

CHAPTER VI—NEW RECRUITS

The band grew larger by the minute. Near the Rue des Billettes, a tall man with graying hair joined them. Courfeyrac, Enjolras, and Combeferre noticed his bold, daring air, but none of them knew him. Gavroche, busy singing, whistling, humming, running ahead, and pounding on the shop shutters with the butt of his pistol, which had no trigger, paid him no attention.

By chance, in the Rue de la Verrerie, they passed in front of Courfeyrac’s door.

"This works out perfectly," said Courfeyrac. "I forgot my purse, and I’ve lost my hat."

He left the crowd and sprinted up to his room. He grabbed an old hat and his purse.

He also took a large square trunk, about the size of a big valise, which he had hidden under his dirty linen.

As he ran back downstairs, the portress called out to him:

“Monsieur de Courfeyrac!”

“What’s your name, portress?”

The portress stared at him in confusion.

“Why, you know very well. I’m the concierge; my name is Mother Veuvain.”

“Well then, if you call me Monsieur de Courfeyrac again, I’ll call you Mother de Veuvain. Now speak. What is it? What do you want?”

“Someone wants to speak to you.”

“Who is it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Where is he?”

“In my lodge.”

“The devil!” Courfeyrac exclaimed.

“But the person has been waiting for you to come back for more than an hour,” said the portress.

At that moment, a pale, thin, small, freckled young workman came out of the lodge. He wore a torn blouse and patched corduroy trousers, and looked more like a girl dressed as a man than a man. In a voice that was not at all like a woman’s, he said to Courfeyrac:

“Monsieur Marius, if you please.”

“He isn’t here.”

“Will he be back this evening?”

“I know nothing about that.”

And Courfeyrac added:

“As for me, I won’t be coming back.”

The young man looked at him steadily and said:

“Why not?”

“Because.”

“Then where are you going?”

“What business is that of yours?”

“Would you like me to carry your trunk for you?”

“I’m going to the barricades.”

“Would you like me to come with you?”

“If you like,” Courfeyrac replied. “The street is free; the paving stones belong to everyone.”

He ran off to rejoin his friends. Once he was back with them, he handed the coffer to one of them to carry. Barely fifteen minutes later, he saw the young man, who had in fact followed them.

A crowd does not go exactly where it means to go. As we have said, it is swept along like something caught in a gust of wind. They went past Saint-Merry and found themselves in the Rue Saint-Denis without quite knowing how they had got there.

CHAPTER I—THE HISTORY OF CORINTHE FROM ITS FOUNDING

Today, when Parisians enter the Rue Rambuteau from the end near the Halles, they may notice on their right, opposite the Rue Mondétour, a basket-maker’s shop with a sign showing a basket shaped like Napoleon the Great, bearing this inscription:

Napoleon Is Made Entirely of Willow

they have no idea of the terrible scenes that took place on that very spot less than thirty years ago.

That was where the Rue de la Chanvrerie stood, spelled Chanverrerie in old deeds, and where the famous tavern called Corinthe– was located.

The reader will remember what has already been said about the barricade built at this spot, a barricade that was, incidentally, overshadowed by the Saint-Merry barricade. It is on this famous barricade in the Rue de la Chanvrerie, now sunk into deep obscurity, that we are about to cast a little light.

For clarity, let us go back to the simple method we already used for Waterloo. Anyone who wants a fairly accurate picture of the houses that stood at that time near the Pointe Saint-Eustache, at the northeast corner of the Paris markets, where the opening of Rue Rambuteau lies today, need only imagine a capital N. Its top touches Rue Saint-Denis, and its base rests on the Halles. Its two upright strokes are Rue de la Grande-Truanderie and Rue de la Chanvrerie, and its crossbar is Rue de la Petite-Truanderie. The old Rue Mondétour crossed all three strokes of this N at the most crooked angles. Thus, the twisting confusion of these four streets was enough to create, within a space of three square fathoms, between the Halles and Rue Saint-Denis on one side, and Rue du Cygne and Rue des Prêcheurs on the other, seven blocks of houses. They were

oddly divided, unequal in size, set at cross angles and at random, and barely separated, like stones in a dock, by narrow gaps.

We say narrow gaps because no better phrase can convey those dark, cramped, many-cornered alleys lined with eight-story houses. The buildings were so dilapidated that in Rue de la Chanvrerie and Rue de la Petite-Truanderie their facades had to be propped up with beams stretching from one house to another. The street itself was narrow and the gutter wide. Pedestrians walked on pavement that was always wet, passing little stalls like cellars, huge posts bound with iron bands, enormous piles of refuse, and doorways fitted with massive old iron grilles. Rue Rambuteau has swept all that away.

The name Mondétour wonderfully captures the winding turns of that whole cluster of streets. A little farther on, those twists were expressed even more vividly by Rue Pirouette, which joined Rue Mondétour.

Anyone coming from Rue Saint-Denis into Rue de la Chanvrerie saw the street slowly narrow ahead of them, as if they had stepped into a long funnel. At the end of this very short street, a high row of houses blocked the way toward the Halles. It would have seemed like a dead end if, to the right and left, two dark openings had not offered a way out. This was Rue Mondétour, which on one side led into Rue de Prêcheurs, and on the other into Rue du Cygne and Petite-Truanderie. At the end of this kind of cul-de-sac, at the corner of the opening on the right, stood a house shorter than the others, jutting out into the street like a cape. In this two-story house, a famous wine shop had been

cheerfully established three hundred years earlier. The tavern filled with lively noise the very spot that old Theophilus described in the following couplet:

There swings the dreadful skeleton Of a poor lover who hanged himself.47

The location was a good one, and one tavern-keeper after another prospered there, passing the place down from father to son.

In the time of Mathurin Regnier, this cabaret was called the _Pot-aux-Roses_. Since rebuses were fashionable then, its sign showed a post (_poteau_) painted pink. In the last century, the worthy Natoire—one of those fanciful masters now looked down on by the rigid school—had often drunk himself merry in this wine shop, at the very table where Regnier had once drunk deeply. Out of gratitude, he painted a cluster of Corinth grapes on the pink post. Delighted, the cabaret keeper changed the sign and had these words placed beneath the cluster in gold letters: “At the Bunch of Corinth Grapes” (_“Au Raisin de Corinthe”_). That is how the name Corinthe arose. Nothing is more natural to drunkards than shortening words and phrases. Ellipsis is the zigzag of speech. Little by little, Corinthe replaced the Pot-aux-Roses. The last owner in the line, Father Hucheloup, no longer even knew the old story and had the post painted blue.

On the ground floor was a room with the bar. On the first floor was another room with a billiard table. A wooden spiral staircase rose through the ceiling. There was wine on the tables, smoke

staining the walls, and candles burning in broad daylight—such was the character of this cabaret. A stairway with a trapdoor in the lower room led down to the cellar. On the second floor were the rooms of the Hucheloup family. You reached them by a staircase that was more like a ladder, and the only entrance was a private door opening from the large first-floor room. Under the roof, in two attic garrets, were the servants' little nests. The kitchen occupied the ground floor along with the taproom.

Father Hucheloup may possibly have been born to be a chemist, but in fact he was a cook; people did not come to his wine-shop only to drink, they also came to eat. Hucheloup had invented an excellent dish that could be found nowhere else but in his house: stuffed carp, which he called _carpes au gras_. People ate it by the light of a tallow candle or a lamp from the time of Louis XVI., at tables covered not with tablecloths but with sheets of waxed cloth nailed in place. People came from far away for it. One fine morning, Hucheloup decided to announce this "specialty" to passers-by. He dipped a brush into a pot of black paint, and since he was his own kind of spelling master just as he was his own kind of cook, he improvised this remarkable sign on his wall:

Carpes Ho Gras.

One winter, rainstorms and showers took it into their heads to erase the S at the end of the first word and the G at the beginning of the third. This was what remained:

Carpe Ho Ras.

With time and rain to help it along, a modest advertisement for food had turned into a profound piece of advice.

So it happened that, though Father Hucheloup knew no French, he understood Latin; that he had drawn philosophy out of his kitchen; and that, while merely trying to do away with Lent, he had matched Horace. And the remarkable thing was that it also meant: “Come into my wine-shop.”

None of this exists anymore. The labyrinth of Mondétour was torn open and laid wide in 1847, and by now it probably no longer exists at all. The Rue de la Chanvrerie and Corinthe have disappeared beneath the paving of the Rue Rambuteau.

As we have already said, Corinthe was the meeting place—if not quite the headquarters—of Courfeyrac and his friends. Grantaire was the one who had discovered Corinthe. He first went there because of the _Carpe horas_, and he came back because of the _Carpes au gras_. There they drank, ate, and shouted. They paid little, paid badly, or did not pay at all, yet they were always welcome. Father Hucheloup was a cheerful host.

Hucheloup, that likable man, as we have just said, was a wine-shop keeper with a moustache—an entertaining combination. He always looked bad-tempered. He seemed eager to intimidate his customers, grumbled at people as they came in, and looked more like a man picking a fight than one serving soup. And yet, we repeat, everyone was always

welcome there. That odd trait drew customers to his shop and brought him young men who said to one another, “Come hear Father Hucheloup growl.” He had once been a fencing master. Then, without warning, he would burst into laughter. He had a booming voice and was a good-hearted man. Beneath his tragic exterior was something comic. Nothing pleased him more than to give you a fright, much like those snuffboxes shaped like pistols—the bang makes you sneeze.

Mother Hucheloup, his wife, was bearded and very plain.

Around 1830, Father Hucheloup died. With him vanished the secret of stuffed carp. His inconsolable widow went on running the wine-shop. But the cooking declined and became dreadful; the wine, which had always been bad, became appallingly bad. Even so, Courfeyrac and his friends kept going to Corinthe—out of pity, as Bossuet said.

Widow Hucheloup was short of breath, misshapen, and fond of rustic memories. Her pronunciation gave those memories a charm they would not otherwise have had. She had her own way of saying things, and it added flavor to her recollections of the village and of her youth. In earlier days, she said, it had been her greatest pleasure to hear the _loups-de-gorge_ (_rouges-gorges_) _chanter dans les ogrepines_ (_aubépines_)—to hear the redbreasts singing in the hawthorn trees.

The upstairs hall, where “the restaurant” was located, was a large, long room cluttered with stools, chairs, benches, tables, and an old billiard table that was warped and half-ruined. You reached it by a spiral staircase that ended in the corner of the

room at a square opening like a ship's hatch.

Lit by a single narrow window and a lamp that was always burning, the room felt like an attic. Every piece of furniture with four legs looked as if it really had only three. The only decoration on the whitewashed walls was this 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

Someone had scrawled it on the wall in charcoal.

Mame Hucheloup, who was a very good match for the portrait, passed back and forth in front of this quatrain from morning to night with complete calm. Two servant girls, Matelote and Gibelotte,49 who had never been known by any other names, helped Mame Hucheloup set on the tables jugs of bad wine and the various broths served to hungry customers in earthenware bowls. Matelote—large, plump, red-haired, and loud—the favorite former sultana of the late Hucheloup, was uglier than any mythological monster, whatever one might choose; still, since a servant should always remain behind her mistress, she was less ugly than Mame Hucheloup. Gibelotte, tall, slight, and pale with a watery pallor, with dark circles under her eyes and drooping eyelids, always looked languid and tired. She suffered from what might be called chronic weariness. She was the first up in the house and the last to go to bed, and she waited on everyone, even the other maid, silently and gently, smiling

through her exhaustion with a vague, sleepy smile.

Before entering the restaurant room, a visitor would read this line, written on the door in chalk by Courfeyrac:

Régale si tu peux et mange si tu l’oses.50

CHAPTER II—EARLY MERRIMENT

As the reader already knows, Laigle lived with Joly more than anywhere else. He had a place to stay there, the way a bird has a perch on a branch. The two friends lived together, ate together, and slept together. They shared everything, even Musichetta, to a certain extent. They were what the lesser monks who accompany monks are called: _bini_. On the morning of June 5, they went to Corinthe for breakfast. Joly, who was badly congested, had a cold that Laigle was starting to catch as well. Laigle's coat was worn thin, but Joly was neatly dressed.

It was about nine o'clock in the morning when they opened the door of Corinthe.

They went up to the first floor.

Matelote and Gibelotte welcomed them.

"Oysters, cheese, and ham," said Laigle.

Then they sat down at a table.

The wine-shop was empty; no one was there but them.

Since Gibelotte knew Joly and Laigle, she set a bottle of wine on the table.

While they were busy with their first oysters, a head appeared in the stairway opening, and a voice said:

“I was just passing by. From the street I caught the delicious smell of Brie cheese, so I came in.” It was Grantaire.

Grantaire took a stool and pulled up to the table.

At the sight of Grantaire, Gibelotte put two bottles of wine on the table.

That made three.

“Are you going to drink those two bottles?” Laigle asked Grantaire.

Grantaire replied:

“Everyone else is clever; you alone are innocent. Two bottles have never yet amazed a man.”

The others had started by eating; Grantaire started by drinking. He quickly swallowed half a bottle.

“So you’ve got a hole in your stomach?” Laigle said again.

“And you’ve got one in your elbow,” said Grantaire.

Then, after emptying his glass, he added:

“Ah, by the way, Laigle of the funeral speech, your coat is old.”

“I should hope so,” Laigle shot back. “That’s why my coat and I get along so well. It has taken on all my creases. It doesn’t pinch me anywhere. It’s shaped itself to all my deformities and moves with me in everything I do. I only notice it because it keeps me warm. Old coats are just like old friends.”

“That’s true,” Joly broke in, jumping into the conversation. “An old goat is an old abi” (_ami_, friend).

“Especially when it comes from a man with his head all stuffed up,” said Grantaire.

“Grantaire,” Laigle asked, “have you just come from the boulevard?”

“No.”

“Joly and I have just seen the head of the procession go by.”

“It’s a marvelous sight,” said Joly.

“How quiet this street is!” Laigle exclaimed. “Who would guess that Paris is being turned upside down? You can see so clearly that this used to be nothing but convents. In this neighborhood! Du Breul and Sauval give a list of them, and so does the Abbé Lebeuf. They were all around here. They were everywhere: booted and barefoot, shaven and bearded, gray, black, white, Franciscans, Minims, Capuchins, Carmelites, Little Augustines, Great Augustines, old Augustines—there was no end to them.”

“Let’s not talk about monks,” Grantaire cut in. “It makes you want to scratch yourself.”

Then he cried out:—

“Ugh! I’ve just swallowed a bad oyster. Now my hypochondria is taking hold of me again. The oysters are bad, the servants are ugly. I hate the whole human race. I just came down the Rue Richelieu, past the big public library. That heap of oyster shells they call a library is disgusting even to think about. What paper!

What ink! What scribbling! And all of it written down! What scoundrel was it who said man was a featherless biped?51 And then I ran into a pretty girl I know, beautiful as spring itself, fit to be called Floréal. She is delighted, enchanted, as happy as the angels, because some miserable creature yesterday—a dreadful banker covered with smallpox scars—was pleased to take a liking to her! Alas! a woman keeps watch for a protector as much as for a lover; cats hunt mice as well as birds. Two months ago that young woman was virtuous in an attic. She fastened little brass rings into the eyelets of corsets—what do you call that? She sewed, she had a camp bed, she lived beside a flowerpot, and she was content. Now she is a banker's lady. The change happened last night. I met the victim this morning in the highest spirits. The horrible thing is that the hussy is just as pretty today as she was yesterday. Her financier has left no mark on her face. Roses have this advantage—or disadvantage—over women: when caterpillars have been at them, you can see the traces. Ah! there is no morality on earth. I call the myrtle to witness, the symbol of love; the laurel, the symbol of glory; the olive, that fool, the symbol of peace; the apple tree, which came very near getting Adam into a quarrel with its seeds; and the fig tree, the grandfather of petticoats. As for right, do you know what right is? The Gauls want Clusium. Rome protects Clusium and asks what wrong Clusium has done them. Brennus answers: 'The wrong that Alba did you, the wrong that Fidenæ did you, the wrong that the Æques, the Volsci, and the Sabines did you. They were your neighbors. The Clusians are ours. We understand neighborliness exactly as you do. You stole 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 crawl.”

He held out his glass to Joly, who filled it. Then he drank and went on, scarcely interrupted by that glass of wine, which no one—not even he himself—had really noticed:

“Brennus, who captures Rome, is called an eagle; the banker who captures the grisette is called an eagle too. There is no more modesty in one than in the other. So we believe in nothing. There is only one reality: drink. Whether you favor the lean cock, like the Canton of Uri, or the fat cock, like the Canton of Glaris, what does it matter? Drink. You talk to me about the boulevard, about that procession, _et cætera, et cætera_. Well then, are we going to have another revolution? I’m amazed at how short of resources the good God seems to be. He has to keep greasing the wheels of events every moment. Something jams, it won’t move—quick, a revolution! The good God always has his hands black with cart-grease. If I were in his place, I’d keep things simple. I wouldn’t have to wind up my machine every minute. I’d guide the human race in a straight line. I’d weave things together thread by thread without ever breaking the strand. I’d have no provisional measures, no emergency stock of miracles. What the rest of you call progress moves forward by two engines: men and events. But unfortunately, from time to time, the exceptional becomes necessary. The ordinary cast is not enough, either for events or for men. Among men, geniuses are needed; among events, revolutions. Great accidents are the rule. The order of things cannot do without

them. And judging by the appearance of comets, one might almost think that Heaven itself needs special performers for the show. Just when no one expects it, God pastes a meteor onto the wall of the sky. Some strange star appears, underlined with an enormous tail. And that brings about the death of Cæsar. Brutus strikes him with a knife, and God strikes him with a comet. _Crac_—and there is an aurora borealis, there is a revolution, there is a great man; ’93 in huge letters, Napoleon standing guard, the comet of 1811 at the top of the bill. Ah, what a splendid blue theater, studded with sudden flashes! Boum! Boum! An extraordinary spectacle! Look up, fools. Everything is in disorder, the stars no less than the drama. Good God, it is too much and not enough. These resources, borrowed from exception, look like magnificence, but they also look like poverty. My friends, Providence has been reduced to expedients. What does a revolution prove? That God is in a quandary. He stages a _coup_ d’état_ because he, God himself, has not been able to make both ends meet. In fact, this confirms my suspicions about Jehovah’s finances. When I see so much distress in heaven and on earth—from the bird without a grain of millet to myself without an income of a hundred thousand livres—when I see human destiny worn threadbare, and even royal destiny in rags, witness the Prince de Condé hanged; when I see winter, which is nothing but a tear in the zenith through which the wind blows; when I see so many tatters even in the brand-new purple of morning on the hilltops; when I see drops of dew, those fake pearls; when I see frost, that cheap paste; when I see humanity torn to pieces and events patched together; when I see so many spots on the sun and so many

holes in the moon; when I see so much misery everywhere, I begin to suspect that God is not rich. The appearance is there, certainly, but I feel he is short of money. He gives us a revolution the way a shopkeeper with an empty cashbox gives a ball. God must not be judged by appearances. Beneath the gilding of heaven, I see a poverty-stricken universe. Creation is bankrupt. That is why I am dissatisfied. Here it is the 4th of June, and it is almost night. Since this morning I have been waiting for daylight to arrive. It has not arrived, and I am willing to bet it won't arrive all day. That is the kind of inaccuracy you get from an underpaid clerk. Yes, everything is badly arranged. Nothing matches anything else. This old world is warped all through. I stand with the opposition. Everything goes wrong. The universe is a tease. It is like children: those who want them have none, and those who do not want them have them. In short, I am annoyed. Besides, Laigle de Meaux, that bald head, offends my eyes. It humiliates me to think that I am the same age as that bald fellow. Still, I criticize, but I do not insult. The universe is what it is. I speak here without malice, only to ease my conscience. Receive, Eternal Father, the assurance of my highest consideration. Ah, by all the saints of Olympus and all the gods of paradise, I was not made to be a Parisian—that is, to keep bouncing forever like a shuttlecock between one crowd of idlers and another crowd of revelers. I was made to be a Turk, watching oriental houris all day long, watching those exquisite Egyptian dances, as sensual as the dream of a chaste man; or a Beauceron peasant; or a Venetian gentleman surrounded by ladies; or a petty German prince, supplying half a foot-soldier to the Germanic Confederation and spending his free time drying

his breeches on his hedge—that is to say, on his frontier. Those are the roles I was born for! Yes, I said a Turk, and I will not take it back. I do not understand why people are so ready to speak ill of Turks. Mohammed had his good points. Respect the inventor of seraglios with houris and paradises with odalisques! Let us not insult Mohammedanism, the only religion decorated with a hen-roost! Now then, I insist on a drink. The earth is one vast piece of stupidity. And apparently all those idiots are going to fight, smash each other's faces, and slaughter one another in the heart of summer, in the month of June, when they could be walking off with a pretty creature on their arm and breathing in the great heaps of fresh-cut hay in the meadows! Really, people commit far too many follies. An old broken lantern I just saw in a junk dealer's shop has given me an idea: it is time to enlighten the human race. Yes, here I am sad again. That is what comes of swallowing an oyster and a revolution the wrong way! I am becoming melancholy once more. Oh, what a dreadful old world. People struggle, drive each other out, sell themselves, kill each other, and then get used to it!"

And after that burst of eloquence, Grantaire was seized by a coughing fit, which he had thoroughly earned.

"Speaking of revolution," said Joly, "it is plainly abberent that Barius is in lub."

"Does anyone know with whom?" Laigle asked.

"Yes."

"No?"

“Yes! I’m telling you.”

“Marius’s love affairs!” cried Grantaire. “I can picture them. Marius is a fog, so of course he must have found himself a mist. Marius belongs to the breed of poets. And when you say poet, you mean fool, madman, _Tymbræus Apollo_. Marius and his Marie, or his Marion, or his Maria, or his Mariette. What a strange pair of lovers they must make. I know exactly what it is like. Raptures so deep they forget to kiss. Chaste on earth, united in heaven. They are souls burdened with senses. They live among the stars.”

Grantaire was beginning his second bottle, and possibly his second speech as well, when a new figure appeared through the square opening at the top of the stairs. It was a boy not yet ten years old, ragged, very small, sallow, with a curious face, lively eyes, a huge mass of hair soaked by the rain, and an air of cheerful contentment.

Without hesitation, the child chose among the three and went straight to Laigle de Meaux.

“Are you Monsieur Bossuet?”

“That’s my nickname,” Laigle replied. “What do you want with me?”

“This. A tall blond fellow on the boulevard said to me, ‘Do you know Mother Hucheloup?’ I said, ‘Yes, Rue Chanvrerie, the old man’s widow.’ Then he said, ‘Go there. You’ll find M. Bossuet there. Tell him from me: “A B C.”’ They’re playing a joke on you, aren’t they? He gave me ten sous.”

“Joly, lend me ten sous,” said Laigle; then, turning to Grantaire, “Grantaire, lend me ten sous.”

That made twenty sous, which Laigle handed to the boy.

“Thank you, sir,” said the urchin.

“What is your name?” Laigle asked.

“Navet, Gavroche’s friend.”

“Stay with us,” said Laigle.

“Have breakfast with us,” said Grantaire.

The child replied:

“I can’t. I belong in the procession. I’m the one who has to shout, ‘Down with Polignac!’”

And with a long scrape of his foot behind him—the most respectful salute imaginable—he took his leave.

When the child had gone, Grantaire spoke up:

“That is the purebred gamin. There are a great many varieties of the 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 a paint-grinder, the tradesman’s gamin is called an errand-boy, the courtesan’s gamin is called the minion, the kingly gamin is called the dauphin, the god gamin is called the bambino.”

Meanwhile, Laigle was thinking. Half aloud, he said:

“A B C—that is to say, the burial of Lamarque.”

“The tall blond one,” Grantaire remarked, “is Enjolras, and he is sending you a warning.”

“Shall we go?” Bossuet burst out.

“It’s raining,” said Joly. “I have sworn to go through fire, but not through water. I don’t want to catch a cold.”

“I shall stay here,” said Grantaire. “I prefer breakfast to a hearse.”

“Conclusion: we stay,” said Laigle. “Well then, let us drink. Besides, we may miss the funeral without missing the riot.”

“Ah! The riot—now I’m with you!” cried Joly.

Laigle rubbed his hands.

“Now we are going to touch up the revolution of 1830. The truth is, it pinches the people at the seams.”

“I do not think much of your revolution,” said Grantaire. “I do not detest this Government. It is the crown softened by a cotton nightcap. It is a sceptre that ends in an umbrella. In fact, with today’s weather, Louis Philippe might put his royalty to use in two ways: he could point the sceptre end at the people and open the umbrella end against heaven.”

The room was dark. Great clouds had just finished blotting out the daylight. There was no one in the wine-shop or in the street; everyone had gone off “to watch events.”

“Is it noon or midnight?” cried Bossuet. “You can’t see your hand in front of your face. Gibelotte, bring a light.”

Grantaire was drinking with a melancholy air.

“Enjolras despises me,” he muttered. “Enjolras said, ‘Joly is ill, Grantaire is drunk.’ He sent Navet to Bossuet. If he had come for me, I would have gone with him. So much the worse for Enjolras! I won’t go to his funeral.”

Once they had made that decision, Bossuet, Joly, and Grantaire did not leave the wine-shop. By two o’clock in the afternoon, the table where they sat was covered with empty bottles. Two candles were burning on it, one in a flat copper candlestick that had turned completely green, the other stuck in the neck of a cracked carafe. Grantaire had drawn Joly and Bossuet into drinking wine; Bossuet and Joly had drawn Grantaire back toward good spirits.

As for Grantaire, he had gone beyond wine, that merely moderate giver of dreams, ever since midday. Among serious drinkers, wine has only a conventional reputation. In drunkenness, in fact, there is white magic and black magic; wine is only white magic. Grantaire was a bold drinker of dreams. The dark gulf of a terrible drunken fit opened before him, and instead of stopping him, it drew him on. He had left the bottle for the beer-glass. The beer-glass is the abyss. Since he had neither opium nor hashish at hand, and wanted to fill his brain with twilight, he had turned to that dreadful mixture of brandy, stout, and absinthe, which produces the most terrible lethargy. From these three vapors—beer, brandy, and

absinthe—the lead of the soul is made. They are three attendants; the heavenly butterfly is drowned in them. In their filmy smoke, dimly taking shape like a bat's wing, three silent furies are formed: Nightmare, Night, and Death, hovering over the sleeping Psyche.

Grantaire had not yet reached that miserable stage; far from it. He was wildly cheerful, and Bossuet and Joly answered in kind. They clinked glasses. To his odd way of stressing words and ideas, Grantaire added a peculiar style of gesture. He rested his left fist on his knee with great dignity, his arm bent at a right angle, and with his cravat untied, sitting astride a stool, his full glass in his right hand, he hurled solemn words at the big maidservant Matelote:

"Throw open the palace doors! Let everyone be a member of the French Academy, with the right to embrace Madame Hucheloup. Let us drink."

Then, turning to Madame Hucheloup, he added:

"Woman, ancient and sanctified by long use, come closer so I may behold you!"

And Joly cried out:

"Matelote and Gibelotte, dod't gib Grantaire anything more to drink. Since this feast began, in reckless extravagance, he has already swallowed up two francs and ninety-five centibes."

And Grantaire started up again:

“Who has been taking down the stars without my permission and setting them on the table as candles?”

Bossuet, though thoroughly drunk, remained perfectly calm.

He was sitting on the sill of the open window, letting the falling rain soak his back, and watching his two friends.

Suddenly he heard an uproar behind him—hurried footsteps and cries of “To arms!” He turned and saw Enjolras in the Rue Saint-Denis, at the end of the Rue de la Chanvrerie, a gun in his hand; Gavroche with his pistol; Feuilly with his sword; Courfeyrac with his sword; Jean Prouvaire with his blunderbuss; Combeferre with his gun; Bahorel with his gun; and behind them the whole armed, turbulent crowd following in their wake.

The Rue de la Chanvrerie was no more than a gunshot in length. Bossuet cupped his hands around his mouth like a speaking trumpet and shouted:

“Courfeyrac! Courfeyrac! Hohée!”

Courfeyrac heard the call, spotted Bossuet, and came a few steps into the Rue de la Chanvrerie, shouting, “What do you want?” just as Bossuet shouted back, “Where are you going?”

“To build a barricade,” Courfeyrac replied.

“Then here! This is a good spot! Build it here!”

“You’re right, Aigle,” said Courfeyrac.

And at a signal from Courfeyrac, the crowd rushed into the Rue de la Chanvrerie.

CHAPTER III—NIGHT BEGINS TO FALL ON GRANTAIRE

The location was, in fact, perfectly suited to their purpose. The entrance to the street opened wide, while the far end narrowed into a dead-end pocket. Corinthe formed a natural obstacle, and Rue Mondétour could easily be barricaded on both the right and the left. That meant no attack could come except from Rue Saint-Denis—that is, from the front and in plain view. Bossuet surveyed it all with the broad, strategic eye of a fasting Hannibal.

The whole street was seized with terror when the mob burst in. Every passerby vanished at once. In a flash, behind them and on both sides, shops, stables, cellar doors, windows, blinds, attic skylights, and shutters of every kind were slammed shut, from the ground floor to the rooftops. One frightened old woman fastened a mattress in front of her window with two clothes poles used for drying linen, hoping to soften the impact of musket fire. Only the wine-shop remained open, and for a very good reason: the mob had rushed into it. “Ah, my God! Ah, my God!” sighed Mother Hucheloup.

Bossuet had gone down to meet Courfeyrac.

Joly, who had taken his place at the window, cried out:

“Courfeyrac, you should have brought an umbrella. You’re going to catch cold.”

Meanwhile, in just a few minutes, twenty iron bars had been torn from the grated front of the wine-shop, and ten fathoms of the street had been stripped of paving stones. Gavroche and Bahorel stopped and overturned the cart of a lime dealer named Anceau as it passed. The cart held three barrels of lime, and they set them beneath the piles of paving stones. Enjolras lifted the cellar trap, and all of Widow Hucheloup's empty casks were used to support the lime barrels on the sides. Feuilly, whose fingers were skilled at painting the delicate sticks of fans, reinforced the barrels and the cart with two huge heaps of rough stone blocks—blocks improvised like everything else and obtained no one knew from where. The beams used as braces were torn from the fronts of neighboring houses and laid across the casks. By the time Bossuet and Courfeyrac turned around, half the street was already blocked by a barricade taller than a man. No one builds by tearing down quite like the people.

Matelote and Gibelotte had joined the workers. Gibelotte went back and forth carrying loads of debris. Even her weariness helped the barricade along. She served the barricade the way she might have served wine, with a drowsy air.

An omnibus pulled past the end of the street, drawn by two white horses.

Bossuet strode across the paving stones and ran to it. He stopped the driver, made the passengers get out, offered his hand to "the ladies," sent the conductor away, and came back leading the vehicle and the horses by the bridle.

“Omnibuses,” he said, “do not pass the Corinthe. _Non licet omnibus adire Corinthum_.”

A moment later, the horses were unharnessed and wandered off as they pleased down the Rue Mondétour, while the omnibus, tipped onto its side, completed the barrier across the street.

Mame Hucheloup, badly shaken, had taken refuge on the first floor.

Her eyes were unfocused, staring without seeing anything, and she wept quietly. Her terror was so great that even her screams could not force their way out.

“The end of the world has come,” she muttered.

Joly planted a kiss on Mame Hucheloup’s fat, red, wrinkled neck and said to Grantaire, “My dear fellow, I have always considered a woman’s neck an infinitely delicate thing.”

But Grantaire rose to the heights of dithyrambic excitement. Matelote had gone up to the first floor again; Grantaire seized her around the waist and burst into long peals of laughter at the window.

“Matelote is plain!” he cried. “Matelote looks like ugliness out of a dream! Matelote is a chimera. Here is the secret of her birth: one fine morning, a Gothic Pygmalion who made gargoyles for cathedrals fell in love with one of them—the most hideous one of all. He begged Love to bring it to life, and Matelote was the result. Look at her, citizens! Her hair is the color of chromate of lead, like Titian’s mistress, and she is a good girl. I guarantee

she will fight well. Every good girl has a hero inside her. As for Mother Hucheloup, she is an old soldier. Look at her moustache! She inherited it from her husband. A hussar, no less! She will fight too. Those two alone will strike terror into the heart of the banlieue. Comrades, we shall overthrow the government as surely as there are fifteen intermediate acids between margaric acid and formic acid; however, I do not care in the least about that. Gentlemen, my father always hated me because I could not understand mathematics. I understand only love and liberty. I am Grantaire, the good fellow. Since I have never had any money, I never got used to having it, and so I have never missed it; but if I had been rich, there would be no poor people left! You would have seen! Oh, if kind hearts only had full purses, how much better the world would be! I imagine myself as Jesus Christ with Rothschild's fortune! How much good he would do! Matelote, embrace me! You are voluptuous and shy! You have cheeks that invite a sister's kiss, and lips that call for a lover's kiss."

"Hold your tongue, you barrel!" said Courfeyrac.

Grantaire shot back:

"I am the capitoul and the master of the floral games!"

Enjolras, standing on the top of the barricade with a gun in his hand, lifted his beautiful, stern face. As the reader knows, there was something both Spartan and Puritan in him. He would have died with Leonidas at Thermopylæ, and burned with Cromwell at Drogheda.

“Grantaire,” he shouted, “go sleep off your wine fumes somewhere else. This is a place for enthusiasm, not drunkenness. Don’t dishonor the barricade!”

This angry outburst had a strange effect on Grantaire. It was as if someone had thrown a glass of cold water in his face. He seemed to sober up at once.

He sat down at a table by the window, rested his elbows on it, looked at Enjolras with indescribable gentleness, and said:

“Let me sleep here.”

“Go sleep somewhere else,” Enjolras cried.

But Grantaire, still keeping his tender, troubled eyes fixed on him, answered:

“Let me sleep here—until I die.”

Enjolras looked at him with contempt and said:

“Grantaire, you are incapable of believing, thinking, willing, living, or dying.”

Grantaire answered in a grave voice:

“You’ll see.”

He stammered a few more unintelligible words. Then his head dropped heavily onto the table, and, as usually happens in the second stage of drunkenness—the state into which Enjolras had roughly and abruptly driven him—he was asleep a moment later.

CHAPTER IV—AN ATTEMPT TO CONSOLE THE WIDOW HUCHELOUP

Bahorel, ecstatic over the barricade, shouted:

“Here’s the street in its low-cut dress! Doesn’t it look fine!”

As Courfeyrac partly demolished the wine-shop, he tried to comfort its widowed owner.

“Mother Hucheloup, weren’t you complaining the other day because you’d been served notice for breaking the law, just 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 into your horror too? It was over the counterpane, and also over a flowerpot that fell from the attic window into the street, that the government fined me a hundred francs. If that isn’t an outrage, what is!”

“Well, Mother Hucheloup, we’re avenging you.”

Mother Hucheloup did not seem to understand very clearly what good these reprisals were supposed to do her. She was satisfied in the same way as that Arab woman who, after her husband boxed her ears, went to complain to her father and demanded revenge, crying: “Father, you owe my husband blow for blow.” The father asked, “Which cheek did he strike?” “The left cheek.” The father slapped her on the right cheek and said, “Now you are satisfied. Go tell your husband that he boxed my

daughter's ears, and I have therefore boxed his wife's."

The rain had stopped. Reinforcements had arrived. Workmen brought, hidden under their blouses, a barrel of powder, a basket of bottles of vitriol, two or three carnival torches, and another basket full of fire-pots, "left over from the King's festival." That festival had taken place only recently, on the 1st of May. People said these supplies had come from a grocer in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine named Pépin. They smashed the only street lantern in the Rue de la Chanvrerie, the one facing a lantern in the Rue Saint-Denis, and then all the lanterns in the nearby streets: de Mondétour, du Cygne, des Prêcheurs, and the Grande and Petite-Truanderie.

Enjolras, Combeferre, and Courfeyrac directed everything. Two barricades were now being built at the same time, both anchored to the Corinthe house and forming a right angle. The larger blocked the Rue de la Chanvrerie; the other closed the Rue Mondétour on the Rue de Cygne side. This second barricade, which was very narrow, was made only of casks and paving stones. About fifty men were working on it, and thirty of them were armed with guns, because on the way they had helped themselves liberally from a gunsmith's shop.

Nothing could have been stranger—or more mixed and ragged—than this band. One man wore a short jacket, carried a cavalry saber, and had two holster pistols. Another was in his shirtsleeves, with a round hat and a powder horn hanging at his side. A third had a breastplate made of nine sheets of gray paper and was armed with a saddler's awl. One man was shouting, "Let us wipe them out to the last man and die on the

points of our bayonets!" He had no bayonet. Another had strapped over his coat the cross-belt and cartridge box of a National Guardsman, and on the flap of the cartridge box, in red wool, were the words: Public Order_. There were many guns marked with the numbers of the legions, few hats, no neckcloths, many bare arms, and some pikes. Add to this every age and every kind of face: slight, pale young men and sunburned dockworkers. Everyone was in a hurry, and while they helped one another, they talked over the chances ahead. Help would come around three in the morning. They were sure of one regiment. Paris would rise. These terrible declarations were mixed with a kind of warm good humor. You would have thought they were brothers, yet they did not know one another's names. Great danger has this noble quality: it reveals the brotherhood of strangers. A fire had been lit in the kitchen, and there they were melting pewter mugs, spoons, forks, and all the brass tableware in the establishment into bullets. In the middle of it all, they drank. Caps and buckshot lay scattered across the tables among glasses of wine. In the billiard room, Mame Hucheloup, Matelote, and Gibelotte—each changed in a different way by terror, which had stunned one, left another gasping, and stirred up the third—were tearing up old dishcloths and making lint. Three insurgents were helping them: three cheerful, shaggy-haired fellows with beards and mustaches, who pulled at the linen with seamstresses' fingers and made the women tremble.

The tall man whom Courfeyrac, Combeferre, and Enjolras had noticed when he joined the crowd at the corner of the Rue des Billettes was working at the smaller barricade and making

himself useful there. Gavroche was working on the larger one. As for the young man who had waited for Courfeyrac at his lodgings and asked for M. Marius, he had disappeared around the time the omnibus was overturned.

Gavroche, swept up in the moment and glowing with excitement, took it on himself to get everything ready. He ran back and forth, climbed up, came down, climbed again, whistled, and flashed with energy. He seemed to exist only to cheer everyone on. Did he have anything driving him? Yes—his poverty. Did he have wings? Yes—his joy. Gavroche was a whirlwind. You could always see him, and you could always hear him. He filled the air because he was everywhere at once. He had an almost maddening way of being present everywhere; with him, no one could stand still. The huge barricade seemed to feel him buzzing around its very base. He disturbed the loafers, stirred up the idle, revived the tired, grew impatient with the thinkers, gave some people laughter, gave others breath, gave others anger, and gave everyone movement. One moment he was needling a student, the next snapping at a workman. He landed, paused, darted off again, hovered over the uproar and the labor, sprang from one group to another, muttering and humming, and kept the whole company in motion—a fly on the great revolutionary coach.

His little arms never stopped moving, and his little lungs never stopped shouting.

“Courage! More paving stones! More barrels! More machinery! Where are you all? Bring me a basket of plaster so I can fill this hole! Your barricade is far too small. It has to be built higher. Pile

everything onto it, throw everything there, jam it all in. Tear the house apart. A barricade is Mother Gibou's tea. Hallo, here's a glass door."

That drew an exclamation from the workers.

"A glass door? What do you expect us to do with a glass door, you little shrimp?"

"You're the great strong men, aren't you!" Gavroche shot back. "A glass door is an excellent thing for a barricade. It won't stop an attack, but it will stop the enemy from taking it. Haven't you ever stolen apples over a wall with broken bottles on top? A glass door slices up the National Guard's feet when they try to climb the barricade. By God, glass is a nasty thing. Really, comrades, you don't have much imagination."

Still, he was furious about his pistol with no trigger. He went from one man to another demanding, "A gun—I want a gun! Why won't you give me a gun?"

"Give you a gun!" said Combeferre.

"Come on!" said Gavroche. "Why not? I had one in 1830, when we had our quarrel with Charles X."

Enjolras shrugged.

"When there's enough for the men, we'll give some to the children."

Gavroche spun around proudly and replied:

"If you're killed before I am, I'll take yours."

“Brat!” said Enjolras.

“Amateur!” said Gavroche.

A dandy who had wandered the wrong way and was strolling past the end of the street caused a distraction. Gavroche shouted to him:

“Come join us, young man! Come on now, aren’t we going to do something for our poor old country?”

The dandy ran off.

CHAPTER V—PREPARATIONS

The newspapers of the time were wrong when they said that the barricade in the Rue de la Chanvrerie—that “nearly impregnable structure,” as they called it—rose as high as the first floor. In fact, it was only about six or seven feet tall on average. It had been built so that the fighters could either vanish behind it or rise above it whenever they wanted. They could even climb to the top by using four tiers of paving stones stacked inside like steps. From the outside, the front of the barricade was made of heaps of paving stones and barrels fastened together with beams and planks, all tangled up with the wheels of Anceau’s dray and the overturned omnibus. It looked jagged, tangled, and impossible to get through.

An opening wide enough for a man to pass through had been left between the house wall and the end of the barricade farthest from the wine shop, so there was a way out at that point. The pole of the omnibus had been set upright and supported with ropes, and a red flag attached to it flew above the barricade.

The smaller Mondétour barricade, hidden behind the wine-shop building, could not be seen. Together, the two barricades formed a true redoubt. Enjolras and Courfeyrac had decided not to block off the other stretch of the Rue Mondétour, the part that opens through the Rue des Prêcheurs into the Halles. No doubt they wanted to keep a possible line of communication with the outside, and they were not greatly afraid of an attack coming through the dangerous and difficult Rue des Prêcheurs.

Except for one opening that had been left clear—what Folard, in his strategic language, would have called a branch—and taking into account the narrow passage set up in the Rue de la Chanvrerie, the inside of the barricade, where the wine-shop formed a projecting angle, looked like an irregular square enclosed on every side. There was a gap of twenty paces between the main barrier and the tall houses at the far end of the street, so that the barricade could be said to rest against those houses, all of them occupied, but shut tight from top to bottom.

All this work was done in less than an hour, without any interference, and without this small band of daring men seeing so much as a single bearskin cap or bayonet appear. Even the respectable townsmen who still dared, in the middle of the riot, to enter the Rue Saint-Denis took one look down the Rue de la Chanvrerie, saw the barricade, and hurried on even faster.

When the two barricades were finished and the flag had been raised, they dragged a table out of the wine-shop, and Courfeyrac climbed onto it. Enjolras brought over the square box, and Courfeyrac opened it. It was full of cartridges. At the sight of them, even the bravest in the crowd felt a shiver, and for a moment everything fell silent.

Courfeyrac handed them out with a smile.

Each man received thirty cartridges. Many had powder and began making more cartridges with the bullets they had cast. As for the barrel of powder, it stood on a table to one side near the door, kept in reserve.

The alarm drumbeat echoing through all Paris did not stop, but in the end it had become nothing more than a monotonous sound that they no longer noticed. At times it seemed to fade away, then come back again in mournful waves.

Together, without hurry and with solemn calm, they loaded the guns and carbines. Enjolras went out and posted three sentries beyond the barricades: one in the Rue de la Chanvrerie, a second in the Rue des Prêcheurs, and a third at the corner of the Rue de la Petite Truanderie.

Then, once the barricades were built, the positions assigned, the guns loaded, and the sentries posted, they waited. They were alone in those formidable streets, now utterly deserted, hemmed in by silent houses that seemed lifeless, with no sign of human movement anywhere. Twilight deepened around them. In that silence, they could feel something approaching, and it gave the whole scene a tragic, terrifying air. There they stood—isolated, armed, resolved, and calm.

CHAPTER VI—WAITING

During those hours of waiting, what did they do?

We must say, because this belongs to history.

While the men cast bullets and the women prepared lint, while a large saucepan of melted brass and lead for the bullet mold smoked over a glowing brazier, while the sentries stood watch on the barricade with weapons in hand, and while Enjolras—whom nothing could distract—kept his eye on the sentries, Combeferre, Courfeyrac, Jean Prouvaire, Feuilly, Bossuet, Joly, Bahorel, and several others gathered together. They came together as they had in the calmest days of their student conversations. In a corner of the wine shop, now turned into a fortification, only a few paces from the redoubt they had built, with their loaded carbines leaning against the backs of their chairs, these splendid young men, standing so near their final hour, began to recite love poems.

What verses? These:

Do you remember our sweet life, when we were both so young, and the only things our hearts desired were to be well dressed and to be in love,

when, adding your age to mine, we still did not make forty between us, and in our humble little household everything—even winter—felt like spring?

Beautiful days! Manuel was proud and wise, Paris sat down to sacred banquets, Foy hurled thunderbolts, and your bodice had

a pin on which I used to prick myself.

Everyone looked at you. A lawyer without cases, when I took you to dine at the Prado, you were so beautiful that the roses seemed to me to turn and look at you.

I could hear them saying: How beautiful she is! How sweet she smells! What flowing hair! Beneath her little cloak she hides a wing; her charming bonnet has scarcely opened like a flower.

I wandered with you, holding your supple arm close. People passing by thought enchanted love had joined, in our happy pair, gentle April to lovely May.

We lived hidden away, happy, behind a closed door, devouring love, that sweet forbidden fruit. My mouth had not yet spoken a word before your heart had already answered.

The Sorbonne was the pastoral place where I adored you from evening until morning. That is how a loving soul lays the Map of Tenderness over the Latin Quarter.

O Place Maubert! O Place Dauphine! When, in that fresh, springlike garret, you pulled your stocking up over your slender leg, I saw a star shining in the depths of the attic.

I read Plato a great deal, but nothing of him remains with me. Better than Malebranche or Lamennais, you showed me heavenly goodness with a flower you gave me.

I obeyed you, and you yielded to me. O golden garret! To lace your dress! To watch you moving back and forth at dawn in your shift, gazing at your young brow in your old mirror.

And who could ever forget those dawn-bright days under open skies, full of ribbons, flowers, gauze, and moire, when love babbles in a charming little language of its own?

Our gardens were a pot of tulips. You covered the window with a petticoat. I took the clay pipe bowl, and I gave you the Japanese cup.

And those great misfortunes that made us laugh! Your muff burned, your boa was lost! And that dear portrait of divine Shakespeare that one evening we sold to buy our supper!

I was a beggar, and you were generous. I stole kisses from your cool, round arms. A folio Dante served us as a table while we happily ate a hundred chestnuts.

The first time, in my cheerful little room, I stole a kiss from your burning lips, when you left with your hair undone and your face flushed, I stayed behind pale and believed in God.

Do you remember our countless joys, and all those scarves worn down into rags? Oh, how many sighs from our shadow-filled hearts have drifted away into the deep heavens!

The hour, the place, and these memories of youth, along with the first stars beginning to appear in the sky, the funeral stillness of those deserted streets, and the nearness of the relentless event that was about to unfold, gave a poignant beauty to the verses Jean Prouvaire murmured softly in the dusk, for, as we have said, he was a gentle poet.

Meanwhile, a lamp had been lit in the small barricade, and in the large one they had set up one of those wax torches seen on

Shrove Tuesday in front of carts full of masked revelers on their way to la Courtille. As the reader has seen, these torches had come from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine.

The torch had been placed in a kind of shelter made of paving stones, closed on three sides to protect it from the wind, and arranged so that all its light fell on the flag. The street and the barricade stayed buried in darkness, and nothing could be seen except the red flag, lit with a terrible intensity, as if by some enormous dark lantern.

The light deepened the scarlet of the flag into an indescribable and terrifying purple.

CHAPTER VII—THE MAN RECRUITED IN THE RUE DES BILLETTES

Night had fully fallen, and nothing appeared. All they could hear were confused noises and, now and then, bursts of gunfire, but these were infrequent, poorly sustained, and far away. This delay, stretching on as it did, showed that the Government was taking its time and gathering its forces. These fifty men were waiting for sixty thousand.

Enjolras felt the impatience that grips strong spirits on the edge of terrible events. He went to look for Gavroche, who had begun making cartridges in the taproom by the uncertain light of two candles set on the counter as a precaution because powder was scattered across the tables. The two candles gave off no light outside. Besides, the insurgents had taken care to leave the upper floors completely dark.

At that moment Gavroche was deeply absorbed, though not exactly in his cartridges. The man from the Rue des Billettes had just come into the taproom and sat down at the table with the least light. A large musket had been assigned to him, and he held it between his legs. Until then, Gavroche, distracted by a hundred "amusing" things, had not even noticed the man.

When he came in, Gavroche’s eyes followed him automatically, admiring his gun. Then, the moment the man sat down, the street boy jumped to his feet. Anyone who had been watching that man until then would have noticed that he was studying

everything in the barricade and everyone among the insurgents with unusual attention. But from the instant he entered this room, he had sunk into a kind of reverie and no longer seemed to notice anything happening around him. The gamin went up to this thoughtful figure and began circling him on tiptoe, the way one moves near someone one is afraid of waking. At the same time, across his childish face—at once so insolent and so serious, so flighty and so deep, so cheerful and so heartbreaking—passed all the expressions of an old man that mean: Nonsense! impossible! My eyes are failing me! I must be dreaming! can it be? no, it can't! but yes! why, no! and so on. Gavroche rocked on his heels, shoved both fists into his pockets, twisted his neck like a bird, and poured all the shrewdness of his lower lip into an enormous pout. He was amazed, doubtful, skeptical, convinced, dazzled. He looked like the chief eunuch in a slave market discovering a Venus among coarse women, and like an art lover recognizing a Raphael in a pile of bad paintings. His whole being was at work: the instinct that sniffs things out, and the intelligence that puts them together. It was clear that a great event had just taken place in Gavroche's life.

Enjolras spoke to him at the very height of this absorption.

"You're small," said Enjolras. "No one will notice you. Go out from the barricade, keep close to the houses, scout around the streets a little, then come back and tell me what's happening."

Gavroche straightened up from his crouch.

“So the little ones are good for something! That’s lucky! I’ll go! Meanwhile, trust the little fellows and be wary of the big ones.” Then Gavroche, lifting his head and lowering his voice, added as he pointed to the man from the Rue des Billettes: “Do you see that big fellow there?”

“Well?”

“He’s a police spy.”

“Are you sure?”

“Less than two weeks ago, he yanked me by the ear off the cornice at Port-Royal, where I was getting some air.”

Enjolras quickly left the street boy and murmured a few words, very softly, to a dockworker from the wine wharves who happened to be nearby. The man left the room and came back almost at once with three others. The four men, all broad-shouldered porters, quietly took their places behind the table where the man from the Rue des Billettes was leaning on his elbows, careful not to draw his attention. They were clearly ready to throw themselves on him.

Then Enjolras walked up to the man and asked:

“Who are you?”

At the sudden question, the man gave a start. He looked straight into Enjolras’ clear eyes and seemed to understand at once what he meant. He smiled—a smile as scornful, forceful, and determined as could be imagined—and answered with proud seriousness:

“I understand. Well, yes!”

“You are a police spy?”

“I am an agent of the authorities.”

“And your name?”

“Javert.”

Enjolras signaled to the four men. In an instant, before Javert had time to turn around, they seized him by the collar, threw him down, bound him, and searched him.

They found on him a small round card sealed between two pieces of glass. On one side were the engraved arms of France with the motto: _Supervision and vigilance_. On the other was this inscription: “JAVERT, inspector of police, aged fifty-two,” followed by the signature of the Prefect of Police at that time, M. Gisquet.

He also had his watch and his purse, which contained several gold coins. They left him both. But beneath the watch, at the bottom of his watch pocket, they felt a paper inside an envelope and took it. Enjolras opened it and read these five lines, written in the Prefect of Police’s own hand:

“As soon as his political mission is completed, Inspector Javert will determine, through special surveillance, whether it is true that the criminals have begun plotting on the right bank of the Seine, near the Jena bridge.”

When the search was over, they pulled Javert to his feet, tied his arms behind his back, and secured him to the famous post in

the middle of the room, the one that had once given the wine-shop its name.

Gavroche, who had watched the whole scene and approved of it all with a silent toss of his head, walked up to Javert and said:

“The mouse has caught the cat.”

It all happened so quickly that the people around the wine-shop did not notice it until it was already over.

Javert had not let out a single cry.

When Courfeyrac, Bossuet, Joly, Combeferre, and the men spread across the two barricades saw Javert tied to the post, they came running up.

Javert, his back against the post and so tightly bound with ropes that he could not move, lifted his head with the fearless calm of a man who had never lied.

“He is a police spy,” said Enjolras.

Then, turning to Javert, he said, “You will be shot ten minutes before the barricade falls.”

Javert replied in his most commanding tone:

“Why not now?”

“We are saving our powder.”

“Then get it over with a knife.”

“Spy,” said the handsome Enjolras, “we are judges, not murderers.”

Then he called to Gavroche:

“You there! Go on about your business! Do what I told you!”

“I’m going!” cried Gavroche.

Then, pausing just as he was about to leave, he said:

“By the way, you’ll give me his gun!” Then he added, “You can keep the musician, but I want the clarinet.”

The street urchin gave a military salute and cheerfully slipped through the opening in the large barricade.

CHAPTER VIII—MANY QUESTIONS ABOUT A CERTAIN LE CABUC, WHOSE NAME MAY NOT HAVE BEEN LE CABUC

The tragic scene we have set out to portray would be incomplete. The reader would not fully see those great moments of social labor in a revolution—where convulsion and struggle are mixed together in all their true force—if we left out an incident of epic, savage horror that took place almost immediately after Gavroche's departure.

As the reader knows, a mob is like a snowball: it grows as it rolls, gathering a noisy crowd of agitated men. Such men do not stop to ask one another where they came from. Among the passers-by who had joined the rabble led by Enjolras, Combeferre, and Courfeyrac was a man in a street porter's jacket, worn threadbare at the shoulders, who waved his arms, shouted, and looked like a drunken brute. This man, whose name or nickname was Le Cabuc, was in fact a complete stranger even to those who claimed to know him. He was either very drunk or pretending to be. He had sat down with several others at a table they had dragged outside the wine-shop. As Cabuc helped get the others drunk, he seemed to be studying with deliberate attention the large house at the end of the barricade, whose five stories overlooked the whole street and faced the Rue Saint-Denis. Suddenly he cried:

“Do you see, comrades? That house over there is where we need to fire from. Once we’re at the windows, no one will be able to make it down the street!”

“Yes, but the house is shut,” said one of the drinkers.

“Then let’s knock!”

“They won’t open.”

“Then let’s break down the door!”

Le Cabuc runs to the door, which has a heavy knocker, and knocks. The door does not open. He knocks again. No one answers. A third blow. The same silence.

“Is anyone here?” Cabuc shouts.

Nothing moves.

Then he grabs a gun and starts smashing the door with the butt.

It was an old alley door—low, arched, narrow, and solid—made entirely of oak and reinforced on the inside with an iron plate and iron braces, a true prison postern. The blows from the gun butt made the whole house shake, but the door did not give.

Even so, the people inside were probably alarmed, because at last a small square window opened on the third floor. In it appeared the frightened, solemn face of a gray-haired old man, the porter, holding a candle.

The man who had been knocking stopped.

“Gentlemen,” said the porter, “what do you want?”

“Open up,” said Cabuc.

“I cannot, gentlemen.”

“Open it anyway.”

“Impossible, gentlemen.”

Le Cabuc raised his gun and aimed at the porter. But because he was standing below and it was very dark, the porter did not see him.

“Will you open, yes or no?”

“No, gentlemen.”

“Is that your answer?”

“I say no, my goo—”

The porter never finished. The gun went off. The bullet entered beneath his chin and came out at the back of his neck, passing through the jugular vein.

The old man fell backward without a sound. The candle dropped and went out. Then nothing could be seen except a motionless head resting on the little window ledge and a faint white puff of smoke drifting up toward the roof.

“There!” said Le Cabuc, lowering the butt of his gun to the pavement.

He had barely spoken when he felt a hand clamp down on his shoulder with the force of an eagle’s claw, and he heard a voice say:

“On your knees.”

The murderer turned and saw Enjolras’ cold, pale face before him.

Enjolras held a pistol in his hand.

He had rushed up at the sound of the shot.

With his left hand, he had grabbed Cabuc by the collar, blouse, shirt, and suspender.

“On your knees!” he repeated.

Then, with a commanding motion, the slight twenty-year-old bent the thickset, powerful porter like a reed and forced him to his knees in the mud.

Le Cabuc tried to resist, but it felt as though a superhuman hand had seized him.

Enjolras stood pale, his neck bare, his hair disheveled. With his almost feminine face, he seemed for that moment like the ancient Themis. His flared nostrils and lowered eyes gave his stern Greek profile both the look of anger and the look of chastity that the ancient world believed suited Justice.

Everyone on the barricade hurried forward, then formed a circle at a distance. They felt it was impossible to speak in the presence of what they were about to witness.

Le Cabuc, defeated, no longer tried to resist and trembled from head to foot.

Enjolras let him go and took out his watch.

“Pull yourself together,” he said. “Think, or pray. You have one minute.”

“Mercy!” the murderer murmured. Then he bowed his head and stammered a few broken oaths.

Enjolras never took his eyes off him. He let a minute pass, then slipped his watch back into his pocket. Then, as Le Cabuc curled up at his knees and screamed, Enjolras seized him by the hair and pressed the muzzle of the pistol to his ear. Many of those fearless men, who had so calmly entered into the most terrible of adventures, turned their heads away.

A shot rang out, and the assassin fell face down on the pavement.

Enjolras straightened up and swept a firm, severe gaze around him. Then he nudged the corpse with his foot and said:

“Throw that outside.”

Three men lifted the body of the miserable wretch, still twitching with the last mechanical convulsions of life now gone, and hurled it over the small barricade into the Rue Mondétour.

Enjolras stood deep in thought. It is impossible to say what vast shadows slowly spread across his formidable calm. Suddenly he raised his voice.

Silence fell over them.

“Citizens,” said Enjolras, “what that man did was dreadful; what I have done is terrible. He killed, and so I killed him. I had to, because an uprising must have discipline. Murder is an even

greater crime here than anywhere else. We stand under the eyes of the Revolution. We are the priests of the Republic. We are bound by duty, and we must give no one grounds to slander our struggle. So I put that man on trial and sentenced him to death. As for myself, forced as I was to do what I have done, and hating it all the same, I have judged myself as well, and you will soon see what sentence I have passed on myself."

Those who heard him shuddered.

"We will share your fate," cried Combeferre.

"So be it," Enjolras replied. "One word more. In executing this man, I obeyed necessity; but necessity is a monster from the old world, and necessity's other name is Fatality. The law of progress is that monsters must disappear before angels, and Fatality must vanish before Fraternity. This is a harsh moment to speak the word love. No matter—I speak it. And I honor it. Love, the future is yours. Death, I use you, but I hate you. Citizens, in the future there will be no darkness and no thunderbolts; no savage ignorance and no bloody revenge. As there will be no more Satan, there will be no more Michael. In the future, no one will kill anyone else. The earth will shine 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 so that it may come that we are about to die."

Enjolras fell silent. His untouched lips closed, and for some time he remained standing where he had shed blood, motionless as marble. His fixed stare made those around him lower their voices.

Jean Prouvaire and Combeferre silently clasped each other's hands and, leaning together in a corner of the barricade, watched that grave young man with admiration touched by pity—an executioner and a priest, made of light like crystal, and of rock as well.

Let us say at once that later, after the fighting was over, the bodies were taken to the morgue and searched, and a police agent's card was found on Le Cabuc. In 1848, the author of this book had in his hands the special report on this matter that was submitted to the Prefect of Police in 1832.

We should also add that, if a police tradition is to be believed—strange as it is, though probably true—Le Cabuc was Claquesous. In fact, after Le Cabuc's death, Claquesous was never heard of again. He left no trace of his disappearance anywhere; it was as though he had merged into the unseen. His whole life had been shadow, and his end was night.

The whole insurgent group was still shaken by the emotion of that tragic affair, so quickly judged and so quickly ended, when Courfeyrac once again saw on the barricade the small young man who had asked him that morning about Marius.

This boy, with his bold and reckless manner, had come in the night to join the insurgents.

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

The voice that had called Marius through the twilight to the barricade in the Rue de la Chanvrerie struck him like the voice of fate. He wanted to die, and the chance had appeared. He knocked at the door of the tomb, and a hand in the darkness offered him the key. These bleak openings that appear in the darkness before despair are hard to resist. Marius pushed aside the bar that had so often let him pass, stepped out of the garden, and said, “I will go.”

Wild with grief, no longer aware of anything steady or solid in his mind, unable to accept anything more from fate after those two months of youthful love and rapture, crushed all at once by every dream of despair, he had only one wish left: to end it all quickly.

He set off at a rapid pace. By good fortune, he was armed, since he still had Javert’s pistols with him.

The young man whom he thought he had glimpsed had disappeared from sight in the street.

Marius came out of the Rue Plumet onto the boulevard, crossed the Esplanade and the bridge at the Invalides, passed through the Champs-Élysées and the Place Louis XV., and reached the Rue de Rivoli. The shops there were open, gaslights burned beneath the arcades, women shopped at the stalls, people ate

ices at the Café Laiter, and nibbled little cakes at the English pastry shop. Only a few posting-chaises were racing away from the Hôtel des Princes and the Hôtel Meurice.

Marius entered the Rue Saint-Honoré by way of the Passage Delorme. There, the shops were closed, merchants stood talking in front of their half-open doors, people strolled about, and the street lamps were lit. Starting with the first floor, all the windows were illuminated as usual. Cavalry stood on the Place du Palais-Royal.

Marius went on along the Rue Saint-Honoré. The farther he left the Palais-Royal behind, the fewer lit windows he saw. The shops were quickly closing, no one talked in the doorways, and the street grew dark. At the same time, the crowd grew thicker. The passers-by had become a crowd. No one in that throng seemed to be speaking, and yet a low, deep murmur rose from it.

Near the fountain of the Arbre-Sec, there were "gatherings"—still, gloomy groups that stood among those coming and going like stones in running water.

At the entrance to the Rue des Prouvaires, the crowd had stopped moving. It had become a dense, solid, tightly packed mass of people, almost impossible to get through, pressed together and speaking in low voices. There were hardly any black coats or round hats left now; instead there were smocks, blouses, caps, and gaunt, bristling faces. The whole mass shifted vaguely in the darkness of night. Its murmuring had a harsh, trembling sound. Though no one seemed to be walking, a

heavy trampling still rose from the mud. Beyond this thick part of the crowd, in the Rue du Roule, the Rue des Prouvaires, and along the stretch of the Rue Saint-Honoré, not a single window still showed a candle. Only the lonely, fading lines of lanterns could be seen disappearing down the street in the distance. The lanterns of that time looked like large red stars hanging from ropes, and they cast on the pavement a shadow shaped like a huge spider. These streets were not empty. One could make out stacks of guns, moving bayonets, and troops encamped for the night. No curious onlooker went past that point. Movement stopped there. There the mob ended, and the army began.

Marius forced himself onward with the resolve of a man who no longer hoped. He had been called, and he had to go. He found a way through the crowd and past the troops camped there. He kept out of sight of the patrols and avoided the sentries. He went around by another route, reached the Rue de Béthisy, and headed toward the Halles. At the corner of the Rue des Bourdonnais, the lanterns had disappeared.

Once he had passed beyond the crowd, he had also gone beyond the line of troops, and he found himself in something almost terrifying. There were no more passers-by, no more soldiers, no more lights; there was no one at all. There was only solitude, silence, night, and some nameless chill that gripped him. To enter a street felt like stepping into a cellar.

He kept going.

He took a few steps. Someone rushed past him at close range. Was it a man? Or a woman? Were there several of them? He

could not have said. It was gone at once, vanished into the dark.

Moving from one winding street to another, he came to a lane he thought was the Rue de la Poterie. Near the middle of the street, he ran into an obstacle. He stretched out his hands. It was an overturned wagon. Underfoot, he felt puddles, ruts, and paving stones scattered and heaped together. A barricade had been started there and then abandoned. He climbed over the stones and found himself on the other side. He kept close to the posts along the street and used the house walls to guide his way. A little beyond the barricade, he thought he saw something white ahead of him. He moved closer, and it took shape. It was two white horses—the omnibus horses Bossuet had harnessed that morning. They had wandered aimlessly through the streets all day and had finally stopped there, with the tired patience of animals that understand human actions no more than human beings understand the ways of Providence.

Marius left the horses behind. As he came near a street that seemed to be the Rue du Contrat-Social, a shot fired from no one knew where cut blindly through the darkness and whistled past him. The bullet pierced a brass shaving bowl hanging above a barber’s shop over his head. That pierced shaving bowl could still be seen in 1848 in the Rue du Contrat-Social, at the corner by the market pillars.

That shot was still a sign of life. After that, he encountered nothing else.

The whole route felt like a descent down black steps.

Still, Marius kept going.

CHAPTER II—A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF PARIS

If some creature could have hovered over Paris that night on the wing of a bat or an owl, it would have seen a dark and terrible sight below.

That whole old Halles quarter, like a city within the city, crossed by the Rue Saint-Denis and the Rue Saint-Martin and tangled with a thousand narrow streets, had become the insurgents' redoubt and stronghold. To him, it would have looked like a vast, dark hollow carved into the heart of Paris. The eye seemed to drop into an abyss there. With the street lamps smashed and the windows shut, all light, life, sound, and movement had vanished. The unseen police of the insurrection kept watch everywhere and enforced order—that is, darkness. One of the basic tactics of an uprising is to hide a small force inside a great mass of shadow, so that each fighter is strengthened by all the possibilities the darkness offers. At dusk, any window with a candle burning in it was fired on. The light went out; sometimes the person inside was killed. So nothing moved. Inside the houses there was only fear, grief, and stunned silence; in the streets, a kind of sacred terror. You could not even make out the long rows of windows and shops, the jagged lines of chimneys and roofs, or the faint reflections from the wet, muddy pavement. If someone looked up into that mass of shadow, he might perhaps catch, here and there, a few dim glimmers that picked out broken, irregular lines and the outlines of strange buildings, like lights flickering among ruins. Those

were the places where the barricades stood. Everything else was a lake of darkness, foggy, heavy, and funeral-like, above which rose, in still and melancholy outline, the tower of Saint-Jacques, the church of Saint-Merry, and two or three other great buildings—those structures that men make into giants and night turns into phantoms.

All around that deserted, unsettling maze, in the districts where the life of Paris had not completely stopped and where a few street lamps still burned, an observer high above might have seen the metallic flash of swords and bayonets, heard the muffled rumble of artillery, and made out the silent swarming of battalions whose ranks were growing fuller by the minute: a terrible ring slowly tightening around the insurrection.

The surrounded quarter had become nothing more than a monstrous cavern. Everything in it seemed asleep or frozen, and, as we have just seen, any street one entered offered nothing but darkness.

It was a savage darkness, full of traps and unseen, crushing blows. To move into it was terrifying; to stay in it was worse. Those who entered trembled at the thought of the people waiting for them, and those who waited shuddered at the thought of those coming toward them. Invisible fighters were dug in at every street corner. Deathtraps, like graves hidden in the thickness of the night, lay everywhere. Everything had reached its end. No light could be hoped for now except the flash of gunfire, no meeting except the sudden, swift appearance of death. Where? How? When? No one knew. But everyone knew it was certain and unavoidable. In this place

marked out for the struggle, the Government and the insurrection, the National Guard and the popular societies, the bourgeois and the uprising, feeling their way through the dark, were about to collide. The necessity was the same for both sides. From this point on, the only possible outcome was to come out either dead or victorious. The situation was so extreme, the darkness so overwhelming, that even the most timid felt courage take hold of them, while the boldest felt fear.

What is more, the fury, rage, and determination were equal on both sides. For one side, advancing meant death, and no one thought of turning back. For the other, staying where they were meant death, and no one thought of running.

Everything had to be settled the next day. Victory had to fall either here or there. The insurrection had to prove itself either a revolution or merely a skirmish. The Government understood this just as clearly as the factions did; even the most ordinary bourgeois could feel it. That is why anguish hung over this quarter, wrapped into the impenetrable darkness where everything was about to be decided. That is why the silence carried an even sharper anxiety, as if catastrophe were about to rise out of it. Only one sound could be heard there, a sound as heartbreaking as a death rattle and as threatening as a curse: the tocsin of Saint-Merry. Nothing could have been more chilling than the cry of that wild, desperate bell, wailing through the shadows.

As so often happens, nature seemed to fall into step with what men were about to do. Nothing broke the unity of the scene. The stars had vanished, and heavy clouds spread their mournful

folds across the horizon. A black sky lay over those dead streets, as if an enormous shroud were being spread across an enormous tomb.

While a struggle that was still entirely political was being prepared in the same area that had already seen so many revolutionary upheavals; while the young, the secret societies, and the schools, in the name of principles, and the middle classes, in the name of their interests, were moving toward each other, ready to collide, grapple, and hurl each other aside; while everyone was pressing forward and calling on the final, decisive hour of the crisis to arrive—far away from this doomed district, deep in the unfathomable recesses of that miserable old Paris hidden beneath the brilliance of prosperous and happy Paris, the dark voice of the people could be heard rising in a low roar.

It was a terrible and sacred voice, made up at once of the beast's roar and the word of God. It frightened the weak and warned the wise. It seemed to come from below, like a lion's cry, and from above, like thunder.

CHAPTER III—THE FARTHEST EDGE

Marius had reached the Halles.

There, everything was even calmer, darker, and more still than in the nearby streets. It seemed as though the icy peace of the tomb had risen from the ground and spread across the sky.

Even so, a red glow stood out against that black background and lit up the high roofs of the houses that blocked the Rue de la Chanvrerie on the Saint-Eustache side. It was the reflection of the torch burning at the Corinthe barricade. Marius made his way toward that red light. It drew him to the Marché-aux-Poirées, where he caught sight of the dark opening of the Rue des Prêcheurs. He went in. The insurgents' sentry guarding the far end did not see him. He felt that he was very near what he had come to find, and he moved forward on tiptoe. In this way he reached the bend in that short stretch of the Rue Mondétour which, as the reader will remember, was the only route Enjolras had kept open to the outside world. At the corner of the last house on his left, he leaned his head forward and looked into that section of the Rue Mondétour.

A little past the corner where the lane met the Rue de la Chanvrerie, a wide band of shadow fell across the street and swallowed him up. From there, he could make out a patch of light on the pavement, part of the wine-shop, and farther on, a flickering lamp behind a kind of misshapen wall, with men crouched there, guns across their knees. It was only about ten

fathoms away. He was looking into the inside of the barricade.

The houses along the right side of the lane hid the rest of the wine-shop, the main barricade, and the flag from him.

Marius had only one more step to take.

Then the unhappy young man sat down on a post, folded his arms, and began to think about his father.

He thought of that heroic Colonel Pontmercy: a soldier of such pride, who had guarded France’s frontier under the Republic and reached the frontier of Asia under Napoleon; who had seen Genoa, Alexandria, Milan, Turin, Madrid, Vienna, Dresden, Berlin, and Moscow; who had left drops of the same blood that ran in Marius’s veins on every victorious battlefield in Europe; who had gone gray before his time through discipline and command; who had lived with his sword-belt fastened, his epaulets falling across his chest, his cockade blackened by powder, his brow marked by his helmet, in barracks, in camps, in bivouacs, in field hospitals; and who, after twenty years, had come back from the great wars with a scarred cheek, a smiling face, calm, admirable, pure as a child, having done everything for France and nothing against her.

He told himself that his day had come too, that his hour had struck, and that, following his father, he was now going to prove himself brave, fearless, and bold. He would run toward the bullets, offer his chest to bayonets, shed his blood, seek out the enemy, seek death. He was about to make war in his turn and step onto a battlefield. But the battlefield he was stepping onto was the street, and the war he was about to enter was civil war.

He saw civil war opening before him like an abyss, and he was about to fall into it. Then he shuddered.

He thought of his father's sword, which his grandfather had sold to a second-hand dealer and whose loss he had mourned so deeply. Now he told himself that the pure and valiant sword had done right to escape him and vanish angrily into the darkness. If it had fled like that, it was because it had intelligence, because it had seen the future coming. It had sensed this uprising, this war of gutters and paving stones, these shots fired through cellar windows, these blows struck and received from behind. Coming from Marengo and Friedland, it had not wanted to go to the Rue de la Chanvrerie. After what it had done for the father, it had not wanted to do this for the son. He told himself that if the sword had been there, if after claiming it at his father's bedside he had dared to take it and carry it into this dark battle between Frenchmen in the streets, it would surely have burned his hands and burst into flame before his eyes like the angel's sword. He told himself it was a blessing that it was gone, and right that it had disappeared. His grandfather had been the true guardian of his father's glory. It was far better for the colonel's sword to be sold at auction, sold to a rag dealer, thrown in among old junk,

than for it to wound the side of its own country today.

Then he broke down and wept bitterly.

This was terrible. But what could he do? He could not live without Cosette. Since she was gone, he had to die. Had he not given her his word of honor that he would die? She had left knowing that, which meant she was content for Marius to die. And besides, it was obvious that she no longer loved him, since she had gone away like this—without warning, without a word, without a letter—even though she knew his address. What was the point of living, and why should he go on now? And then what? Should he turn back after coming this far? Should he run from danger after moving toward it? Should he sneak away after coming to look into the barricade—slipping off in fear and saying, "After all, I have had enough. I have seen it, and that is enough. This is civil war, and I shall take my leave"? Should he abandon his friends, who were expecting him? Who might even need him? Who were only a handful against an army? Should he betray, all at once, his love, his country, and his word? Should he dress up his cowardice as patriotism? No, that was impossible. And if the ghost of his father was there in the darkness, watching him retreat, it would strike him across the back with the flat of its sword and shout, "Forward, you coward!"

Caught in these conflicting thoughts, he lowered his head.

Suddenly he lifted it again. A kind of brilliant correction had just taken place in his mind. There is an expansion of thought that belongs especially to the nearness of the grave; being close to

death makes things clear. The action he felt he might be about to enter no longer seemed miserable to him, but magnificent. By some unfathomable inner change in his soul, the fighting in the streets was suddenly transformed before his mind's eye. All the restless questions that had crowded his thoughts came back in a rush, but they no longer disturbed him. He had an answer for every one of them.

Let us ask why his father should be outraged. Are there not times when rebellion becomes a duty? What could be dishonorable for Colonel Pontmercy's son in the struggle that was about to begin? This was no longer Montmirail or Champaubert; it was something entirely different. The issue was no longer sacred soil, but a sacred idea. The nation may cry out, perhaps, but humanity approves. But does the nation truly cry out? France bleeds, yet liberty smiles; and before liberty's smile, France forgets its wound. And if we look at things from an even higher point of view, why call it civil war?

Civil war—what does that mean? Is there really such a thing as a foreign war? Isn't every war, in the end, a war between human beings, a war between brothers? War is defined only by its purpose. There is no such thing as foreign war or civil war; there is only just war and unjust war. Until the day when humanity reaches its great common agreement, war—at least the kind that serves the future, pushing forward against the past that drags behind—may still be necessary. And what, exactly, do we condemn in such a war? War becomes shameful, and the sword becomes shameful, only when they are used to murder justice, progress, reason, civilization, and truth. Then war,

whether foreign or civil, is wicked; it becomes a crime. Outside that sacred thing called justice, by what right can one kind of man look down on another? By what right should Washington's sword reject Camille Desmoulins's pike? Which is greater: Leonidas against the foreign invader, or Timoleon against the tyrant? One is a defender; the other is a liberator. Should we condemn every call to arms within a city simply because it happens inside the city, without asking what cause it serves? If so, then we must also condemn Brutus, Marcel, Arnould von Blankenheim, Coligny. Street fighting? Barricade war? Why not? That was the war of Ambiorix, of Artevelde, of Marnix, of Pelagius. But Ambiorix fought Rome, Artevelde fought France, Marnix fought Spain, Pelagius fought the Moors—all against foreign enemies. Very well: monarchy is a foreigner; oppression is a stranger; divine right is a stranger. Despotism crosses the moral frontier just as invasion crosses the geographic one. To drive out a tyrant or to drive out the English is, in either case, to take back one's own territory. There comes a moment when protest is no longer enough. After philosophy, action is needed. Living force completes what the idea first outlined. Prometheus in chains begins the work; Arostogeiton finishes it. The encyclopedia enlightens minds; the 10th of August electrifies them. After Æschylus comes Thrasybulus; after Diderot comes Danton. Crowds tend to accept a master. Their very size often shows their apathy. A multitude is easily led into obedience. People must be stirred, pushed forward, even shaken harshly by the very blessing of their liberation. Their eyes must be struck by truth; light must be thrown at them in fierce handfuls. They must be somewhat stunned by their own coming

happiness; that flash wakes them up. Hence the need for alarm bells and wars. Great fighters must arise. They must light up nations with boldness and shake this sorrowful humanity, darkened by divine right, Cæsarian glory, brute force, fanaticism, irresponsible power, and absolute majesty—a rabble stupidly absorbed in admiring, through their dim splendor, these dark triumphs of the night. Down with the tyrant! But whom do you mean? Do you call Louis Philippe a tyrant? No—no more than Louis XVI. Both are what history usually calls good kings. But principles cannot be divided up. The logic of truth runs straight, and truth has one hard quality: it does not flatter. So there can be no concessions. Every encroachment on man must be resisted. There is divine right in Louis XVI.; there is _because a Bourbon_ in Louis Philippe. Both, in some measure, stand for the confiscation of right, and both must be opposed if universal insurrection is to be cleared away. And France must always be the first to act. When the master falls in France, he falls everywhere. In short, what cause could be more just—and therefore what war could be greater—than the one that restores social truth, gives liberty back her throne, gives the people back to themselves, returns sovereignty to man, places the purple once more on the head of France, restores equity and reason in their fullness, removes every seed of conflict by restoring each person to himself, destroys the obstacle that royalty sets in the way of universal concord, and brings the human race back into alignment with right? These are wars that build peace. A vast fortress of prejudices, privileges, superstitions, lies, extortions, abuses, violence, injustice, and darkness still stands in this world, with its towers of hatred. It must be torn down. This

monstrous mass must be reduced to rubble. To win at Austerlitz is grand; to take the Bastille is immense.

Everyone has noticed this in themselves: the soul—strangely unified and yet somehow present everywhere—has a remarkable ability to reason almost coolly even in the most violent moments. It often happens that broken-hearted passion and deep despair, in the very agony of their darkest monologues, still examine subjects and argue points. Logic mixes with convulsion, and the thread of reasoning floats on, unbroken, through the sorrowful storm of thought. This was the state of Marius's mind.

As he thought this over—downcast but determined, wavering in every direction, and, in short, trembling at what he was about to do—his eyes wandered toward the inside of the barricade. The insurgents were speaking there in low voices, without moving, and that near-silence could be felt which marks the final stage of waiting. Above them, at the small third-floor window, Marius noticed a kind of spectator who seemed strangely intent. It was the porter whom Le Cabuc had killed. Below, in the light of the torch wedged between the paving stones, that head could be dimly made out. Nothing could have been stranger, in that dark and uncertain glow, than that pale, motionless, astonished face, with its bristling hair, its fixed, staring eyes, and its gaping mouth, leaning over the street as if in curiosity. It looked as though the dead man were watching those who were about to die. A long trail of blood, flowing from that head, ran down from the window in reddish threads as far as the first floor, where it stopped.

BOOK FOURTEENTH—THE GRANDEURS OF DESPAIR

[Illustration: The Grandeurs of Despair]

CHAPTER I—THE FLAG: ACT FIRST

So far, nothing had happened. Ten o’clock had struck from Saint-Merry. Enjolras and Combeferre had gone to sit near the opening of the great barricade, carbines in hand. They no longer spoke to each other. They listened, trying to catch even the faintest, most distant sound of marching.

Suddenly, in the middle of that grim stillness, a clear, cheerful young voice seemed to rise from the Rue Saint-Denis and began to sing distinctly, to the old popular tune of “By the Light of the Moon,” this bit of verse, ending with a cry like a rooster’s crow:—

Mon nez est en larmes, Mon ami Bugeaud, Lend me your gendarmes So I can say a word to them. In blue coats, The hen in a shako, Here comes the suburb! Cock-a-doodle-doo!54

They clasped each other’s hands.

“That’s Gavroche,” Enjolras said.

“He’s warning us,” said Combeferre.

A sudden rush disturbed the empty street. They saw a figure, quicker than an acrobat, scramble over the omnibus. Gavroche leaped into the barricade, out of breath, and said:—

“My gun! They’re here!”

A sudden thrill ran through the whole barricade, and they could hear hands reaching for guns.

“Would you like my carbine?” Enjolras asked the boy.

“I want a big gun,” Gavroche replied.

And he grabbed Javert’s gun.

Two sentries had fallen back and arrived almost at the same moment as Gavroche. They were the sentries from the end of the street and the lookout from the Rue de la Petite-Truanderie. The lookout in the Lane des Prêcheurs had stayed at his post, which showed that nothing was coming from the direction of the bridges and the Halles.

The Rue de la Chanvrerie, where only a few paving stones showed faintly in the reflected light cast on the street, looked to the insurgents like a huge black doorway opening dimly into smoke.

Each man had taken his place for the fight.

Forty-three insurgents, including Enjolras, Combeferre, Courfeyrac, Bossuet, Joly, Bahorel, and Gavroche, knelt inside the large barricade. Their heads were level with the top of the barrier, and the barrels of their guns and carbines rested on the stones as if at loopholes. They were alert, silent, and ready to fire. Six more men, under Feuilly’s command, had positioned themselves at the windows on the first and second floors of Corinthe, their guns braced at their shoulders.

Several minutes passed like this. Then the sound of footsteps—steady, heavy, and many of them—became clearly audible from the direction of Saint-Leu. At first the sound was faint, then distinct, then deep and resonant. It came closer

slowly, without stopping, without a break, with a calm and terrifying steadiness. Nothing else could be heard. It was like the silence and sound of the statue of the commander, but this stony tread had something vast and multiplied about it, suggesting both a crowd and a ghost. It was as if one heard the terrible statue Legion marching forward. The footsteps came near, came nearer still, and then stopped. It seemed as though the breathing of many men could be heard at the end of the street. Yet nothing could be seen. Still, in the depths of that thick darkness, one could make out a mass of metallic threads, fine as needles and almost invisible, shifting like those strange phosphorescent patterns seen beneath closed eyelids in the first haze of sleep, just as one is drifting off. They were bayonets and gun barrels, dimly lit by the distant reflection of the torch.

A pause followed, as if both sides were waiting. Then suddenly, out of the depths of the darkness, a voice shouted. It was all the more sinister because no one could be seen, and it seemed as though the darkness itself were speaking:

“Who goes there?”

At the same moment, they heard the click of guns being lowered into position.

Enjolras answered in a proud, ringing voice:

“The French Revolution!”

“Fire!” shouted the voice.

A flash turned all the fronts of the houses in the street purple, as if the door of a furnace had been thrown open and then quickly shut again.

A terrible explosion burst against the barricade. The red flag fell. The volley had been so violent and so concentrated that it cut through the staff—the very tip of the omnibus pole.

Bullets that ricocheted off the house cornices struck the barricade and wounded several men.

“Comrades!” shouted Courfeyrac. “Let’s not waste our powder. Let’s wait until they are in the street before we answer.”

“And above all,” said Enjolras, “let’s raise the flag again.”

He picked up the flag, which had fallen right at his feet.

Outside, they could hear the clatter of ramrods in the guns; the troops were reloading their weapons.

Enjolras went on:

“Who here has the courage? Who will plant the flag on the barricade again?”

No one answered. To climb onto the barricade at that moment, when it was almost certainly the enemy’s target again, meant certain death. Even the bravest hesitated to speak his own sentence. Enjolras himself shuddered. He repeated:

“Will no one volunteer?”

CHAPTER II—THE FLAG: ACT SECOND

Since they had arrived at Corinthe and begun building the barricade, no one had paid any attention to Father Mabeuf. Yet M. Mabeuf had not left the crowd. He had gone into the ground floor of the wine-shop and sat down behind the counter. There he had, so to speak, withdrawn into himself. He no longer seemed to see or think. Courfeyrac and several others had spoken to him two or three times, warning him of the danger and begging him to leave, but he did not hear them. When no one was speaking to him, his mouth moved as if he were answering someone, and as soon as anyone addressed him, his lips grew still and his eyes lost all appearance of life.

Several hours before the barricade was attacked, he had taken up a posture he never changed afterward: both fists planted on his knees, his head thrust forward as if he were staring over a precipice. Nothing could make him move from it. His mind did not seem to be in the barricade at all. When everyone went to take up his position for the fight, only one insurgent remained in the tap-room, where Javert was tied to the post: a man with a drawn sword watching over Javert, and Mabeuf himself. At the moment of the attack, when the shot rang out, the physical shock reached him and seemed to wake him. He sprang up, crossed the room, and just as Enjolras repeated his call—"Will no one volunteer?"—the old man appeared in the doorway of the wine-shop. His presence caused a stir among the different groups. A cry went up:

“It’s the voter! It’s the member of the Convention! It’s the representative of the people!”

He probably did not hear them.

He walked straight up to Enjolras, and the insurgents shrank back before him with a kind of reverent fear. He snatched the flag from Enjolras, who stepped back in astonishment. Then, because no one dared either stop him or help him, this eighty-year-old man, his head trembling but his step steady, slowly began to climb the staircase of paving stones built into the barricade. It was so mournful and so magnificent that everyone around him cried, “Hats off!” With every step he climbed, the sight grew more terrible: his white hair, his worn-out face, his high bald wrinkled brow, his astonished open mouth, his aged arm holding up the red banner. They rose through the darkness, enlarged by the bloody torchlight, and the onlookers thought they were seeing the ghost of ’93 rise out of the earth with the flag of terror in its hand.

When he reached the top step, when that trembling, terrifying phantom stood upright on that heap of rubble before twelve hundred unseen guns, facing death as if he were stronger than it, the whole barricade took on a supernatural, colossal shape in the darkness.

Then came one of those silences that happen only in the presence of something extraordinary. In the middle of that silence, the old man waved the red flag and shouted:

“Long live the Revolution! Long live the Republic! Fraternity! Equality! and Death!”

Those on the barricade heard a low, quick whisper, like the murmur of a priest rushing through a prayer. It was probably the police commissary making the formal legal summons from the other end of the street.

Then the same piercing voice that had shouted, “Who goes there?” cried out:

“Fall back!”

M. Mabeuf, pale and wild-looking, his eyes burning with the sorrowful fire of madness, lifted the flag above his head and repeated:

“Long live the Republic!”

“Fire!” said the voice.

A second volley, like the first, poured down on the barricade.

The old man dropped to his knees, then got up again, let the flag fall, and toppled backward onto the pavement like a log, flat on his back with his arms spread wide.

Thin streams of blood ran beneath him. His old face, pale and sorrowful, seemed to be looking up at the sky.

One of those feelings greater than any man, the kind that makes him forget even to defend himself, took hold of the insurgents, and they came toward the body with reverent awe.

“What men these regicides were!” said Enjolras.

Courfeyrac leaned down to Enjolras' ear:

"This is for you alone; I do not want to cool anyone's enthusiasm. But this man was anything but a regicide. I knew him. His name was Father Mabeuf. I do not know what came over him today. But he was a brave fool. Just look at his head."

"The head of a fool and the heart of a Brutus," Enjolras replied.

Then he raised his voice:

"Citizens! This is the example the old set for the young. We hesitated; he came forward. We were retreating; he advanced. This is what those who shake with age teach those who shake with fear. This old man is sacred in the eyes of his country. He lived a long life and died a magnificent death. Now let us carry his body under shelter, so that each of us may defend this dead old man as he would his living father, and may his presence among us make the barricade impossible to take!"

A low murmur of dark, determined agreement followed his words.

Enjolras bent down and lifted the old man's head. Fierce as he was, he kissed him on the forehead. Then he spread his arms wide and, handling the dead man with gentle care, as if afraid of hurting him, took off his coat, showed everyone the bloody holes in it, and said:

"This is our flag now."

CHAPTER III—GAVROCHE WOULD HAVE DONE BETTER TO TAKE ENJOLRAS' CARBINE

They covered Father Mabeuf with one of Widow Hucheloup's long black shawls. Six men made a stretcher out of their guns. They laid the body on it and carried it, bareheaded and with solemn slowness, to the large table in the tap-room.

Completely absorbed in the solemn, sacred work before them, these men no longer gave a thought to the danger they were in.

As the corpse passed near Javert, who still showed no emotion, Enjolras said to the spy:

"Your turn will come soon!"

All this time, little Gavroche alone had stayed at his post, standing guard while the others had left. He thought he saw men creeping toward the barricade, and suddenly he shouted:

"Watch out!"

Courfeyrac, Enjolras, Jean Prouvaire, Combeferre, Joly, Bahorel, Bossuet, and all the others came rushing out of the wine shop in confusion. They were almost too late. Above the barricade they saw a shining mass of bayonets swaying. Tall municipal guards were forcing their way in, some climbing over the omnibus, others coming through the gap, driving the street boy before them as he gave ground without running away.

The moment was critical. It was that first terrible instant of a flood, when the water rises to the top of the embankment and begins to seep through cracks in the dike. One second more, and the barricade would have been lost.

Bahorel threw himself at the first municipal guard who came in and killed him on the spot with a blow from his gun. The second guard killed Bahorel with a bayonet thrust. Another had already knocked down Courfeyrac, who was shouting, “Follow me!” The biggest of them all, a kind of giant, advanced on Gavroche with his bayonet fixed. The boy seized Javert’s huge gun in his arms, aimed it firmly at the giant, and fired. Nothing happened. Javert’s gun was not loaded. The municipal guard laughed and lifted his bayonet over the child.

Before the bayonet could touch Gavroche, the gun flew from the soldier’s hands. A bullet had struck the municipal guardsman square in the middle of the forehead, and he fell backward. A second bullet hit the other guard—the one who had attacked Courfeyrac—in the chest and dropped him onto the pavement.

Marius had just entered the barricade, and this was his doing.

CHAPTER IV—THE BARREL OF POWDER

Marius, still hidden at the bend of the Rue Mondétour, had watched the first stage of the fighting with horror and indecision. But he could not resist for long that strange, overpowering pull that might be called the call of the abyss. Faced with the nearness of danger, with the death of M. Mabeuf, that sorrowful mystery, with Bahorel killed, with Courfeyrac shouting, “Follow me!”, with that child in danger, and with friends to save or avenge, all hesitation disappeared. He threw himself into the fight, a pistol in each hand. With his first shot he saved Gavroche, and with the second he freed Courfeyrac.

Through the gunfire and the cries of the guards under attack, the attackers had climbed the barricade. At its crest, Municipal Guards, line soldiers, and National Guards from the suburbs could now be seen, guns in hand, rising high enough for more than half their bodies to show.

They already covered more than two-thirds of the barricade, but they did not jump down into the enclosure, as if they feared a trap. They stared into the dark barricade the way one might stare into a lion’s den. The torchlight lit only their bayonets, their bearskin caps, and the upper parts of their uneasy, angry faces.

Marius had no weapons left. He had thrown away his pistols after firing them. But he had noticed the barrel of gunpowder in the tap-room near the door.

As he turned halfway around and looked that way, a soldier aimed at him. Just as the soldier was taking aim, a hand came down over the muzzle of the gun and blocked it. Someone had rushed forward to do it—the young workman in velvet trousers. The shot went off, passed through the hand, and perhaps through the workman as well, since he fell, but the bullet did not hit Marius. Through the smoke, all this was something more sensed than clearly seen, and Marius, already entering the tap-room, barely noticed it. Still, he had dimly seen the gun aimed at him, the hand that blocked it, and he had heard the shot. But in moments like these, what one sees wavers and rushes past, and one stops for nothing. One feels dimly driven toward even deeper darkness, and everything is clouded.

The insurgents were caught off guard, but they did not panic. They regrouped. Enjolras shouted, “Wait! Don’t fire blindly!” In the first confusion, they might easily hit one another. Most of them had gone up to the first-floor windows and the attic windows, from which they could fire down on the attackers.

The most resolute among them—along with Enjolras, Courfeyrac, Jean Prouvaire, and Combeferre—had taken their places proudly with their backs against the houses at the rear, fully exposed and facing the lines of soldiers and guards standing on top of the barricade.

All this was done without hurry, with that strange, menacing solemnity that comes before a clash. Both sides took aim at point-blank range. They were so close that they could speak to each other without raising their voices.

Just as they reached that moment when the spark was about to fly, an officer wearing a gorget stretched out his sword and said:

“Lay down your arms!”

“Fire!” Enjolras answered.

Both sides fired at the same instant, and everything vanished into smoke.

The smoke was acrid and suffocating. In it, the dying and the wounded let out faint, muffled groans. When it cleared, the fighters on both sides could be seen to have been thinned out, though they still held the same positions, reloading in silence. Suddenly, a thunderous voice rang out, shouting:

“Get away, or I’ll blow up the barricade!”

Everyone turned toward the place the voice had come from.

Marius had gone into the tap-room and grabbed the barrel of powder. Then, using the smoke and the dim haze that filled the fortified enclosure, he slipped along the barricade to the cage of paving stones where the torch was fixed. Tearing the torch free, replacing it with the barrel of powder, and shoving the pile of stones under the barrel, which split open at once with a kind of dreadful readiness—all this took Marius no more than the time it took to bend down and stand up again. Now everyone—National Guards, Municipal Guards, officers, soldiers—crowded at the far end of the barricade and stared at him in stunned silence. He stood with one foot on the stones, the torch in his hand, his proud face lit by a deadly resolve,

lowering the flame toward that terrifying pile where they could see the broken barrel of powder, and crying out:

“Get back, or I’ll blow up the barricade!”

Marius on that barricade, coming after the old man of eighty, was the vision of the young revolution following the appearance of the old.

“Blow up the barricade!” said a sergeant. “And yourself with it!”

Marius shot back, “Myself as well.”

And he lowered the torch toward the barrel of powder.

But no one was left at the barrier. The attackers, leaving behind their dead and wounded, fell back in a confused rush toward the end of the street, where they disappeared again into the night. It was a wild, panicked retreat.

The barricade was clear.

CHAPTER V—END OF JEAN PROUVAIRE'S VERSES

Everyone crowded around Marius. Courfeyrac threw his arms around him.

"So here you are!"

"What good luck!" said Combeferre.

"You arrived at exactly the right moment!" cried Bossuet.

"If it hadn't been for you, I'd be dead!" Courfeyrac said again.

"If it hadn't been for you, I'd have been swallowed up!" added Gavroche.

Marius asked:

"Where is the chief?"

"You are," said Enjolras.

Marius had felt as though a furnace had been burning in his brain all day; now it had turned into a whirlwind. The storm inside him felt so powerful that it seemed to be outside him, sweeping him away. It seemed to him that he was already far removed from life. His two radiant months of joy and love, ending suddenly at that terrible abyss; Cosette lost to him; the barricade; M. Mabeuf killed for the Republic; he himself now leading the insurgents—all of it struck him like a vast nightmare. He had to make a conscious effort to remember that everything around him was real. Marius had seen enough of life to know that nothing comes closer than the impossible, and that the

thing one must always expect is the unexpected. He watched his own drama as if it were a play he could not understand.

In the fog that clouded his thoughts, he did not recognize Javert. Bound to his post, Javert had not even turned his head during the entire attack on the barricade. He had watched the revolt boiling around him with the resignation of a martyr and the authority of a judge. Marius had not even noticed him.

Meanwhile, the attackers did not move forward. They could be heard marching and gathering at the end of the street, but they did not dare enter it, either because they were waiting for orders or because they wanted reinforcements before throwing themselves once more against that impregnable stronghold. The insurgents posted sentries, and some of them, who were medical students, began tending the wounded.

They had thrown the tables out of the wine-shop, except for the two kept for lint and cartridges and the one on which Father Mabeuf lay. They added the rest to the barricade, and in the tap-room they replaced them with mattresses taken from the bed of the widow Hucheloup and her servants. They laid the wounded on these mattresses. As for the three poor creatures who lived at Corinthe, no one knew what had become of them. They were finally found hiding in the cellar.

A deep sadness dimmed the joy of the now-cleared barricade.

They called the roll. One of the insurgents was missing. And who was it? One of the most beloved. One of the bravest. Jean Prouvaire. They looked for him among the wounded, but he was not there. They looked for him among the dead, but he was not

there. He was clearly a prisoner. Combeferre said to Enjolras:

“They have our friend, and we have their agent. Are you determined to put that spy to death?”

“Yes,” Enjolras replied, “but not as determined as I am to save Jean Prouvaire’s life.”

This happened in the taproom near Javert’s post.

“Well,” Combeferre went on, “I’m going to tie my handkerchief to my cane and go under a flag of truce to offer an exchange: our man for theirs.”

“Listen,” said Enjolras, placing his hand on Combeferre’s arm.

At the far end of the street, there was a sharp, ominous clash of weapons.

They heard a strong voice cry out:

“Vive la France! Long live France! Long live the future!”

They recognized Prouvaire’s voice.

A flash burst out, and a shot rang through the air.

Then silence fell again.

“They’ve killed him,” Combeferre cried.

Enjolras looked at Javert and said to him:

“Your friends have just killed you.”

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

One feature of this kind of fighting is that barricades are almost always attacked from the front. The attackers usually avoid trying to outflank them, either because they fear ambushes or because they do not want to get trapped in the twisting streets. So the insurgents had focused all their attention on the main barricade, which was clearly the point under constant threat, and where the fighting would certainly begin again. But Marius thought of the smaller barricade and went there. It was deserted, watched over only by the fire-pot trembling between the paving stones. Besides that, the Mondétour alley and the branches of the Rue de la Petite Truanderie and the Rue du Cygne were completely still.

As Marius was leaving, after finishing his inspection, he heard his name spoken faintly in the darkness.

“Monsieur Marius!”

He started, because he recognized the voice that had called to him through the gate in the Rue Plumet two hours earlier.

Only now, the voice seemed no more than a breath.

He looked around, but saw no one.

Marius thought he must have been mistaken, that his mind had added an illusion to the strange realities crashing around him.

He took a step forward, intending to leave the far corner where the barricade stood.

“Monsieur Marius!” the voice repeated.

This time he could not doubt that he had heard it clearly; he looked, and still saw nothing.

“At your feet,” said the voice.

He bent down and saw, in the darkness, a figure dragging itself toward him.

It was crawling along the pavement. It was this creature that had spoken to him.

By the light of the fire-pot, he could make out a blouse, torn coarse-velvet trousers, bare feet, and something like a pool of blood. Dimly, Marius saw a pale face lifted toward him, saying:

“Don’t you recognize me?”

“No.”

“Éponine.”

Marius quickly bent lower. It was indeed that unhappy child. She was dressed in men’s clothes.

“How did you get here? What are you doing here?”

“I’m dying,” she said.

There are words and moments that can rouse even the most despairing. Marius cried out in alarm:

“You’re wounded! Wait, I’ll carry you into the room! They’ll take care of you there. Is it serious? How can I lift you without hurting you? Where are you hurt? Help! My God! But why did you come here?”

And he tried to slip his arm under her to lift her up.

She gave a faint cry.

“Did I hurt you?” Marius asked.

“A little.”

“But I only touched your hand.”

She raised her hand to Marius, and in the middle of it he saw a black hole.

“What happened to your hand?” he said.

“It’s pierced.”

“Pierced?”

“Yes.”

“With what?”

“A bullet.”

“How?”

“Did you see a gun pointed at you?”

“Yes, and a hand stopping it.”

“It was mine.”

Marius shuddered.

“What madness! Poor child! But all the better, if that’s all it is, it’s nothing. Let me carry you to a bed. They’ll dress your wound; no one dies from a hand being pierced.”

She murmured:

“The bullet went through my hand, but it came out through my back. There’s no use moving me from here. I’ll tell you how you can take better care of me than any surgeon. Sit down beside me on this stone.”

He obeyed. She rested her head on Marius’ knees and, without looking at him, said:

“Oh! How good this feels! How comfortable this is! There, I’m not suffering anymore.”

She was silent for a moment. Then, with an effort, she turned her face and looked at Marius.

“Do you know, Monsieur Marius? I couldn’t understand why you went into that garden. It was foolish, because I was the one who showed you that house. And then I should have told myself that a young man like you—”

She stopped, then, skipping over the dark thoughts that must have been passing through her mind, went on with a heartbreaking smile:

“You thought I was ugly, didn’t you?”

She went on:

“You see—you’re trapped now. No one can get out of the barricade. I was the one who led you here, after all. You’re going to die; I’m sure of it. And yet, when I saw them aiming at you, I put my hand over the gun’s muzzle. Strange, isn’t it? But I did it because I wanted to die before you. When that bullet hit me, I dragged myself here. No one saw me, no one helped me up. I was waiting for you, and I kept saying, ‘So he isn’t coming!’ Oh, if you only knew. I bit my blouse, I was suffering so much! Now I’m all right. Do you remember the day I came into your room and looked at myself in your mirror? And the day I came to you on the boulevard near the washerwomen? How the birds were singing! 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’re not rich. I didn’t think to tell you to pick it up. The sun was shining brightly, and it wasn’t cold. Do you remember, Monsieur Marius? Oh! How happy I am! Everyone is going to die.”

She looked wild, solemn, and heartbreaking. Her torn blouse left her throat bare.

As she spoke, she pressed her wounded hand against her chest, where there was another hole, and from it blood kept spurting now and then like wine shooting from an open cask.

Marius looked at the unfortunate girl with deep compassion.

“Oh!” she went on, “it’s starting again. I can’t breathe!”

She grabbed her blouse and bit into it, and her limbs went rigid on the pavement.

At that moment, the crow of a young rooster, imitated by little Gavroche, rang out across the barricade.

The child had climbed onto a table to load his gun, and he was cheerfully singing the song that was popular at the time:—

“En voyant Lafayette, Le gendarme répète:— Sauvons nous! sauvons nous! sauvons nous!”

“At the sight of Lafayette, the gendarme keeps repeating:— Let us run away! let us run away! let us run away!”

Éponine raised herself and listened, then murmured:—

“It’s him.”

Then, turning to Marius:—

“My brother is here. He mustn’t see me. He would scold me.”

“Your brother?” Marius asked. In the bitter, grief-stricken depths of his heart, he had been thinking about the obligations to the Thénardiers that his father had left him. “Who is your brother?”

“That little boy.”

“The one who’s singing?”

“Yes.”

Marius started to move.

“Oh, don’t go,” she said. “It won’t be long now.”

She was sitting almost upright, but her voice was very faint and broken by hiccups.

Now and then, the death rattle cut her off. She brought her face as close to Marius's as she could and added with a strange expression:

"Listen, I don't want to trick you. I have a letter for you in my pocket. I was told to mail it. I kept it. I didn't want it to reach you. But maybe you'll be angry with me for that when we see each other again very soon. Take your letter."

With her wounded hand, she clutched Marius's hand convulsively, but she no longer seemed to feel her pain. She guided his hand into the pocket of her blouse. There, Marius did indeed feel a paper.

"Take it," she said.

Marius took the letter.

She gave a sign of satisfaction and contentment.

"Now, for my trouble, promise me—"

And she stopped.

"What?" Marius asked.

"Promise me!"

"I promise."

"Promise me you'll kiss me on the forehead when I'm dead. I'll feel it."

She let her head fall back onto Marius's knees, and her eyelids closed. He thought the poor soul was gone. Éponine lay motionless. Then, just when Marius thought she had fallen

asleep forever, she slowly opened her eyes, and in them was the dark depth of death. She said to him in a voice whose sweetness already seemed to come from another world:

“And by the way, Monsieur Marius, I think I was a little in love with you.”

She tried to smile one last time and died.

CHAPTER VII—GAVROCHE AS A MASTER OF CALCULATING DISTANCES

Marius kept his promise. He pressed a kiss to that bruised forehead, where cold sweat stood in beads.

This was no betrayal of Cosette; it was a tender, thoughtful farewell to an unhappy soul.

His hand trembled as he took the letter Éponine had given him. At once, he felt that it meant something important. He was eager to read it. The human heart is made in such a way that, scarcely had the unhappy girl closed her eyes than Marius began thinking of opening the paper.

He laid her gently on the ground and walked away. Something told him he could not read that letter beside her body.

He went over to a candle in the taproom. It was a small note, folded and sealed with the neat, graceful care of a woman. The address, written in a woman's hand, read:

"To Monsieur Marius Pontmercy, at Monsieur Courfeyrac's, 16 Rue de la Verrerie."

He broke the seal and read:

"My dearest, alas! my father insists that we leave at once. This evening we shall be at No. 7 Rue de l'Homme Armé. In a week we shall be in England. COSETTE. June 4th."

Their love was so innocent that Marius did not even know Cosette's handwriting.

What happened can be told briefly. Éponine was behind it all. After the evening of June 3, she held onto two aims: to ruin her father's and the gang's plans for the house on the Rue Plumet, and to separate Marius from Cosette. She traded clothes with the first young street urchin she found who thought it fun to dress as a woman, while Éponine disguised herself as a man. It was she who gave Jean Valjean that blunt warning in the Champ de Mars: "Leave your house." Jean Valjean did in fact return home and say to Cosette, "We leave this evening and go to the Rue de l'Homme Armé with Toussaint. Next week we shall be in London." Cosette, crushed by this sudden blow, quickly wrote Marius a short note. But how could she mail it? She never went out alone, and Toussaint, startled by such an errand, would certainly have shown the letter to M. Fauchelevent. In this difficulty, Cosette noticed Éponine through the fence, dressed in men's clothes and constantly prowling around the garden. Cosette called to "that young workman" and gave him five francs and the letter, saying, "Take this letter at once to the address." Éponine put the letter in her pocket. The next day, June 5, she went to Courfeyrac's rooms to ask for Marius, not to deliver the letter, but—something every jealous and loving heart will understand—simply "to see." There she waited for Marius, or at least for Courfeyrac, still for the sake of seeing. When Courfeyrac told her, "We are going to the barricades," an idea flashed into her mind: to throw herself into that death, as she would have thrown herself into any other, and to draw Marius into it as well. She followed Courfeyrac and made sure where

the barricade was being built. Then, certain that Marius had received no warning because she had intercepted the letter, and certain that at dusk he would go, as he did every evening, to the place where he met Cosette, she went to the Rue Plumet, waited there for Marius, and, in the name of his friends, sent him the summons that she thought would lead him to the barricade. She counted on Marius' despair when he failed to find Cosette, and she was not mistaken. She herself returned to the Rue de la Chanvrerie. What she did there the reader has just seen. She died with the tragic joy of jealous hearts that drag the one they love into death with them and say, "No one shall have him!"

Marius covered Cosette's letter with kisses. So she loved him! For a moment, he thought that perhaps he should not die after all. Then he said to himself, "She is leaving. Her father is taking her to England, and my grandfather refuses to consent to our marriage. Nothing in our fate has changed." Dreamers like Marius are vulnerable to overwhelming fits of despair, and from them come desperate decisions. The weariness of living becomes unbearable; death seems quicker and easier. Then he remembered that he still had two duties to carry out: to let Cosette know of his death and send her a final farewell, and to save from the disaster that was about to happen that poor boy, Éponine's brother and Thénardier's son.

He had a pocketbook with him, the same one that had once held the notebook where he had written so many loving thoughts about Cosette. He tore out a leaf and wrote a few lines on it in pencil:

“Our marriage was impossible. I asked my grandfather, and he refused. I have no fortune, and neither do you. I hurried to you, but you were no longer there. You know the promise I gave you; I will keep it. I am dying. I love you. When you read this, my soul will be near you, and you will smile.”

As he had nothing to seal the letter with, he simply folded the paper into four and added the address:

“To Mademoiselle Cosette Fauchelevent, at M. Fauchelevent’s, Rue de l’Homme Armé, No. 7.”

After folding the letter, he stood thinking for a moment, then took out his pocketbook again, opened it, and wrote these four lines on the first page with the same pencil:

“My name is Marius Pontmercy. Take 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 and then called Gavroche.

At the sound of Marius’s voice, the gamin ran up to him with his usual cheerful, devoted manner.

“Will you do something for me?”

“Anything,” said Gavroche. “Good God! If it hadn’t been for you, I’d have been finished.”

“Do you see this letter?”

“Yes.”

“Take it. Leave the barricade at once.” Gavroche began uneasily scratching his ear. “Tomorrow morning, deliver it to Mademoiselle Cosette at M. Fauchelevent’s, 7 Rue de l’Homme Armé.”

The brave child replied:

“Yes, but in the meantime the barricade will be taken, and I won’t be there.”

“From all appearances, the barricade won’t be attacked until daybreak, and it won’t be taken before tomorrow at noon.”

In fact, the fresh delay the attackers were giving the barricade had been extended. It was one of those pauses that often happen in night battles, and they are always followed by even greater fury.

“Well,” said Gavroche, “what if I took your letter tomorrow instead?”

“It will be too late. The barricade will probably be surrounded, all the streets will be guarded, and you won’t be able to get out. Go now.”

Gavroche had no answer to that. He stood there, uncertain, sadly scratching his ear.

Then, all at once, he snatched up the letter with one of the quick, birdlike movements so natural to him.

“All right,” he said.

And he ran off through Mondétour Lane.

An idea had come to Gavroche and made up his mind for him, but he had not mentioned it because he was afraid Marius might object.

This was his idea:

“It’s barely midnight. Rue de l’Homme Armé is not far away. I’ll go deliver the letter at once, and I’ll be back in time.”

CHAPTER I—A DRINKER TALKS TOO MUCH

What are the upheavals of a city compared with the rebellions of the soul? A man can be deeper still than a people. At that very moment, Jean Valjean was in the grip of a terrible inner turmoil. Every kind of abyss had opened again within him. He too was trembling, like Paris, on the edge of a dark and fearsome revolution. A few hours had been enough to bring it on. His fate and his conscience had suddenly been plunged into shadow. The same could have been said of him as of Paris: “Two principles stand face to face. The white angel and the black angel are about to grapple on the bridge above the abyss. Which one will throw the other over? Which one will prevail?”

On the evening before that same 5th of June, Jean Valjean, with Cosette and Toussaint, had settled into the house in the Rue de l’Homme Armé. A change was waiting for him there.

Cosette had not left the Rue Plumet without trying to resist. For the first time since they had been living together, her will and Jean Valjean’s had shown themselves to be separate, and even opposed, if not openly in conflict. On one side there were objections; on the other, unbending firmness. The sudden warning, “Leave your house,” thrown at Jean Valjean by a stranger, had frightened him so much that he became absolute in his decision. He believed he had been tracked and watched. Cosette had been forced to give in.

They both arrived in the Rue de l'Homme Armé without speaking a word, each absorbed in private thoughts: Jean Valjean so troubled that he did not notice Cosette's sadness, and Cosette so sad that she did not notice Jean Valjean's anxiety.

Jean Valjean had brought Toussaint with him, something he had never done on his earlier absences. He saw that he might not return to the Rue Plumet, and he could neither leave Toussaint behind nor trust her with his secret. Besides, he felt that she was loyal and dependable. Betrayal between master and servant begins with curiosity. But Toussaint, as if she had been made to serve Jean Valjean, was not curious. She would stammer in her peasant dialect of Barneville: "That's how I am; I do my work; the rest is none of my business."

When they left the Rue Plumet—a departure that was almost an escape—Jean Valjean took nothing with him except the little leather valise Cosette had nicknamed "the inseparable." Large trunks would have meant hiring porters, and porters are witnesses. A fiacre had been called to the door in the Rue de Babylone, and they set out.

Toussaint had only with difficulty managed to get permission to pack a little linen, some clothes, and a few toilet articles. Cosette had taken only her portfolio and her blotting book.

To make their departure from the pavilion in the Rue Plumet even more secluded and mysterious, Jean Valjean had arranged for them to leave only at dusk. That gave Cosette time to write her note to Marius. They reached the Rue de l'Homme Armé

after night had fully fallen.

They went to bed without a word.

The lodgings in the Rue de l'Homme Armé were on a back court, on the second floor. They consisted of two bedrooms, a dining room, and a kitchen next to the dining room, along with an attic where there was a folding bed, which was given to Toussaint. The dining room also served as an antechamber and lay between the two bedrooms. The apartment was furnished with everything necessary.

People regain confidence just as foolishly as they lose it; that is how human nature is made. Hardly had Jean Valjean arrived in the Rue de l'Homme Armé when his anxiety began to ease and gradually faded. Some places calm the mind almost mechanically. A dark street, quiet residents. In that alley of old Paris, Jean Valjean felt an indescribable contagion of peace. It was so narrow that a crossbar set on two posts blocked carriages from entering. Silent and still in the middle of the noisy city, dim even at midday, it seemed incapable of emotion, shut in between two rows of tall, centuries-old houses that kept their silence like the ancients they were. There was something of stagnant oblivion in that street. Jean Valjean could breathe again there. How could anyone find him in such a place?

His first concern was to place the inseparable beside him.

He slept well. Night brings wisdom; we might also say that night brings comfort. The next morning he woke in a mood that was almost cheerful. He found the dining room charming, though it was actually ugly, furnished with an old round table, a long

sideboard topped by a tilted mirror, a worn-out armchair, and several plain chairs cluttered with Toussaint's parcels. Through a tear in one of them, Jean Valjean's National Guard uniform could be seen.

As for Cosette, she had Toussaint bring some broth to her room and did not appear until evening.

At about five o'clock, Toussaint, going back and forth as she busied herself with the little household, set a cold chicken on the table, which Cosette, out of respect for her father, agreed to look at.

After that, Cosette, claiming a stubborn headache, bade Jean Valjean good night and shut herself in her room. Jean Valjean ate a wing of the chicken with a healthy appetite, and, with his elbows on the table, gradually recovered his calm and his sense of security.

While he was eating this simple dinner, he vaguely noticed, two or three times, Toussaint's stammering words as she said to him, "Monsieur, something is happening; they are fighting in Paris." But lost in a crowd of thoughts and calculations, he paid no attention. In truth, he had not heard her. He got up and began to pace from the door to the window and from the window to the door, growing calmer and calmer.

In that calm, Cosette—his one real concern—came back into his thoughts. It was not that he was worried about this headache, this slight nervous upset, this young girl's moment of sulking, this passing cloud; in a day or two, nothing would remain of it. But he was thinking about the future, and, as usual, he thought

of it with pleasure. After all, he saw no reason why their happy life should not go on as before. At some moments, everything seems impossible; at others, everything seems easy. Jean Valjean was in one of those hopeful hours. They usually come after the dark ones, as day follows night, by that law of sequence and contrast that lies at the heart of nature, and that shallow minds call antithesis. In this quiet street where he had taken refuge, Jean Valjean felt freed from everything that had been troubling him for some time. The very fact that he had seen so many shadows made him begin to notice a little blue sky. Leaving the Rue Plumet without complications or incident was already one important step. Perhaps it would be wise to go abroad, if only for a few months, and leave for London. Very well, they would go. What did it matter to him whether he was in France or England, as long as Cosette was with him? Cosette was his country. Cosette was enough for his happiness. The thought that he might perhaps not be enough for Cosette's happiness—a thought that had once caused him fever and sleepless nights—did not even cross his mind. He was exhausted by all he had suffered, and he had fully given himself over to optimism. Cosette was beside him; she seemed to belong to him—an illusion of perspective that everyone has known. In his mind, he arranged his departure for England with Cosette in all sorts of happy ways, and in the distance of his daydream he saw his happiness restored wherever he chose to place it.

As he walked back and forth in long strides, his eyes suddenly fell on something strange.

In the tilted mirror above the sideboard facing him, he saw the following four lines:

“My dearest, alas! my father insists that we leave at once. This evening we shall be at No. 7 Rue de l’Homme Armé. In a week we shall be in England. COSETTE. June 4.”

Jean Valjean stopped short, utterly aghast.

When Cosette arrived, she had set her blotting book on the sideboard in front of the mirror. Completely lost in her grief, she forgot it there. She did not even notice that she had left it wide open, turned to the very page where she had placed the four lines she had written to dry—the lines she had entrusted to the young workman in the Rue Plumet. The writing had transferred onto the blotter.

The mirror reflected the writing.

The result was what geometry calls a symmetrical image. The writing, reversed on the blotter, appeared corrected in the mirror and showed itself in its natural form. So Jean Valjean saw before him the letter Cosette had written to Marius the night before.

It was brief and devastating.

Jean Valjean stepped toward the mirror. He read the four lines again, but he could not believe them. They struck him like a flash of lightning. It had to be a hallucination. It was impossible. It could not be true.

Gradually, his senses cleared. He looked at Cosette's blotting book, and the reality of it came back to him. Snatching up the blotter, he said, "It comes from there." He examined the four lines feverishly, printed onto the blotter, the letters reversed into a strange scrawl, and he could make no sense of them. Then he said to himself, "But this means nothing; there is nothing written here." And he let out a long breath of indescribable relief. Who has not known those foolish bursts of hope in terrible moments? The soul does not give itself over to despair until it has used up every illusion.

He held the blotter in his hand and stared at it with dull delight, almost ready to laugh at the hallucination that had fooled him. Then suddenly his eyes went back to the mirror, and he saw the vision again. There were the four lines, standing out with merciless clarity. This time it was no mirage. When a vision returns, it becomes reality. It was unmistakable: the writing restored in the mirror. He understood.

Jean Valjean staggered, let the blotter fall, and collapsed into the old armchair beside the buffet. His head drooped, his eyes were vacant, and he sat there in complete bewilderment. He told himself that it was obvious: the light had gone out of his world forever, and Cosette had written those words to someone else. Then, in the darkness, he heard his soul—terrible once again—let out a low, muffled roar. Imagine what happens when you take from a lion the dog he keeps in his cage.

Strange and painful as it is to say, at that very moment Marius still had not received Cosette's letter; chance had treacherously placed it in Jean Valjean's hands before it reached Marius. Until

that day, Jean Valjean had not been defeated by suffering. He had endured terrible ordeals. No cruelty of misfortune had been spared him. Fate, with all its vindictiveness and all the contempt of society, had marked him as its prey and attacked him relentlessly. Whenever it was necessary, he had accepted every extreme. He had sacrificed the security of his life as a reformed man, given up his freedom, risked his life, lost everything, suffered everything. And through it all he had remained so selfless and so stoic that he might have seemed detached from himself, like a martyr. His conscience, hardened against every blow of destiny, might have seemed forever unshakable. Yet anyone who could have seen into his soul would have had to admit that, at that moment, it gave way. Of all the torments he had suffered during the long inquisition to which fate had condemned him, this was the worst. Never before had he been gripped by such agony. He felt every hidden feeling within him begin to stir. He felt that strange inner string being plucked. Alas, the ultimate trial—or rather, the only true trial—is losing the person one loves.

Poor old Jean Valjean certainly did not love Cosette in any way but as a father. But, as we have already noted, the loneliness of his widowed life had brought every shade of love into that fatherly bond. He loved Cosette as a daughter, as a mother, and as a sister. And because he had never had a woman to love or a wife, and because nature is a creditor who accepts no refusal, that feeling too—the hardest of all to root out—was mixed in with the rest. It remained vague, innocent, and pure with the purity of blindness: unconscious, heavenly, angelic, divine. It was less a feeling than an instinct, and less an instinct than a

subtle, invisible, yet real attraction. In the immense tenderness he felt for Cosette, love properly so called was like a thread of gold hidden deep in a mountain, untouched and unseen.

Let the reader remember the state of their hearts that we have already described. No marriage between them was possible, not even a marriage of souls; and yet their destinies were undeniably joined. Except for Cosette—that is, except for one childhood—Jean Valjean had never, in his whole long life, known anything that could be loved. The passions and loves that come one after another had never produced in him those successive growths, pale green or dark green, that we see in foliage that survives winter and in men who pass fifty. In short—and we have emphasized this more than once—all this inward blending, this whole whose final result was a lofty virtue, ended by making Jean Valjean a father to Cosette. A strange father, made out of the grandfather, the son, the brother, and the husband within him; a father who even contained a mother; a father who loved Cosette and adored her, and who saw that child as his light, his home, his family, his country, his paradise.

So when he saw that the end had truly come—that she was escaping him, slipping from his grasp, drifting away like a cloud, like water—when he had before his eyes this crushing proof: "someone else is the aim of her heart, someone else is the desire of her life; there is one she loves most dearly; I am nothing now but her father, I no longer exist"; when he could no longer doubt, when he said to himself, "She is leaving me!"—the grief he felt went beyond all limits. To have done everything he had done only for it to end like this! And then the thought of

being nothing! At that moment, as we have said, a shudder of revolt passed through him from head to foot. He felt the vast return of selfishness, down to the very roots of his hair, and the "I" in the depths of this man cried out.

There are moments when the ground inside a person suddenly gives way. A certainty born of despair does not enter a man without pushing aside and breaking deep parts of him—parts that, in some cases, are the man himself. Grief, when it takes this form, becomes a wild stampede of every force in the conscience. These are deadly crises. Few of us come through them still unchanged and steady in our duty. When the limit of endurance is crossed, even the calmest virtue is shaken. Jean Valjean picked up the blotter again and made sure once more. He stayed bent over those four undeniable lines, as if turned to stone, staring at them; and such a darkness rose within him that it seemed as though everything in his soul were collapsing.

He looked at this revelation through all the distortions of his brooding thoughts with a calm that was both visible and terrifying, for it is a dreadful thing when a man’s calm grows as cold as a statue’s.

He measured the terrible step his fate had taken without his ever suspecting it. He remembered his fears from the previous summer, fears he had dismissed so foolishly. He saw the precipice and knew it was the same one as before; only now Jean Valjean was no longer standing at the edge—he was at the bottom.

What was unprecedented and heartbreaking was that he had fallen without realizing it. All the light had gone out of his life while he still imagined that he was looking at the sun.

His instinct did not waver. He connected certain circumstances, certain dates, and the blushes and sudden paleness he had seen in Cosette, and he said to himself, “It is he.”

The intuition born of despair is like a mysterious arrow that never misses. With his very first guess, he hit upon Marius. He did not know his name, but he recognized the man at once. Through the relentless spell of his memories, he clearly saw again the unknown figure who had lurked in the Luxembourg—that miserable hunter of love affairs, that romantic idler, that fool, that coward; for it is cowardly to cast looks at young girls when a father who loves them is beside them.

Once he had fully convinced himself that this young man was the cause of the whole situation, and that everything came from him, Jean Valjean—the regenerated man, the man who had worked so hard on his soul, the man who had struggled to turn all life, all misery, and all unhappiness into love—looked into his own heart and saw a specter there: Hate.

Great sorrows carry a kind of collapse within them. They make a person lose heart about life itself. The man they enter feels something inside him pulling away. In youth, their visits are mournful; later, they become terrifying. Alas, if despair is dreadful when the blood is warm, when the hair is black, when the head stands upright like a flame on a torch, when destiny

still seems full before us, when the heart, rich with love to give, still has beats that can be answered, when there is still time to set things right, when all women and all smiles and all the future and all the horizon lie ahead, when the strength of life is whole—what is despair in old age, when the years rush on, growing paler and paler, toward that twilight hour when one begins to see the stars of the tomb?

While he was thinking, Toussaint came in. Jean Valjean stood up and asked her:

“What part of the city is it in? Do you know?”

Toussaint was so startled that she could only answer:

“What is it, sir?”

Jean Valjean repeated, “Did you not just tell me that there is fighting going on?”

“Ah, yes, sir,” Toussaint replied. “It is in the direction of Saint-Merry.”

A kind of automatic impulse can rise in us, without our knowing it, from the deepest part of our minds. It was probably under the force of such an impulse, one he was barely aware of, that Jean Valjean found himself in the street five minutes later.

Bareheaded, he sat on the stone post by his door. He seemed to be listening.

Night had fallen.

CHAPTER II—THE STREET URCHIN, AN ENEMY OF LIGHT

How long did he stay like that? What passed through that tragic meditation, as it rose and fell? Did he lift himself up? Did he remain bent over? Had he been pushed to the breaking point? Could he still stand again and find firm ground in his conscience? He himself probably could not have said.

The street was empty. A few anxious bourgeois, hurrying home, barely noticed him. In times of danger, everyone thinks of himself. As usual, the lamplighter came to light the lantern directly opposite the door of No. 7, then went away. To anyone who might have looked at him in that shadow, Jean Valjean would hardly have seemed alive. He sat there on the post by his door, motionless as an ice figure. Despair has a way of freezing a man. Alarm bells could be heard, along with a vague, turbulent uproar. In the middle of all that shaking bell-ringing mixed with revolt, the clock of Saint-Paul struck eleven, solemnly and without haste; for the tocsin is man, and the hour is God. The passing of the hour had no effect on Jean Valjean; he did not move. But around that moment, a sudden shot rang out in the direction of the Halles, followed by a second, even more violent one. It was probably the attack on the barricade in the Rue de la Chanvrerie that we have just seen Marius repel. At that double blast, whose violence seemed even greater in the stunned silence of the night, Jean Valjean started. He stood up and turned toward the part of the city where the noise had come from. Then he sank back onto the post, folded his arms, and

slowly let his head drop onto his chest again.

He went back to his dark conversation with himself.

All at once, he lifted his eyes. Someone was walking in the street; he heard footsteps near him. He looked, and in the light of the lanterns, toward the street that led into the Rue-aux-Archives, he saw a young face, pale and radiant.

Gavroche had just arrived in the Rue de l'Homme Armé.

Gavroche was gazing up into the air, as if he were looking for something. He saw Jean Valjean clearly enough, but paid him no attention.

After staring upward, Gavroche looked down. He rose onto his tiptoes and felt along the doors and ground-floor windows; every one of them was shut, barred, and padlocked. After checking the fronts of five or six barricaded houses this way, the street urchin shrugged and scolded himself in these words:

"Pardi!"

Then he started looking up into the air again.

Jean Valjean, who a moment earlier, in the state of mind he was in, would neither have spoken to nor answered anyone, felt an irresistible urge to speak to the child.

"What's the matter, my little fellow?" he said.

"What's the matter is that I'm hungry," Gavroche replied bluntly. Then he added, "Little fellow yourself."

Jean Valjean felt in his watch pocket and took out a five-franc piece.

But Gavroche, lively as a wagtail and quick to dart from one impulse to the next, had just picked up a stone. He had spotted the lantern.

“Look here,” he said, “you’ve still got your lanterns here. You’re breaking the regulations, my friend. This is disorderly. Smash that for me.”

And he hurled the stone at the lantern. The shattered glass came down with such a crash that the bourgeois hiding behind the curtains in the house opposite cried, “Ninety-three has come again.”

The lantern swung violently, then went out. The street was suddenly dark.

“That’s right, old street,” Gavroche exclaimed, “put on your nightcap.”

Then he turned to Jean Valjean:

“What do you call that enormous monument at the end of the street? That’s the Archives, isn’t it? I ought to chip away at those big stupid pillars a little and make a nice barricade out of them.”

Jean Valjean stepped closer to Gavroche.

“Poor child,” he said softly, speaking to himself, “he’s hungry.”

And he placed the hundred-sou coin in his hand.

Gavroche looked up, stunned by the size of the coin. He peered at it in the dark, and the pale shine of the big piece dazzled him. He had only heard about five-franc coins; he liked the sound of them well enough, and he was thrilled to see one up close. He said:

“Let us admire the tiger.”

He stared at it in rapture for several minutes. Then he turned to Jean Valjean, held the coin out to him, and said with great dignity:

“Bourgeois, I’d rather smash lanterns. Take back your fierce beast. You can’t buy me off. It may have five claws, but it doesn’t scratch me.”

“Do you have a mother?” Jean Valjean asked.

Gavroche replied:

“Maybe more than you do.”

“Then,” said Jean Valjean, “keep the money for your mother.”

Gavroche was moved. Besides, he had just noticed that the man speaking to him had no hat, and that made him trust him.

“Really,” he said, “so it wasn’t to stop me from breaking the lanterns?”

“Break whatever you like.”

“You’re a good man,” said Gavroche.

And he slipped the five-franc piece into one of his pockets.

Now that he felt more at ease, he added:

“Do you live on this street?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Can you tell me where No. 7 is?”

“What do you want with No. 7?”

At that, the boy stopped short; he was afraid he had said too much. He dug his nails hard into his hair and settled for answering:

“Ah! Here it is.”

An idea flashed through Jean Valjean’s mind. Even anguish has moments of sudden insight. He said to the boy:

“Are you the one bringing a letter I’ve been expecting?”

“You?” said Gavroche. “You’re not a woman.”

“The letter is for Mademoiselle Cosette, isn’t it?”

“Cosette,” Gavroche muttered. “Yes, I think that’s the odd name.”

“Well,” Jean Valjean went on, “I’m the one you’re supposed to deliver the letter to. Give it here.”

“In that case, you should know I was sent from the barricade.”

“Of course,” said Jean Valjean.

Gavroche plunged his hand into another pocket and pulled out a sheet of paper folded into four.

Then he gave a military salute.

“Respect for official messages,” he said. “It comes from the Provisional Government.”

“Give it to me,” said Jean Valjean.

Gavroche held the paper up over his head.

“Don’t go thinking it’s a love letter. It’s for a woman, yes, but it’s for the people too. We men fight, and we respect the ladies. We’re not like those people in high society, where lions send chickens to camels.”

“Give it to me.”

“Still,” Gavroche went on, “you do look like an honest man.”

“Give it to me, quickly.”

“Take it, then.”

And he handed the paper to Jean Valjean.

“And hurry up, Monsieur What’s-your-name, because Mademoiselle Cosette is waiting.”

Gavroche was pleased with himself for coming out with that remark.

Jean Valjean began again:

“Should the reply be sent to Saint-Merry?”

“Now you’re making one of those little pastries commonly called brioches—that is, blunders. This letter comes from the barricade in the Rue de la Chanvrerie, and that’s where I’m

going back. Good evening, citizen."

With that, Gavroche slipped away—or, more exactly, fluttered off in the direction he had come from, like a bird that had escaped. He plunged back into the darkness as if he were tearing a hole through it, moving with the hard, swift force of a shot. The alley of l'Homme Armé fell silent and deserted again. In an instant, that strange child, who seemed half shadow and half dream, vanished into the mist among the rows of black houses and was lost there like smoke in the night. One might have thought he had simply dissolved and disappeared, if not for what happened a few minutes later: a sudden, startling shiver of glass, and then the splendid crash of a lantern clattering down onto the pavement, once again jolting the indignant bourgeois awake. It was Gavroche, making his way along the Rue du Chaume.

CHAPTER III—WHILE COSETTE AND TOUSSAINT ARE ASLEEP

Jean Valjean went into the house with Marius' letter.

He felt his way up the stairs, as comfortable in the dark as an owl clutching its prey. He opened and closed his door softly, then listened for any sound. He made sure that, as far as he could tell, Cosette and Toussaint were asleep. Before he could get a spark, he had to strike three or four matches against the bottle of the Fumade lighter; his hand was trembling so badly. What he had just done felt like theft. At last the candle was lit. He leaned his elbows on the table, unfolded the paper, and read.

In moments of violent emotion, people do not really read. They almost throw the paper to the ground, so to speak, even while clutching it like a victim. They crumple it. They dig their nails into it in anger or joy. They rush to the end, then jump back to the beginning. Their attention burns with fever. It takes in only the main points, in broad strokes; it seizes one thing, and everything else disappears. In Marius' note to Cosette, Jean Valjean saw only these words:

"I die. When thou readest this, my soul will be near thee."

At the sight of those two lines, he was overwhelmed, almost blinded. For a moment he sat crushed by the violent change of feeling rising within him. He stared at Marius' note in a kind of

intoxicated amazement. Before his eyes shone that radiant thought: the death of a man he hated.

He let out a terrible cry of secret joy. So it was over at last. The disaster had come sooner than he had even dared hope. The person standing in the way of his destiny was vanishing. That man had gone of his own free will, willingly, by his own choice. He was going to his death, and Jean Valjean had played no part in it. It was in no way his fault. Perhaps he was even dead already. At that point, his feverish mind began to calculate. No, he was not dead yet. The letter was clearly meant for Cosette to read the next morning. After the two shots heard between eleven o'clock and midnight, nothing else had happened. The barricade would not be seriously attacked until daybreak. But that changed nothing. Since "that man" was involved in this battle, he was doomed. He was caught in the machinery. Jean Valjean felt set free. He was going to be alone with Cosette again. The rivalry would end. The future was beginning anew. He had only to keep the note in his pocket. Cosette would never know what had become of that man. Nothing needed to be done except let events take their course. The man could not escape. If he was not dead already, then he was certain to die soon. What good fortune!

After saying all this to himself, he grew gloomy.

Then he went downstairs and woke the porter.

About an hour later, Jean Valjean went out dressed in the full uniform of a National Guard and carrying weapons. The porter had easily found, in the neighborhood, everything needed to

complete his outfit. He had a loaded gun and a cartridge box full of cartridges.

He set off toward the markets.

CHAPTER IV—GAVROCHE'S EXCESS OF ZEAL

Meanwhile, Gavroche had an adventure.

After dutifully stoning the lantern in the Rue du Chaume, Gavroche turned into the Rue des Vieilles-Haudriettes. Seeing not even a cat there, he decided it was a fine chance to sing at the top of his lungs. Far from slowing his march, the singing made him move faster. As he went along past the sleeping or frightened houses, he scattered these incendiary verses:

"L'oiseau médit dans les charmilles, Et prétend qu'hier Atala Avec un Russe s'en alla. Où vont les belles filles, Lon la."

"My friend Pierrot, you chatter on, because the other day Mila knocked on her window and called to me, Where do the pretty girls go, lon la."

"The girls are very charming. Their poison, which bewitched me, would intoxicate Monsieur Orfila. Where do the pretty girls go, lon la."

"I love love and I love quarrels. I love Agnès, I love Paméla. Lise caught fire while setting me ablaze. Where do the pretty girls go, lon la."

"Long ago, when I saw the mantillas of Suzette and Zéila, my soul tangled itself in their folds. Where do the pretty girls go, lon la."

“Love, when in the shadow where you shine, you crown Lola with roses, I would damn myself for that. Where do the pretty girls go, lon la.”

“Jeanne, you dress yourself before your mirror! One fine day my heart flew away. I think Jeanne is the one who took it. Where do the pretty girls go, lon la.”

“In the evening, coming out of the quadrilles, I point Stella out to the stars, and I say to them, ‘Look at her.’ Where do the pretty girls go, lon la.”56

As he sang, Gavroche threw himself into the performance with extravagant pantomime. Gesture was the heart of the refrain. His face, an endless storehouse of expressions, twisted into grimaces wilder and more startling than the tears in a cloth ripped apart by a violent wind. Unfortunately, he was alone, and it was night, so no one saw any of it, or even could have. Such squandered riches do happen.

All at once, he stopped.

“Let’s pause the romance,” he said.

His catlike eye had just spotted, in the recess of a carriage doorway, what painters call an _ensemble_—that is, a person and a thing. The thing was a handcart; the person was a man from Auvergne asleep inside it.

The cart’s shafts rested on the pavement, and the Auvergnat’s head leaned against the front of the cart. His body was curled up along that sloping surface, and his feet touched the ground.

With his worldly experience, Gavroche recognized a drunk man at once. He was some street errand-runner who had drunk too much and was now sleeping it off.

“Well now,” thought Gavroche, “that’s what summer nights are good for. We’ll take the cart for the Republic and leave the Auvergnat to the Monarchy.”

A sudden idea had just flashed through his mind:

"How great that cart would look on our barricade!"

The Auvergnat was snoring.

Gavroche gently pulled the cart from behind and tugged the Auvergnat from the front—that is, by the feet—and within another minute the unshakable Auvergnat was lying flat on the pavement.

The cart was free.

Gavroche, used to dealing with surprises from every direction, always had what he needed. He felt around in one of his pockets and pulled out a scrap of paper and a bit of red pencil he had stolen from some carpenter.

He wrote:

"French Republic."

"Received your cart."

And he signed it: "GAVROCHE."

When that was done, he slipped the paper into the pocket of the still-snoring Auvergnat's velvet vest, grabbed the cart shafts

with both hands, and headed toward the Halles, shoving the cart ahead of him at a full run with glorious, triumphant noise.

This was dangerous. There was a guard post at the Royal Printing Establishment, but Gavroche did not think of that. The post was manned by National Guards from the suburbs. The squad began to stir, and heads lifted from camp beds. Two street lanterns had been smashed one after the other, and that song had been shouted at the top of a voice. It was a lot for those timid streets, which wanted to be asleep by sunset and snuffed out their candles so early. For the past hour, that boy had been raising a racket in that quiet arrondissement, like a fly trapped in a bottle. The suburban sergeant listened. He waited. He was a cautious man.

The wild clatter of the cart pushed waiting as far as it could go and finally made the sergeant decide to go out and take a look.

"There's a whole gang of them out there!" he said. "Let's move carefully."

It was obvious that the hydra of anarchy had come out of its box and was now roaming through the neighborhood.

And the sergeant stepped out of the post with careful, quiet steps.

All at once, as Gavroche pushed his cart ahead of him and was just about to turn into the Rue des Vieilles-Haudriettes, he came face to face with a uniform, a shako, a plume, and a gun.

For the second time, he stopped dead.

“Well now,” he said, “it’s him. Good day, public order.”

Gavroche was never amazed for long, and he recovered quickly.

“Where are you going, you rascal?” shouted the sergeant.

“Citizen,” Gavroche shot back, “I haven’t called you ‘bourgeois’ yet. Why are you insulting me?”

“Where are you going, you rogue?”

“Monsieur,” Gavroche replied, “perhaps you were witty yesterday, but this morning you’ve gone downhill.”

“I’m asking you where you’re going, you villain!”

Gavroche replied:

“You do have a charming way of speaking. Really, no one would think you were as old as you are. You ought to sell your hair at a hundred francs apiece. That would bring you five hundred francs.”

“Where are you going? Where are you going? Where are you going, bandit?”

Gavroche fired back again:

“What filthy language! You ought to wipe your mouth better the first time they nurse you.”

The sergeant lowered his bayonet.

“Will you tell me where you’re going, you wretch?”

“General,” said Gavroche, “I’m on my way to fetch a doctor for my wife, who’s in labor.”

“To arms!” shouted the sergeant.

The great trick of strong men is to save themselves by the very thing that seemed to ruin them; Gavroche grasped the whole situation in a single glance. The cart was what had given him away, so the cart would have to protect him.

Just as the sergeant was about to come down on Gavroche, Gavroche turned the cart into a missile and hurled it with all his strength. It came crashing down on the sergeant, hit him square in the stomach, and sent him sprawling backward into the gutter while his gun went off into the air.

At the sergeant’s shout, the men at the post rushed out in a wild scramble. The shot set off a general, aimless volley. Then they reloaded and started firing again.

This blind man’s bluff of musket fire went on for fifteen minutes and shattered several windowpanes.

Meanwhile, Gavroche had raced back the way he came. Five or six streets away, he stopped and sat down, out of breath, on the stone post at the corner of the Enfants-Rouges.

He listened.

After catching his breath for a few minutes, he turned toward the direction where the gunfire was still raging. He raised his left hand level with his nose and thrust it forward three times, while slapping the back of his head with his right hand—an insolent gesture in which Paris street-urchins have packed all the irony

of France, and one that must be effective, since it has already lasted half a century.

One bitter thought spoiled his good humor.

“Yes,” he said, “I’m dying of laughter, I’m beside myself with joy, I’m overflowing with happiness—but I’m losing my way. I’ll have to go around. If only I can reach the barricade in time!”

Then he took off running again.

And as he ran:

“Ah, by the way, where was I?” he said.

And he picked up his little song again as he darted quickly through the streets, and this is what faded into the darkness:

“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 guard’s use of force was not without effect. The cart was captured, and the drunken man was arrested. The cart was taken to the pound, and the man was later given some trouble before the military councils as an accomplice. In this case, the

public prosecutor of the day showed tireless zeal in defending society.

[END OF VOLUME IV “SAINT DENIS”]

Volume V Jean Valjean

[Illustration: Frontispiece to Volume Five]

[Illustration: Title Page of Volume Five]

CHAPTER I—THE CHARYBDIS OF THE FAUBOURG SAINT-ANTOINE AND THE SCYLLA OF THE FAUBOURG DU TEMPLE

The two most memorable barricades that any observer of society's illnesses can point to do not belong to the period in which this story takes place. Both were symbolic, each in its own way, of a formidable crisis. They rose from the ground during the fatal June uprising of 1848, the greatest street war history has ever seen.

It sometimes happens that, in defiance of principle, in defiance of liberty, equality, and fraternity, in defiance of universal suffrage, in defiance of government by all for all, that great despairing mass—the mob—rises out of the depths of its anguish, discouragement, poverty, fever, misery, foul air, ignorance, and darkness, and protests against the people, even making war on them.

Beggars attack the common right; the mob rises against the people.

These are sorrowful days. For even in this madness there is always some darkness; in this duel there is something of suicide. And those words meant as insults—beggars, canaille, ochlocracy, populace—show, alas, less the fault of those who suffer than the fault of those who rule; less the fault of the

privileged than that of the dispossessed.

For our part, we never say those words without both pain and respect. When philosophy probes the realities they refer to, it often discovers a kind of greatness alongside all that misery. Athens was an ochlocracy; beggars helped shape Holland; the common people saved Rome more than once; and the rabble followed Jesus Christ.

There is no thinker who has not, at times, reflected on the grandeur of the lower classes.

No doubt Saint Jerome was thinking of this rabble—of all these poor people, all these wanderers, all these wretched souls from whom the apostles and martyrs arose—when he spoke that mysterious phrase: _"Fex urbis, lex orbis,"_—the dregs of the city, the law of the earth.

The outbursts of this suffering, bleeding crowd—its senseless violence, turned against the very principles that sustain its life, its forceful attacks on what is right—are its popular _coups d'état_, and they must be put down. An honest man gives himself to that task, and out of his very love for this crowd, he fights it. Yet even as he stands against it, how readily he forgives it. Even as he resists it, how deeply he honors it. This is one of those rare moments when, in doing what duty requires, a person feels something unsettling, something that would almost persuade him to stop. Still, he goes on; he must. But though his conscience is satisfied, it is sorrowful, and the fulfillment of duty is mixed with heartbreak.

Let us say at once that June, 1848, was an exceptional event, one that almost defies classification in the philosophy of history. All the words we have just used must be set aside when we speak of this extraordinary uprising, in which one senses the sacred unrest of labor demanding its rights. It had to be fought, and that was a duty, because it attacked the republic. But what was June, 1848, at its core? It was the people rising against itself.

As long as the subject remains in view, there is no digression. So let us pause for a moment and ask the reader to consider the two utterly unique barricades we have just mentioned, which gave this insurrection its distinctive character.

One blocked the entrance to the Faubourg Saint Antoine; the other guarded the approach to the Faubourg du Temple. No one who saw these two terrifying masterpieces of civil war rising beneath the brilliant blue sky of June will ever forget them.

The Saint-Antoine barricade was enormous: three stories high and seven hundred feet across. It sealed off the broad entrance to the faubourg—that is, three streets from corner to corner. Torn, jagged, gouged out, split, and notched, with a huge gap in it, braced by heaps that were like bastions themselves and jutting out here and there like capes, it was powerfully supported by two large clusters of houses in the faubourg. At the end of that formidable square, which had seen the 14th of July, it rose like a Cyclopean dike. Behind this main barricade, nineteen more were lined up one after another in the depths of the streets. At the mere sight of it, you could feel the agonized suffering of the vast faubourg, driven to that final extreme

where misery can turn into catastrophe. What was this barricade made of? Some said it came from the ruins of three six-story houses deliberately torn down for the purpose. Others said it was made from the miracle of every kind of rage. It had the mournful look of everything built out of hatred and ruin. You might ask, Who built this? You might just as well ask, Who destroyed this? It was the sudden creation of an uprising in full boil. Here—take this door! this iron grating! this lean-to! this mantelpiece! this broken brazier! this cracked pot! Give everything! Throw everything in! Roll this over, dig, tear down, overturn, destroy it all! It was made by the combined labor of paving stones, blocks of rock, beams, iron bars, rags, scraps, shattered glass, overturned chairs, cabbage stalks, tatters, and curses. It was grand, and it was trivial. It was the abyss acted out in the public square by uproar. The massive beside the tiny; a strip of ruined wall beside a broken bowl—the threatening brotherhood of every kind of debris. Sisyphus had thrown in his rock, and Job his potsherd. In short, it was terrible. It was the acropolis of the barefooted. Overturned carts broke up the slope’s uniform line. A huge dray lay across it, its axle sticking up toward the sky, like a scar on that chaotic front. An omnibus, hauled by sheer force to the very top of the heap, seemed to show that the builders of this savage structure had wanted to add a touch of street-urchin humor to their terror; horseless and unharnessed, it held out its pole to some unknown horses of the air. This gigantic pile, the sediment of revolt, suggested to the mind an Ossa piled on Pelion of revolutions: '93 on '89, the 9th of Thermidor on the 10th of August, the 18th of Brumaire on the 11th of January, Vendémiaire on Prairial, 1848 on 1830. The

moment justified the effort, and this barricade deserved to stand on the very ground where the Bastille had once stood. If the ocean built dikes, this is how it would build them. The fury of a flood was stamped on this shapeless mass. What flood? The crowd. It looked like uproar turned to stone. You seemed to hear a humming above it, as if enormous dark bees of violent progress hovered over their hive. Was it a thicket? A bacchanal? A fortress? It seemed as though dizziness itself had built it with the beating of its wings. There was something of the cesspool in that redoubt, and something Olympian in its confusion. In that desperate jumble you could see roof timbers, bits of attic windows with patterned paper still on them, window frames with panes still set in them waiting for cannon fire, broken chimneys, cupboards, tables, benches, a howling world turned upside down, and those thousand poverty-stricken objects—the very refuse of beggars—that somehow hold both fury and emptiness. You might have said it was the tatters of a people—rags of wood, iron, bronze, and stone—and that the Faubourg Saint-Antoine had swept them up and flung them down at its own door, making a barricade out of its misery with one colossal stroke of the broom. Blocks like executioners' chopping blocks, broken chains, pieces of woodwork with brackets shaped like gallows, wheels jutting out sideways from the rubble—all of it blended into this structure of anarchy and brought with it the dark image of the old tortures the people had endured. The Saint-Antoine barricade turned everything into a weapon. Everything that civil war could hurl at the head of society came from there. This was not combat; it was a paroxysm. The carbines defending the redoubt—some of them

blunderbusses—fired shards of earthenware, bones, coat buttons, even the casters from nightstands, dangerous because of the brass. This barricade was furious. It flung an indescribable clamor into the sky. At certain moments, when it challenged the army, it was covered with crowds and storm. A tumult of blazing faces crowned it. A swarm filled it. Along its thorny crest bristled guns, sabers, clubs, axes, pikes, and bayonets. A vast red flag snapped in the wind. You could hear shouted orders, battle songs, drumrolls, women sobbing, and dark bursts of laughter from the starving. It was huge and alive, and like the back of some electric beast, it gave off little flashes of lightning. The spirit of revolution spread its cloud over that summit, where the voice of the people rumbled like the voice of God. A strange majesty rose from that titanic basket of rubbish. It was a heap of filth, and it was Sinai.

As we said earlier, it struck in the name of the revolution—but what revolution? That was the question. It—that barricade, that chance, danger, disorder, terror, misunderstanding, that unknown force—stood against the Constituent Assembly, the sovereignty of the people, universal suffrage, the nation, and the republic. It was the Carmagnole throwing down a challenge to the Marseillaise.

It was a vast but heroic act of defiance, for the old faubourg is heroic.

The faubourg and its redoubt supported each other. The faubourg bore up the redoubt, and the redoubt stood sheltered by the faubourg. The huge barricade stretched out like a cliff, and the strategy of the African generals broke against it. Its

hollows, its bulges, its lumps, its swelling masses seemed, so to speak, to grimace and grin through the smoke. Grapeshot disappeared into its formless mass. Shells buried themselves in it. Bullets did no more than punch holes in it. What could cannon fire do against chaos? And the regiments, used to the harshest sights of war, looked uneasily at that kind of redoubt—like a wild beast in its boar-like bristling, and like a mountain in its immense size.

A quarter of a league away, at the corner of the Rue du Temple where it opens onto the boulevard near the Château-d'Eau, if you leaned your head out past the edge of the Dallemagne shopfront, you could see something strange in the distance. Beyond the canal, in the street that climbs the slopes of Belleville, at the very top of the rise, stood an odd wall reaching as high as the second story of the houses. It looked like a kind of hyphen joining the houses on the right to those on the left, as if the street had bent back its highest wall to shut itself off all at once. The wall was built of paving stones. It was straight, precise, cold, upright, squared and measured out with rule and line. There was no cement, of course, but that did nothing to weaken its severe structure, just as with certain Roman walls. Its top ran mathematically parallel to its base. At intervals, you could make out on the gray surface tiny loopholes, barely visible, like black threads. They were spaced at equal distances. The street lay deserted as far as the eye could see. Every window and door was shut. At the far end rose this barrier, turning the street into a blind alley: a still, quiet wall. No one could be seen. Nothing could be heard. Not a cry, not a sound, not a breath. A tomb.

The brilliant June sun flooded this terrible thing with light.

It was the barricade of the Faubourg of the Temple.

The moment one reached the place and saw it, even the bravest could not help falling silent and thoughtful before this mysterious sight. It was fitted together, layered, straight-lined, symmetrical, and funeral in its effect. Science and darkness seemed to meet there. You felt that the man who had

commanded this barricade was either a geometer or a ghost. People looked at it and lowered their voices.

Now and then, if a soldier, an officer, or a representative of the people happened to cross the deserted road, a faint, sharp whistle would sound, and the passerby would fall dead or wounded. If the bullet missed him, a biscaïen could sometimes be seen lodged in a closed shutter, in the gap between two stones, or in the plaster of a wall. The men at the barricade had even made two small cannons from cast-iron sections of gas pipe, sealed at one end with tow and fire clay. They did not waste powder. Almost every shot hit its mark. Bodies lay here and there, and blood had pooled on the pavement. I remember a white butterfly drifting back and forth in the street. Summer does not give up its throne.

Nearby, the spaces under the porte-cochères were crowded with wounded men.

You felt that someone you could not see was taking aim at you, and you understood that guns were trained all along the length of the street.

Clustered behind the sloping rise formed by the vaulted canal at the entrance to the Faubourg du Temple, the soldiers in the attacking column watched this grim redoubt with grave, deliberate attention. It stood motionless and silent, yet death came from it. Some of the soldiers crawled on their bellies as far as the top of the bridge’s curve, careful not to let their shakos show above it.

The brave Colonel Monteynard looked at the barricade with a shiver of admiration. “Look how it is built!” he said to a Representative. “Not one paving stone sticks out beyond another. It is like porcelain.” At that instant, a bullet shattered the cross on his chest, and he fell.

“Cowards!” people said. “Let them show themselves. Let us see them! They do not dare. They are hiding!”

The barricade at the Faubourg du Temple, defended by eighty men and attacked by ten thousand, held out for three days. On the fourth, they did what had been done at Zaatcha and at Constantine: they broke through the houses and came across the rooftops. The barricade was taken. Not one of those eighty “cowards” thought of running away. All were killed there except their leader, Barthélemy, of whom we shall speak presently.

The Saint-Antoine barricade roared like thunder; the barricade of the Temple was silent. The difference between these two strongholds was the difference between something terrifying and something sinister. One looked like a gaping mouth; the other like a mask.

If we accept that the vast, dark June uprising was made up of both anger and mystery, then the first barricade suggested a dragon, and the second a sphinx lurking behind it.

These two fortresses had been built by two men: one named Cournet, the other Barthélemy. Cournet built the Saint-Antoine barricade; Barthélemy built the barricade of the Temple. Each one reflected the man who had made it.

Cournet was a tall man with broad shoulders, a red face, a crushing fist, a fearless heart, a loyal soul, and a frank, terrible gaze. He was brave, forceful, quick-tempered, and turbulent—the warmest of men and the most formidable of fighters. War, struggle, and conflict were the very air he breathed, and they put him in good spirits. He had been a naval officer, and from his gestures and his voice one could tell that he came from the sea and from the storm; he carried the hurricane with him into battle. If Cournet lacked genius, he still had something of Danton in him, just as Danton, though not divine, had something of Hercules.

Barthélemy—thin, frail, pale, and silent—was like a tragic street boy. After a policeman boxed his ears, he waited for him and killed him, and at seventeen he was sent to the galleys. He came out and built this barricade.

Later, by a fatal turn of events, Barthélemy, exiled and rejected by everyone in London, killed Cournet. It was a funeral-like duel. Some time afterward, caught in one of those mysterious affairs in which passion plays a part—a disaster in which French justice sees mitigating circumstances, and English justice sees only death—Barthélemy was hanged. Society is darkly constructed in such a way that, through material poverty and moral obscurity, that unhappy man, who possessed an intelligence that was certainly resolute and perhaps great, began in France with the galleys and ended in England on the gallows. When the moment came, Barthélemy flew only one flag: the black flag.

CHAPTER II—WHAT TO DO IN THE ABYSS IF NO ONE IS TALKING

Sixteen years matter in the underground schooling of revolt, and June 1848 understood far more about it than June 1832. So the barricade in the Rue de la Chanvrerie was only a sketch, an early version, compared with the two colossal barricades we have just described; but for its time, it was formidable.

Under Enjolras's direction—for Marius was no longer attending to anything—the insurgents had used the night well. They had not only repaired the barricade but strengthened it. They raised it by two feet. Iron bars driven into the pavement looked like lances at rest. Every kind of debris, dragged in and piled up from all sides, added to the confusion outside. The redoubt had been skillfully remade, becoming a wall within and a thicket without.

They had rebuilt the staircase of paving stones that allowed them to climb it like the wall of a fortress.

They had put the barricade in order and cleared out the taproom. They turned the kitchen into an infirmary. They finished dressing the wounded. They gathered up the powder that had been scattered over the floor and tables, cast bullets, made cartridges, scraped lint, redistributed the fallen weapons, cleaned the inside of the redoubt, swept up the debris, and removed the corpses.

They piled the dead in Mondétour lane, which they still controlled. The pavement at that spot stayed red for a long time. Among the dead were four National Guardsmen from the suburbs. Enjolras had their uniforms set aside.

Enjolras advised everyone to sleep for two hours. A suggestion from Enjolras was an order. Even so, only three or four made use of it.

Feuilly spent those two hours engraving this inscription on the wall facing the tavern:

Long Live the Peoples!

Those four words, carved into the rough stone with a nail, could still be read on the wall in 1848.

The three women had used the night's pause to disappear for good, which let the insurgents breathe more easily.

They had managed to take refuge in some nearby house.

Most of the wounded were still able—and eager—to keep fighting. In the kitchen, which had been turned into a makeshift aid station, five men lay seriously wounded on a bed of mattresses and bundles of straw. Two of them were municipal guardsmen, and they were treated first.

Only Mabeuf, beneath his black cloth, and Javert, tied to his post, remained in the tap-room.

“This is the hall of the dead,” said Enjolras.

Inside that room, dimly lit by a single candle at one end, the scene formed a kind of vast, shadowy cross: the mortuary table stretched behind the post like a horizontal beam, with Javert standing upright and Mabeuf lying flat.

The pole of the omnibus, though broken by the gunfire, still stood upright enough for them to fasten the flag to it.

Enjolras, who had a true leader’s habit of doing exactly what he said he would do, tied the old man’s coat—torn by bullets and stained with blood—to the pole.

No meal had been possible. There was no bread and no meat. The fifty men at the barricade had quickly used up the wine-shop's meager supplies during the sixteen hours they had been there. Sooner or later, every barricade becomes the raft of the _Méduse_. They had no choice but to accept hunger. They had reached the first hours of that Spartan day, the 6th of June, when at the Saint-Merry barricade Jeanne, surrounded by insurgents demanding bread, answered every fighter who cried, "Something to eat!" with, "Why? It is three o'clock; at four we shall be dead."

Since they could no longer eat, Enjolras forbade them to drink freely. He banned the wine and rationed the brandy.

In the cellar they had found fifteen full, tightly sealed bottles. Enjolras and Combeferre examined them. When Combeferre came back upstairs, he said, "It's Father Hucheloup's old stock, from when he started out as a grocer." "Then it must be real wine," Bossuet remarked. "It's lucky Grantaire is asleep. If he were up, we'd have a hard time saving those bottles." Despite all the grumbling, Enjolras forbade anyone to touch the fifteen bottles, and to make sure no one did, he had them placed under the table where Father Mabeuf was lying.

At about two in the morning, they counted their numbers. There were still thirty-seven of them.

Day was beginning to break. The torch, which had been put back into its hollow in the pavement, had just gone out. Inside the barricade—that little courtyard stolen from the street—everything lay in shadow. In the dim terror of dawn, it

looked like the deck of a crippled ship. As the fighters moved back and forth, they seemed like black shapes. Above that dreadful nest of darkness, the stories of the silent houses stood out in a pale outline, and higher still the chimneys showed faintly. The sky had that lovely uncertain color that might be white or might be blue. Birds crossed it, crying out with joy. The tall house that formed the rear of the barricade faced east, and its roof held a rosy reflection. The morning breeze stirred the gray hair of the dead man at the third-story window.

“I’m glad the torch has gone out,” said Courfeyrac to Feuilly. “That torch flickering in the wind bothered me. It looked afraid. Torchlight is like the wisdom of cowards: it gives a poor light because it trembles.”

Dawn wakes the mind just as it wakes the birds, and everyone began to talk.

Joly noticed a cat prowling along a gutter and drew a bit of philosophy from the sight.

“What is the cat?” he cried. “It is a correction. After the good God made the mouse, he said, ‘Hello! I’ve made a mistake.’ So he made the cat. The cat is the erratum to the mouse. The mouse, plus the cat, is creation revised and corrected.”

Combeferre, surrounded by students and workers, was speaking of the dead—of Jean Prouvaire, of Bahorel, of Mabeuf, and even of Cabuc—and of Enjolras’s sorrowful severity. He said:

“Harmodius and Aristogiton, Brutus, Chereas, Stephanus, Cromwell, Charlotte Corday, Sand—all of them had their moment of agony when it was already too late. Our hearts tremble so deeply, and human life is such a mystery, that even in the case of a political killing, even a killing meant to bring freedom, if such a thing exists, the remorse of having struck down a man outweighs the joy of having served the human race.”

Such are the twists and turns of conversation that, a moment later, prompted by Jean Prouvaire’s verses, Combeferre was comparing the translators of the Georgics: Raux with Cournand, and Cournand with Delille. He pointed out the passages translated by Malfilâtre, especially the wonders that followed Cæsar’s death; and at the word Cæsar, the conversation turned back to Brutus.

“Cæsar,” said Combeferre, “fell justly. Cicero spoke harshly of Cæsar, and he was right to do so. That harshness is not the same as abuse. When Zoïlus attacks Homer, when Mævius attacks Virgil, when Visé attacks Molière, when Pope attacks Shakspeare, when Frederic attacks Voltaire, it is the old law of envy and hatred at work; genius draws insults, and great men are always barked at to some degree. But Zoïlus and Cicero are not the same kind of man. Cicero is a judge in matters of thought, just as Brutus is a judge by the sword. For my part, I condemn that final form of justice, the blade; but antiquity accepted it. Cæsar, by violating the Rubicon, by handing out dignities as though they came from him when they in fact came from the people, and by not rising when the senate entered,

committed acts proper to a king and almost to a tyrant, _regia ac pene tyrannica_. He was a great man; so much the worse, or so much the better. The lesson is only the higher for it. His twenty-three wounds move me less than the spitting in the face of Jesus Christ. Cæsar is stabbed by senators; Christ is struck by lackeys. In the greater outrage, one feels the God."

Bossuet, standing above the others on top of a heap of paving stones, cried out, rifle in hand:

"Oh Cydathenæum, oh Myrrhinus, oh Probalinthus, oh graces of the Æantides! Oh, who will grant me the power to recite Homer's verses like a Greek of Laurium or of Edapteon?"

CHAPTER III—LIGHT AND SHADOW

Enjolras had gone out to scout the area. He made his way through Mondétour lane, slipping along close to the houses.

The insurgents, it should be said, were full of hope. The way they had beaten back the attack the night before made them almost dismiss the dawn assault before it even came. They waited for it with smiles. They were as sure of victory as they were of their cause. Besides, help was clearly on the way, or so they believed. They counted on it. With that easy confidence in triumphant prediction that is one source of strength in the French fighter, they divided the coming day into three clear stages. At six in the morning, a regiment they had “worked on” would switch sides; at noon, all Paris would rise; by sunset, there would be revolution.

They could hear the alarm bell of Saint-Merry, which had not stopped for a moment since the night before; proof that the other barricade, the great one, Jeanne’s, was still holding out.

All these hopes passed from group to group in a kind of cheerful, terrible whisper, like the warlike hum of a hive of bees.

Enjolras reappeared. He came back from his dark, eagle-like flight into the outer night. He listened for a moment to all this joy, his arms folded and one hand over his mouth. Then, fresh and flushed in the growing whiteness of dawn, he said:

“The whole army of Paris is about to move. A third of the army is advancing on the barricades you are in now. The National Guard is with them as well. I have identified the shakos of the Fifth of the Line and the standard-bearers of the Sixth Legion. Within an hour you will be attacked. As for the people, yesterday they were boiling; today they are not moving. There is nothing to expect, nothing to hope for. Not from a faubourg, not from a regiment. You have been abandoned.”

These words fell over the buzzing groups and had the same effect on them as the first drops of a storm on a swarm of bees. Then came a moment of indescribable silence, so deep that it seemed as though death itself could be heard passing by.

The moment did not last long.

A voice cried out to Enjolras from the darkest part of the crowd:

“So be it. Then let us raise the barricade to twenty feet and all stay inside it. Citizens, let us make our protest with our dead bodies. Let us show that if the people abandon the republicans, the republicans do not abandon the people.”

These words lifted everyone’s thoughts out of the painful fog of personal fear. They were greeted with an enthusiastic shout of approval.

No one has ever known the name of the man who spoke that way. He was some unknown workingman in a blouse, a stranger, a forgotten man, a hero for a moment—that great anonymous figure who always appears in human crises and at the birth of social movements, who at a decisive instant speaks

the decisive word with supreme force, then disappears back into the shadows after, for one flash of lightning, standing for the people and for God.

This relentless resolve filled the air so completely on June 6, 1832, that at almost that same hour, at the Saint-Merry barricade, the insurgents were shouting the cry that has passed into history and was recorded in the official case documents: “What does it matter whether they come to help us or not? Let us be killed here, every last man of us.”

As the reader can see, the two barricades, though physically cut off from each other, were still in communication.

CHAPTER IV—MINUS FIVE, PLUS ONE

After the man who had called for this “protest of corpses” had spoken and given voice to their shared spirit, a strange cry rose from every mouth—terrible and satisfied at once, funeral in meaning but triumphant in sound:

“Long live death! Let us all stay here!”

“Why all?” said Enjolras.

“All! All!”

Enjolras went on:

“The position is strong; the barricade is excellent. Thirty men are enough. Why sacrifice forty?”

They answered:

“Because not one of us will leave.”

“Citizens,” cried Enjolras, and there was an almost impatient edge in his voice, “this republic does not have enough men to waste them uselessly. Vanity is waste. If it is the duty of some to leave, then that duty must be carried out like any other.”

Enjolras, a man made of principle, held over his fellow believers the kind of irresistible authority that comes from the absolute. Yet great as that authority was, a murmur still rose. A leader through and through, Enjolras saw that they were murmuring and pressed the point. He continued haughtily:

“Let anyone who is afraid of being no more than thirty speak up.”

The murmuring grew louder.

“Besides,” said a voice from one of the groups, “it’s easy to talk about leaving. The barricade is surrounded.”

“Not on the Halles side,” said Enjolras. “Rue Mondétour is open, and by way of Rue des Prêcheurs you can reach the Marché des Innocents.”

“And once you get there,” another voice went on, “you’d be caught. You’d run into some large guard from the line or the suburbs. They’ll notice a man going by in a blouse and cap. ‘Where do you come from?’ ‘Aren’t you from the barricade?’ Then they’ll look at your hands. You smell of powder. Shot.”

Without answering, Enjolras touched Combeferre on the shoulder, and the two of them went into the tap-room.

A moment later they came back out. Enjolras held the four uniforms he had set aside, stretched out in his hands. Combeferre followed, carrying the shoulder-belts and the shakos.

“With this uniform,” said Enjolras, “you can blend in with the ranks and get away; there are enough here for four.” And he threw the four uniforms onto the ground, stripped of its paving stones.

His stoic listeners did not waver. Combeferre spoke next.

“Come,” he said, “you must show a little pity. Do you understand what this is really about? It is about women. Look at it plainly. Are there women, or are there not? Are there children, or are there not? Are there mothers, yes or no, rocking cradles with their feet while little ones crowd around them? Let any man here who has never seen 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 ghosts of women winding their arms around me. Die, if you wish, but do not make others die. A suicide like the one about to happen here may be sublime; but suicide is a private act, and cannot be extended. The moment it reaches your neighbors, suicide becomes murder. Think of the little fair heads; think of the white hair of the old. Listen: Enjolras has just told me that at the corner of the Rue du Cygne he saw a lit window, a candle in a poor room on the fifth floor, and on the pane the trembling shadow of an old woman’s head, as if she had spent the whole night watching. Perhaps she is one of your mothers. Well then, let that man go quickly and say to his mother, ‘Here I am, mother!’ He may be at ease; the work here will still be done. When a man supports his family by his labor, he has no right to sacrifice himself. That is deserting his family. And those of you who have daughters—what are you thinking? You get yourselves killed; you are dead; very well. But what happens tomorrow? Young girls without bread—that is a terrible thing. A man begs; a woman sells herself. Ah! those charming, graceful creatures, so gentle and so sweet, with flowered bonnets, filling the house with purity, singing and chattering, like a living fragrance, proving 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 joy and your pride—ah, good God, they will go hungry! What do you expect me to tell you? There is a market for human flesh, and your ghostly hands, trembling around them, will not keep them from entering it. Think of the street. Think of the pavement crowded with passers-by. Think of the shops women pass, going and coming with bare necks through the mud. Those women were pure once too. Think of your sisters, those of you who have them. Misery, prostitution, the police, Saint-Lazare—that is what awaits those beautiful, delicate girls, those fragile wonders of modesty, gentleness, and loveliness, fresher than lilacs in May. Ah! you have got yourselves killed! You are no longer there! Very well; you wanted to free the people from Royalty, and instead you hand your daughters over to the police. Friends, be careful, have mercy. Women—unhappy women—we are not used to thinking much about them. We rely on the fact that women have not been given a man's education; we keep them from reading, we keep them from thinking, we keep them from concerning themselves with politics. But will you keep them from going to the dead-house tonight and identifying your bodies? Come now, those among you who have families must be reasonable. Shake hands with us, go away, and leave us here alone to manage this business. I know it takes courage to leave. I know it is hard. But the harder it is, the more honorable it is. You say, 'I have a gun, I am at the barricade; so much the worse, I shall stay here.' 'So much the worse' is easy to say. My friends, there is a tomorrow. You will not be here tomorrow, but your families will—and what suffering there will be! Look, here is a pretty, healthy child, with cheeks like an apple, babbling,

prattling, chattering, laughing, smelling sweet under your kiss—and do you know what becomes of him when he is abandoned? I saw one, a tiny little thing, 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 go up to the stove, where there was never any fire, and whose pipe, as you know, was made of mastic and yellow clay. His breathing was hoarse, his face pale and bluish, his limbs limp, his belly swollen. 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 there. Now, if there are any fathers among you—fathers who know the happiness of walking out on Sundays with their child's little hand in their strong one—let each of them imagine that this child was his own. I remember that poor little creature, and I can still see him now, lying naked on the dissecting table, with his ribs showing through his skin like graves under the grass in a cemetery. They found a sort of mud in his stomach. There were ashes in his teeth. Come, let us examine ourselves honestly and listen to our hearts. Statistics show that the death rate among abandoned children is fifty-five per cent. I repeat: this is a question of women. It concerns mothers. It concerns young girls. It concerns little children. Who is speaking to you about yourselves? We know very well what you are. We know very well that you are all brave, of course! We know very well that each of you feels the joy and glory of giving his life for the great cause. We know very well that you believe yourselves chosen to die usefully and magnificently, and that each of you wants his share in the triumph. Very well.

But you are not alone in this world. There are other beings you must think about. You must not be selfish."

Everyone lowered their heads gloomily.

Such are the strange contradictions of the human heart, even at its noblest moments. Combeferre, who had just spoken that way, was not an orphan. He remembered other men's mothers and forgot his own. He was about to go and get himself killed. He was, in that sense, "an egoist."

Marius was weak from fasting and burning with fever. One by one, all hope had left him, and he had been cast into grief, the darkest of all shipwrecks. Overwhelmed by violent emotions and certain that the end was near, he had sunk deeper and deeper into that visionary stupor that always comes before a death one has willingly accepted.

A physiologist might have observed in him the increasing signs of that feverish absorption known to science and given a name by it, a state that stands to suffering as sensual rapture stands to pleasure. Despair, too, has its ecstasy. Marius had reached that point. He watched everything as if from outside himself. As we have said, whatever passed before him seemed far away. He grasped the whole, but not the details. He saw men coming and going as if through flames. He heard voices as though they were speaking from the bottom of an abyss.

But this affected him. Something in the scene pierced through and stirred even him. He had only one thought now: to die. He did not want to be drawn away from it. Yet, in his dark, sleepwalking state, he reflected that while he was destroying

himself, nothing prevented him from saving someone else.

He raised his voice.

“Enjolras and Combeferre are right,” he said. “No needless sacrifice. I agree with them, and you must hurry. Combeferre has spoken persuasively to you. Some of you have families, mothers, sisters, wives, children. Those men should leave the ranks.”

No one moved.

“Married men and those who support families, step out of the ranks!” Marius repeated.

His authority carried great weight. Enjolras was certainly the leader of the barricade, but Marius was its savior.

“I order it,” cried Enjolras.

“I beg you,” said Marius.

Then, moved by Combeferre’s words, shaken by Enjolras’ command, and stirred by Marius’ plea, these heroic men began arguing against themselves and for one another. “It’s true,” said one young man to an older man, “you’re the father of a family. Go.” “No, it’s your duty instead,” the man replied. “You support two sisters.” And so an unheard-of debate broke out. Each man fought to decide which of them should not be sent to stand at the door of the tomb.

“Hurry,” said Courfeyrac. “In another quarter of an hour, it will be too late.”

“Citizens,” Enjolras went on, “this is the Republic, and universal suffrage rules here. Choose among yourselves who is to go.”

They obeyed. A few minutes later, five men had been chosen unanimously, and they stepped out of the ranks.

“There are five of them!” cried Marius.

There were only four uniforms.

“Well,” said the five, “one of us must stay behind.”

Then another struggle began over who should remain, and who could give reasons why the others should not. The noble quarrel started again.

“You have a wife who loves you.” — “You have your old mother.” — “You have no father or mother; what will happen to your three little brothers?” — “You are the father of five children.” — “You have the right to live; you are only seventeen. It is too soon for you to die.”

These great revolutionary barricades were gathering places for heroism. There, the impossible seemed natural. These men did not surprise one another.

“Quick,” Courfeyrac repeated.

From the groups, men shouted to Marius:

“You choose who is to stay.”

“Yes,” said the five. “Choose. We will obey you.”

Marius had not thought himself capable of feeling anything more. Yet at this idea—choosing a man for death—his blood

rushed back to his heart. He would have turned pale, if it had been possible for him to grow any paler.

He stepped toward the five men, who smiled at him, and each one, with eyes blazing with that great fire seen in the depths of history above Thermopylæ, cried out to him:

“Me! Me! Me!”

And Marius, foolishly, counted them; there were still five! Then his eyes dropped to the four uniforms.

At that moment, a fifth uniform dropped onto the other four, as though it had fallen from the sky.

The fifth man was saved.

Marius looked up and recognized M. Fauchelevent.

Jean Valjean had just entered the barricade.

He had come by way of Mondétour lane, guided there by persistent questioning, or instinct, or pure chance. Thanks to his National Guardsman’s uniform, he had made his way in without difficulty.

The insurgents’ sentry posted in the Rue Mondétour had no reason to raise the alarm over a single National Guardsman, and had let him work his way into the street, thinking: “Probably he’s a reinforcement; in any case, he’s a prisoner.” The moment was too serious for the sentry to leave his duty and his lookout post.

When Jean Valjean entered the redoubt, no one noticed him; every eye was fixed on the five chosen men and the four uniforms. Jean Valjean, too, had seen and heard everything,

and he quietly took off his coat and threw it onto the pile with the others.

The emotion this stirred was beyond description.

“Who is this man?” Bossuet asked.

“He is a man who saves other people,” Combeferre replied.

Marius added in a grave voice:

“I know him.”

That assurance satisfied everyone.

Enjolras turned to Jean Valjean.

“Welcome, citizen.”

Then he added:

“You know that we are about to die.”

Without answering, Jean Valjean helped the insurgent he had saved put on his uniform.

CHAPTER V—THE HORIZON ONE SEES FROM THE TOP OF A BARRICADE

The condition of everyone in that fatal hour and merciless place found its fullest expression in Enjolras’s profound melancholy.

Enjolras carried the full force of the revolution within him. Even so, he was not complete—if anything so absolute can be incomplete. He had too much of Saint-Just in him and not enough of Anacharsis Cloots. Still, among the Friends of the A B C, his mind had gradually been reshaped by Combeferre's ideas. For some time, he had been moving beyond the narrow limits of dogma and opening himself to the widening influence of progress. He had come to embrace, as a final and magnificent development, the transformation of the great French Republic into the vast human republic. As for immediate action, if the situation was violent, he wanted to answer it with violence. On that point he never changed. He remained part of that epic and formidable school summed up in the single phrase: "Eighty-three." Enjolras stood upright on the staircase of paving-stones, one elbow resting on the butt of his gun. He was deep in thought. He trembled as though prophetic breaths were passing over him; places where death is near can have that effect, like tripods of prophecy. A kind of muffled fire flashed from his eyes, which were turned inward. Suddenly he threw back his head. His blond hair fell behind him like an angel's against the dark quadriga of stars; it looked like the mane of a startled lion in the blaze of a halo, and Enjolras cried:

"Citizens, can you imagine the future? City streets flooded with light. Green branches at every doorway. Nations living as sisters. Just men. Old men blessing children. The past embracing the present. Thinkers completely free. Believers standing in full equality. Religion reaching toward heaven, with God as the direct priest, and the human conscience become an altar. No more hatred. The workshop and the school joined in

brotherhood. Fame as the only punishment and reward. Work for all. Rights for all. Peace over all. No more bloodshed. No more wars. Happy mothers! To conquer matter is the first step; to make the ideal real is the second. Think of what progress has already done. In the earliest ages, humanity looked on in terror as the hydra passed before its eyes, breathing over the waters; as the dragon spewed fire; as the griffin, monster of the air, flew with an eagle's wings and a tiger's claws. These were dreadful creatures, greater than man. And yet man set his traps, guided by intelligence, and in the end conquered them. We have defeated the hydra, and it is called the locomotive. We are on the verge of defeating the griffin; we already have hold of it, and it is called the balloon. On the day when this Promethean labor is complete, when man has finally harnessed to his will the ancient triple Chimera—the hydra, the dragon, and the griffin—he will command water, fire, and air. He will stand toward the rest of living creation as the ancient gods once stood toward him. Courage, then, and forward! Citizens, where are we going? Toward science made government. Toward the force of things becoming the only public force. Toward natural law, carrying within itself both sanction and penalty, and declaring itself by its own evidence. Toward a dawn of truth answering to the dawn of day. We are moving toward the union of peoples; we are moving toward the unity of man. No more fictions. No more parasites. The real governed by the true—that is the goal. Civilization will hold its great assemblies at the summit of Europe, and later at the center of the continents, in a vast parliament of intelligence. Something like this has already existed. The amphictyons met twice a year, once at Delphos,

the seat of the gods, and once at Thermopylæ, the place of heroes. Europe will have its amphictyons; the globe will have its amphictyons. France carries this sublime future within her. This is what the nineteenth century is bringing to birth. What Greece only sketched, France is worthy to complete. Listen to me, you, Feuilly, brave workman, man of the people. I honor you. Yes, you see the future clearly. Yes, you are right. You had neither father nor mother, Feuilly; you chose humanity as your mother and right as your father. You are about to die—that is to say, to triumph—here. Citizens, whatever happens today, whether through our defeat or our victory, we are about to create a revolution. Just as great fires light up an entire city, revolutions light up the whole human race. And what revolution are we about to bring forth? I have just told you: the Revolution of the True. Politically, there is only one principle: the sovereignty of man over himself. This sovereignty of myself over myself is called Liberty. When two or three of these sovereignties join together, the state begins. But in that union there is no surrender. Each sovereignty gives up a certain portion of itself in order to form the common right. That portion is the same for all. This equal surrender that each makes to all is called Equality. Common right is nothing but the protection of all shining upon the right of each. This protection of all over each is called Fraternity. The point where all these united sovereignties meet is called society. Because that meeting is a joining, that point is a knot. Hence what we call the social bond. Some call it the social contract; it is the same thing, since the word contract itself carries the idea of a bond. Let us be clear about equality, for if liberty is the summit, equality is the foundation. Equality,

citizens, is not merely a thin surface growth, not a society of tall blades of grass beside tiny oaks, not a closeness of jealousies that cancel one another out. Legally, it means every ability given the same opportunity. Politically, it means every vote given the same weight. Religiously, it means every conscience given the same right. Equality has one instrument: free and compulsory education. The right to the alphabet—that is where we must begin. Primary school required for all, secondary school offered to all: that is the law. From one common school will come one common society. Yes, education! Light! Light! Everything comes from light, and everything returns to it. Citizens, the nineteenth century is great, but the twentieth century will be happy. Then history will no longer resemble the history of old. We will no longer, as we do today, have to fear conquest, invasion, usurpation, nations clashing with weapons in hand, civilization interrupted by a marriage of kings, by a birth in hereditary tyrannies, by the partition of peoples at a congress, by dismemberment caused by the fall of a dynasty, by two religions confronting each other like two rams in the dark on the bridge of the infinite. We will no longer have to fear famine, tax farming, prostitution born of distress, misery caused by the failure of work, the scaffold and the sword, battles, and the brute violence 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 fulfill its law, just as the earth fulfills its own. Harmony will be restored between the soul and the star. The soul will revolve around truth as the planet revolves around light. Friends, the hour in which I speak to you is a dark one. But these are the terrible prices paid for the future. A revolution is a

toll. Oh, the human race will be delivered, lifted up, comforted! We declare it here on this barricade. From where else could that cry of love rise, if not from the heights of sacrifice? Oh my brothers, this is the meeting place of those who think and those who suffer. This barricade is not made of paving stones, beams, or scraps of iron. It is made of two heaps: a heap of ideas and a heap of sorrows. Here misery meets the ideal. Day embraces night and says to it, 'I am about to die, and you shall be born again with me.' From the embrace of every desolation, faith leaps forth. Suffering brings here its agony, and ideas bring their immortality. That agony and that immortality are about to unite and become our death. Brothers, whoever dies here dies in the radiance of the future, and we are entering a tomb flooded with dawn."

Enjolras did not fall silent so much as pause. His lips kept moving without a sound, as if he were speaking to himself, and that made them all watch him closely, trying to catch more. No one applauded, but they whispered together for a long time. Since speech is only breath, the murmur of minds sounds like leaves rustling.

CHAPTER VI—MARIUS GAUNT, JAVERT SPARE OF WORDS

Let us tell what was going through Marius's mind.

Let the reader remember the state of his soul. We have just described it: everything now seemed unreal to him, like a vision. His judgment was shaken. Marius—we must stress this—was under the shadow of the great dark wings that spread over those in their death agony. He felt that he had entered the tomb. It seemed to him that he was already on the far side of the wall, and he saw the faces of the living only through the eyes of a dead man.

How had M. Fauchelevent come there? Why was he there? What had he come to do? Marius did not really ask himself all these questions. Besides, despair has this strange quality: it wraps others up along with ourselves. So it seemed natural to him that the whole world should come there to die.

Only the thought of Cosette struck him with pain.

Yet M. Fauchelevent did not speak to him, did not look at him, and did not even seem to hear him when Marius raised his voice and said, "I know him."

For Marius, M. Fauchelevent's manner was reassuring, and, if one may use such a word for such feelings, even welcome. He had always felt it utterly impossible to speak to that mysterious man, who in his eyes was both troubling and impressive. Besides, he had not seen him for a long time, and that made it

even harder for Marius, with his shy and reserved nature.

The five chosen men left the barricade by way of Mondétour lane. They looked exactly like members of the National Guard. One of them wept as he said goodbye. Before leaving, they embraced those who stayed behind.

When the five men sent back to life had gone, Enjolras turned his thoughts to the man who had been condemned to die.

He went into the tap-room. Javert, still tied to the post, sat there deep in thought.

“Do you need anything?” Enjolras asked him.

Javert answered, “When are you going to kill me?”

“Wait. Right now we need every cartridge we have.”

“Then give me something to drink,” said Javert.

Enjolras himself brought him a glass of water, and since Javert’s hands were tied, he helped him drink it.

“Is that all?” Enjolras asked.

“I’m uncomfortable against this post,” Javert replied. “It was hardly kind to leave me here all night. Tie me up however you like, but you could at least lay me on a table like that other man.”

With a tilt of his head, he pointed to the body of M. Mabeuf.

As the reader will remember, there was a long, wide table at the end of the room where they had been casting bullets and making cartridges. Now that all the cartridges were finished and all the powder had been used, the table was empty.

At Enjolras' order, four insurgents untied Javert from the post. As they loosened his bonds, a fifth man held a bayonet to his chest.

They left his arms tied behind his back and looped a thin but strong cord around his feet, the way it is done for men about to mount the scaffold. It let him take steps of only about fifteen inches. In this way they made him walk to the table at the end of the room, where they laid him down and tied him tightly around the waist.

For extra security, they also fastened a rope around his neck. This added to the set of restraints that made escape impossible a kind of binding known in prisons as a martingale: it began at the neck, split at the stomach, passed between the legs, and joined the hands.

While they were tying up Javert, a man standing in the doorway watched him with unusual attention. The shadow from the man made Javert turn his head. He looked up and recognized Jean Valjean. He did not even flinch. Proudly lowering his eyes again, he said only, "It is perfectly simple."

CHAPTER VII—THE SITUATION GROWS MORE SERIOUS

Daylight was coming fast. Not a window was open, not a door stood ajar. It was dawn, but not waking. The end of the Rue de la Chanvrerie opposite the barricade had been cleared by the troops, as we have said. It seemed open, and to anyone passing by it showed a sinister calm. The Rue Saint-Denis was as silent as the avenue of Sphinxes at Thebes. Not a living soul stood at the crossroads, which shone white in the sunlight. Nothing is sadder than this kind of light in deserted streets. Nothing could be seen, but something could be heard. A mysterious movement was going on some distance away. It was clear that the decisive moment was near. As on the previous evening, the sentries had come back in; but this time they had all returned.

The barricade was stronger than it had been during the first attack. After the five had left, they had raised it even higher.

On the advice of the sentry who had reconnoitered the Halles district, Enjolras made a serious decision, fearing a surprise attack from the rear. He ordered the narrow opening into Mondétour lane, which had been left open until then, to be barricaded. To do this, they tore up the pavement for the length of several more houses. In this way, the barricade, closed off on three streets—in front on the Rue de la Chanvrerie, to the left on the Rues du Cygne and de la Petite Truanderie, and to the right on the Rue Mondétour—became almost impregnable. It is true that they were fatally trapped inside it. It had three fronts, but no way out. “A fortress, but a rat hole too,” said Courfeyrac with a

laugh.

Enjolras had about thirty paving stones torn up “for extra use,” as Bossuet put it, and piled near the door of the wine shop.

The silence had grown so deep in the part of the neighborhood from which the attack had to come that Enjolras ordered every man back to his fighting post.

A ration of brandy was given to each man.

Nothing is stranger than a barricade getting ready for an assault. Each man picks his place as if he were choosing a seat at the theatre. They push, elbow, and crowd one another. Some turn paving-stones into seats. If a corner of the wall gets in the way, they pull it down; if a redan might offer cover, they crouch behind it. Left-handed men are especially valuable, because they can take positions that are awkward for everyone else. Many even arrange to fight sitting down. They want to be comfortable while they kill, and while they die. In the grim fighting of June 1848, one insurgent, a deadly marksman firing from the top of a terrace onto a roof, had a reclining chair brought up for him there; a burst of grape-shot found him in it.

The moment the leader gives the order to prepare for action, all that restless movement stops. No one tugs at anyone else anymore. The little groups disappear. Side conversations end. No one stands apart. Every mind turns in one direction and becomes a single act of waiting for the attackers. Before danger arrives, a barricade is chaos; once danger is there, it becomes perfect discipline. Peril creates order.

As soon as Enjolras took up his double-barrelled rifle and stationed himself in a kind of embrasure he had kept for himself, everyone else fell silent. Then a series of faint, sharp sounds ran in a confused line along the wall of paving-stones. It was the men cocking their guns.

Their bearing, too, was prouder and more confident than ever. The very excess of their sacrifice gave them strength. They no longer had hope, but they still had despair—despair, the last weapon, which can sometimes bring victory; Virgil says as much. The highest resources come from the most extreme resolve. Sometimes setting out toward death is the very thing that saves you from shipwreck, and the lid of the coffin becomes a plank that keeps you afloat.

As on the evening before, everyone's attention was fixed—one might almost say resting—on the end of the street, now lit up and clearly visible.

They did not have to wait long. A disturbance clearly began in the Saint-Leu quarter, but it was nothing like the movement of the first attack. The clash of chains, the uneasy jolting of something heavy, the click of brass striking the pavement, a kind of solemn uproar, all announced that some sinister iron machine was coming closer. A shudder ran through these quiet old streets, laid out and built for the healthy flow of business and ideas, not for the dreadful thunder of the wheels of war.

Every fighter fixed a savage stare on the far end of the street.

A cannon came into view.

Artillerymen were pushing it forward. It was ready to fire. The fore-carriage had been removed. Two men supported the gun-carriage, four were at the wheels, and others followed with the caisson. They could see the smoke from the burning lint-stock.

“Fire!” shouted Enjolras.

The whole barricade fired, and the blast was terrible. A great wave of smoke covered and erased both the cannon and the men. After a few seconds, the cloud cleared, and the cannon and the men appeared again. The gun crew had just finished rolling it slowly, steadily, and without haste into position facing the barricade. Not one of them had been hit. Then the captain of the gun bent over the breech to raise the muzzle and began aiming the cannon with the calm seriousness of an astronomer adjusting a telescope.

“Bravo for the cannoneers!” cried Bossuet.

And the whole barricade applauded.

A moment later, planted squarely in the middle of the street, straddling the gutter, the gun was ready to fire. A formidable pair of jaws gaped at the barricade.

“Come, let’s be cheerful!” cried Courfeyrac. “Now comes the brutal part. After the flick on the nose, the punch from the fist. The army is stretching out its big paw toward us. The barricade is about to be badly shaken. Musket fire tests you; cannon fire finishes the job.”

“It’s a brass eight-pounder of the new model,” Combeferre added. “Those guns are liable to burst as soon as the proportion rises above ten parts tin to a hundred parts brass. Too much tin makes them too soft. Then, when you inspect them through the vent, you find cavities and hollows inside. To prevent that danger, and to make it possible to increase the charge, it may become necessary to go back to the fourteenth-century method of hooping them—to encircle the outside of the gun, from the breech to the trunnions, with a series of unwelded steel bands. For the moment, they deal with the defect as best they can. They use a searcher to find where the holes are in a cannon’s vent. But there is a better method, with Gribeauval’s movable star.”

“In the sixteenth century,” Bossuet remarked, “they used to rifle cannon.”

“Yes,” Combeferre replied, “that increases the projectile’s force, but it reduces the accuracy of the fire. At short range, the trajectory is not as flat as one would want; the parabola becomes too pronounced, and the projectile’s path is no longer straight enough to strike objects in between, though that is often essential in battle, especially when the enemy is close and the firing is hurried. This weakness in the curve of projectiles fired from sixteenth-century rifled cannon came from the smallness of the charge. Small charges are required for that kind of weapon because of ballistic necessities—for example, to preserve the gun carriage. In short, that tyrant, the cannon, cannot do everything it wants. Force is a great weakness. A cannonball travels only six hundred leagues an hour; light

travels seventy thousand leagues a second. That is the superiority of Jesus Christ over Napoleon."

"Reload your guns," said Enjolras.

How would the outer facing of the barricade stand up to the cannonballs? Would they break through it? That was the question. While the insurgents reloaded their guns, the artillerymen loaded the cannon.

The anxiety inside the redoubt was intense.

The shot flew; the report rang out.

"Aim!" shouted a joyful voice.

And Gavroche threw himself into the barricade just as the cannonball slammed into it.

He had come from the Rue du Cygne and had nimbly climbed over the secondary barricade facing the maze of the Rue de la Petite Truanderie.

Gavroche caused a bigger stir in the barricade than the cannonball had.

The ball buried itself in the heap of debris. At worst, it broke an omnibus wheel and smashed the old Anceau cart. When they saw that, everyone at the barricade burst out laughing.

"Keep going!" Bossuet shouted to the artillerymen.

CHAPTER VIII—THE ARTILLERYMEN MAKE PEOPLE TAKE THEM SERIOUSLY

They crowded around Gavroche, but he had no time to explain anything. Marius pulled him aside with a shudder.

“What are you doing here?”

“Hey!” said the boy. “What are you doing here yourself?”

And he fixed Marius with a steady stare, full of his heroic insolence. His eyes widened with proud light.

Marius went on in a stern tone:

“Who told you to come back? Did you deliver my letter to the address?”

Gavroche did feel some guilt about that letter. In his hurry to get back to the barricade, he had gotten rid of it rather than truly delivering it. He had to admit to himself that he had handed it over far too casually to a stranger whose face he had not even been able to see clearly. True, the man had been bareheaded, but that was hardly enough. In short, he had already been scolding himself inwardly, and he was afraid of Marius’ reproaches. To get out of the difficulty, he chose the simplest solution: he lied outrageously.

“Citizen, I gave the letter to the porter. The lady was asleep. She’ll get the letter when she wakes up.”

Marius had had two reasons for sending that letter: to say goodbye to Cosette and to save Gavroche. He had to be satisfied with only half of what he wanted.

The sending of his letter and the presence of M. Fauchelevent at the barricade struck him as a coincidence. He pointed M. Fauchelevent out to Gavroche.

“Do you know that man?”

“No,” Gavroche said.

In fact, as we have just said, Gavroche had only seen Jean Valjean at night.

The uneasy, unhealthy suspicions taking shape in Marius’ mind faded away. Did he know M. Fauchelevent’s political views? Perhaps M. Fauchelevent was a republican. If so, his presence in this fight was perfectly natural.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the barricade, Gavroche was shouting, “My gun!”

Courfeyrac had it given back to him.

Gavroche warned “his comrades,” as he called them, that the barricade was cut off. He had had a hard time getting there. A battalion of regular infantry, whose stacked weapons were in the Rue de la Petite Truanderie, was standing watch on the Rue du Cygne side. On the other side, the municipal guard held the Rue des Prêcheurs. The main body of the army faced them from

the front.

After giving this information, Gavroche added:

“I give you permission to hit ’em as hard as you can.”

Meanwhile, Enjolras was listening intently and watching from his embrasure.

The attackers, no doubt unhappy with their shot, did not fire again.

A company of regular infantry had come up and taken position at the end of the street behind the cannon. The soldiers were ripping up the pavement and using the stones to build a small, low wall, a kind of side defense no more than eighteen inches high, facing the barricade. At the left corner of this earthwork, the head of a battalion column from the suburbs could be seen massed in the Rue Saint-Denis.

Keeping watch, Enjolras thought he caught the distinctive sound made when grapeshot is taken from the caissons, and he saw the commander of the gun adjust its angle and turn the mouth of the cannon slightly to the left. Then the gunners began loading it. The officer took the linstock himself and lowered it to the vent.

“Heads down, press against the wall!” Enjolras shouted. “Everyone on your knees along the barricade!”

The insurgents who had been lingering in front of the wine-shop, and who had abandoned their fighting positions when Gavroche arrived, rushed in confusion toward the barricade. But before Enjolras’ order could be carried out, the

shot came, with the terrifying clatter of grapeshot. That was what it was.

The blast had been aimed at the opening in the redoubt, where it struck the wall and ricocheted back. That dreadful rebound left two men dead and three wounded.

If this continued, the barricade could no longer be held. The grapeshot was getting through.

A murmur of alarm rose up.

“Let us stop the second shot,” said Enjolras.

And, lowering his rifle, he aimed at the captain of the gun, who at that moment was bending over the breech and adjusting it, fixing its aim for good.

The captain of the gun was a handsome young artillery sergeant, fair-haired, with a very gentle face and the intelligent look so characteristic of that destined and terrible weapon which, by perfecting horror, must one day put an end to war itself.

Combeferre, standing beside Enjolras, studied the young man closely.

“What a pity!” said Combeferre. “How monstrous these slaughters are! When there are no more kings, there will be no more war. Enjolras, you are aiming at that sergeant, but you are not really seeing him. Just think—he is a fine young man; he is brave; he is clearly thoughtful; those young artillerymen are very well educated; he has a father, a mother, a family; he is probably in love; he cannot be more than five-and-twenty at

most; he might be your brother."

"He is," said Enjolras.

"Yes," replied Combeferre, "he is mine too. Then let us not kill him."

"Leave me alone. It has to be done."

And a tear slowly ran down Enjolras' marble cheek.

At that same instant, he pulled the trigger of his rifle. A flash burst out. The artilleryman spun around twice, his arms stretched out in front of him, his head lifted as if he were gasping for air. Then he collapsed against the cannon and lay still. They could see his back, and from the middle of it blood was streaming straight out. The bullet had passed clean through his chest. He was dead.

He had to be carried off and replaced by someone else. That bought them several minutes, in fact.

CHAPTER IX—HOW THE OLD SKILLS OF A POACHER WERE PUT TO USE, AND HOW THAT UNFAILING MARKSMANSHIP HELPED BRING ABOUT THE CONDEMNATION OF 1796

The men at the barricade quickly exchanged views. The cannon was about to fire again. They could not withstand that grapeshot for another quarter of an hour. They absolutely had to soften the impact.

Enjolras gave this order:

"We need to put a mattress there."

“We don’t have one,” said Combeferre. “The wounded are lying on them.”

Jean Valjean was sitting apart on a stone post at the corner of the tavern, his gun between his knees. Until then, he had taken no part in anything happening around him. He did not seem to hear the fighters saying nearby, “Here is a gun that is doing nothing.”

At Enjolras’s order, he stood up.

You will remember that when the crowd arrived in the Rue de la Chanvrerie, an old woman, expecting bullets, had placed her mattress in front of her window. The window—an attic window—was in the roof of a six-story house a little beyond the barricade. The mattress had been set crosswise. It rested at the bottom on two poles used for drying linen, and at the top it was held by two ropes which, from that distance, looked like threads and were tied to two nails driven into the window frame. Against the sky, those ropes stood out clearly, as fine as hairs.

“Can someone lend me a double-barreled rifle?” said Jean Valjean.

Enjolras, who had just reloaded his own, handed it to him.

Jean Valjean aimed at the attic window and fired.

One of the mattress ropes was cut.

The mattress was now hanging by a single thread.

Jean Valjean fired a second shot. The second rope whipped across the attic windowpanes. The mattress slipped between

the two poles and dropped into the street.

The barricade burst into applause.

Voices cried out:

“Here’s a mattress!”

“Yes,” said Combeferre, “but who will go get it?”

The mattress had in fact fallen outside the barricade, in the space between the attackers and the defenders. The death of the artillery sergeant had enraged the troops, and for several minutes the soldiers had been lying flat behind the line of paving stones they had thrown up. While the cannon stood silent as its crew reorganized, they made up for it by firing on the barricade. The insurgents did not answer the musket fire, wanting to save their ammunition. The shots struck the barricade, but the street they swept was deadly.

Jean Valjean stepped out of the gap, went into the street, crossed the storm of bullets, walked to the mattress, lifted it onto his back, and came back to the barricade.

He set the mattress in the gap with his own hands. He braced it against the wall so that the artillerymen would not see it.

Then they waited for the next burst of grapeshot.

It came quickly.

The cannon roared and spat out its load of shot. But this time there was no rebound. The effect they had expected was achieved. The barricade was saved.

“Citizen,” Enjolras said to Jean Valjean, “the Republic thanks you.”

Bossuet, amused and admiring, exclaimed:

“It is scandalous that a mattress should wield such power. A triumph for what gives way over what strikes like lightning. Still, glory to the mattress that cancels out a cannon!”

CHAPTER X—DAWN

At that moment, Cosette woke up.

Her room was small, neat, and quiet, with a long sash window facing east over the back courtyard of the house.

Cosette knew nothing about what was happening in Paris. She had not been there the night before, and she had already gone to her room when Toussaint said:

“It seems there is some disturbance.”

Cosette had slept only a few hours, but deeply. She had sweet dreams, perhaps because her little bed was so white. Someone had appeared to her in the light, and that someone was Marius. She woke with the sun in her eyes, and at first it felt like her dream was simply continuing. Her first thought as she came out of sleep was a happy one. Cosette felt completely reassured. Like Jean Valjean, a few hours earlier she had gone through that reaction of the soul that absolutely refuses to believe in unhappiness. She began to hope with all her strength, without knowing exactly why. Then she felt a pain in her heart. It had been three days since she had seen Marius. But she told herself that he must have received her letter, that he knew where she was, and that he was clever enough to find a way to reach her. Surely he would come today, perhaps even that very morning. It was full daylight, but the sun's rays were still very slanting. She thought it must be very early, but that she should get up anyway so that she could receive Marius.

She felt that she could not live without Marius, and therefore that was reason enough for Marius to come. No objection mattered. All of it was certain. It was already monstrous to have suffered for three days. Marius gone for three days—such a thing was dreadful on the good God's part. But now that cruel teasing from above was over. Marius was about to arrive, and he would bring good news. That is how youth is made: it dries its eyes quickly; it finds sorrow useless and refuses to accept it. Youth is the smile of the future in the face of an unknown thing, which is itself. Happiness comes naturally to it. It seems to breathe hope.

Cosette also could not remember what Marius had told her about this absence that was supposed to last only one day, or what explanation he had given. Everyone has noticed how quickly a coin dropped on the ground can roll away and hide, and how cleverly it makes itself impossible to find. Some thoughts play the same trick on us. They slip into a corner of the mind, and that is the end of them: they are lost, and memory cannot get hold of them again. Cosette was a little annoyed by this useless effort to remember. She told herself that it was very wrong of her, very unkind, to have forgotten Marius's words.

She jumped out of bed and went through the two acts of cleansing, for soul and body: her prayers and her dressing.

In a moment of necessity, one may bring the reader into a bridal chamber, but not into a maiden's room. Poetry would scarcely dare to do it; prose must not.

It is like the inside of a flower not yet opened, whiteness hidden in the dark, the secret heart of a closed lily, which no man should look upon before the sun itself has seen it. A girl on the verge of womanhood is sacred. That innocent bud beginning to open; that lovely half-covered form, shy even of itself; that white foot slipping quickly into a slipper; that throat covered before a mirror as if the mirror had eyes; that chemise hastily pulled up to hide a shoulder at the creak of a piece of furniture or the passing of a carriage; those strings tied, those hooks fastened, those laces drawn tight; those tremors, those shivers of cold and modesty; that delicate alarm in every movement; that almost winged uneasiness when there is nothing to fear; the unfolding stages of dressing, as lovely as the clouds at dawn—it is not proper to describe such things, and it is already too much to have pointed them out.

A person should approach a young girl coming into womanhood with even more reverence than they would a rising star. The very possibility of causing harm should deepen that respect. The fuzz on a peach, the bloom on a plum, the crystalline pattern of snow, the butterfly’s wing dusted with delicate scales—all of these are rough by comparison with a purity so innocent it does not even know itself to be pure. A young girl is still only the shimmer of a dream, not yet something fixed and fully formed. Her private world lies hidden in the shadowed realm of the ideal. An intrusive glance makes that dim, delicate mystery coarse. Here, even looking too closely becomes a kind of violation.

So we will say nothing about that sweet, slight flutter of Cosette as she rose.

An Eastern tale says that God made the rose white, but when Adam looked at it as it was opening, the rose felt ashamed and turned crimson. We are among those who fall silent before young girls and flowers, because we believe they deserve reverence.

Cosette dressed very quickly and combed her hair, which was a simple task in those days, before women puffed out their curls and braids with pads and false fullness, and before they stuffed their hair into elaborate shapes. Then she opened the window and looked in every direction, hoping to catch sight of some piece of the street, a corner of the house, or an edge of pavement, so that she could watch for Marius there. But she could see nothing outside. The back courtyard was enclosed by fairly high walls, and the only view was of several gardens. Cosette declared those gardens ugly. For the first time in her life, she found flowers unattractive. The smallest glimpse of the street gutter would have pleased her more. At last she decided to look at the sky, as if she imagined Marius might come from that direction.

Suddenly, she burst into tears. This was not because she was fickle; it was because hope had been cut in two by despair. She had a vague sense that something terrible was happening. Indeed, the air was full of troubled thoughts. She told herself that she could be sure of nothing, and that once she was hidden from sight, she might be lost. And the idea that Marius might return to her from heaven no longer seemed beautiful to her,

but sorrowful.

Then, as often happens with these passing moods, calm came back to her, along with hope and a faint, almost unconscious smile that still showed her trust in God.

Everyone in the house was still asleep. A country-like silence filled the place. Not a single shutter was open. The porter's lodge was shut. Toussaint was not up, and Cosette naturally assumed that her father was asleep. She must have suffered deeply, and she was clearly still suffering, because she told herself that her father had been unkind; but she was relying on Marius. The eclipse of such a light seemed utterly impossible. From time to time, she heard sharp blows in the distance and said to herself, "It is strange that people should be opening and closing their carriage gates so early." They were the cannon shots battering the barricade.

A few feet below Cosette's window, in the old, completely black cornice of the wall, there was a martin's nest. Its curved shape projected a little beyond the cornice, so that from above one could look into that tiny paradise. The mother was there, spreading her wings like a fan over her young. The father fluttered around, flew off, then returned with food and kisses in his beak. The rising day gilded this happy scene. The great law, "Multiply," was there, smiling in its majesty, and that gentle mystery opened itself in the glory of the morning. Cosette, her hair lit by the sun, her soul lost in dreams, brightened inwardly by love and outwardly by dawn, leaned over almost mechanically. Hardly daring to admit even to herself that she was thinking of Marius at the same time, she began to watch

these birds, this family, that male and female, that mother and her little ones, with the deep agitation that a nest stirs in a virgin.

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

The attackers kept firing. Musket fire and grapeshot came one after the other, but to tell the truth, they did not do much damage. Only the top of the Corinthe façade was hit badly. The first-floor window and the attic window in the roof, riddled with buckshot and biscaïens, were slowly being torn out of shape. The fighters stationed there had been forced to pull back. This, however, was standard barricade tactics: keep firing for a long time to wear down the insurgents' ammunition, if they make the mistake of firing back. Once it becomes clear, from the weakening of their fire, that they have no powder or bullets left, the assault begins. Enjolras had not fallen into the trap; the barricade did not answer.

At every volley, Gavroche pushed out his cheek with his tongue, a sign of complete contempt.

"Good for you," he said. "Tear up the cloth. We need lint."

Courfeyrac scolded the grapeshot for doing so little damage and said to the cannon:

"You're getting long-winded, my good fellow."

In battle, as at a ball, people become confused. This silence from the redoubt probably began to make the besiegers uneasy and to stir fears of some unexpected move. They likely felt the need to see clearly behind that pile of paving stones and to

know what was happening behind that impassable wall that took blow after blow without striking back. Suddenly the insurgents saw a helmet shining in the sun on a nearby roof. A fireman had braced himself against a tall chimney and seemed to be standing watch. His eyes looked straight down into the barricade.

“That watcher is a problem,” said Enjolras.

Jean Valjean had given Enjolras back his rifle, but he still had his own gun.

Without a word, he aimed at the fireman. A second later, a bullet smashed the man’s helmet, and it clattered loudly into the street. Terrified, the soldier hurried out of sight. A second watcher took his place. This one was an officer. Jean Valjean, having reloaded his gun, aimed at the newcomer and sent the officer’s casque after the soldier’s helmet. The officer did not insist, and withdrew at once. This time the warning was understood. No one appeared on that roof again, and the idea of spying on the barricade was given up.

“Why didn’t you kill the man?” Bossuet asked Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean did not reply.

CHAPTER XII—DISORDER, A SUPPORTER OF ORDER

Bossuet muttered in Combeferre's ear:

"He didn't answer my question."

"He's a man who does good with gunshots," said Combeferre.

Those who still remember that now distant time know that the National Guard from the suburbs fought bravely against uprisings. It was especially eager and fearless in the days of June 1832. Some worthy tavern keeper from Pantin des Vertus or la Cunette, whose business had been shut down by the riots, could turn lionlike at the sight of his empty dance hall and get himself killed to defend the order represented by a tea garden. In that bourgeois yet heroic age, when ideas had their knights, interests had their champions as well. The commonplace nature of their motives took nothing away from the courage of their action. A shrinking pile of crowns could make bankers sing the Marseillaise. They shed their blood with lyrical fervor for the countinghouse, and they defended the shop—that vast little version of the fatherland—with Spartan enthusiasm.

At bottom, we should note, there was nothing in any of this that was not deeply serious. Social forces were clashing while they waited for the day when they would come into balance.

Another sign of the times was the anarchy mixed with governmentalism [the barbarous name of the party of correctness]. People wanted order, but along with it they

wanted a lack of discipline.

The drum suddenly sounded erratic calls, on the orders of one or another colonel of the National Guard. This captain or that one rushed into action on impulse. Some National Guardsmen fought “for an idea,” acting on their own initiative. At critical moments, on those decisive “days,” they listened less to their commanders than to their own instincts. Within the army of order there were true guerrillas: some men of the sword, like Fannicot, and others men of the pen, like Henri Fonfrède.

Civilization, unfortunately, was represented in that period less by a body of principles than by a collection of interests, and it either was, or believed itself to be, in danger. It raised the alarm. Each person made himself a center of action and defended it, helped it, and protected it with his own life. The first man who came along took it upon himself to save society.

Zeal sometimes went as far as extermination. A platoon of the National Guard would, on its own authority, turn itself into a private court-martial and try and execute a captured insurgent in five minutes. It was one such improvised tribunal that killed Jean Prouvaire. It was savage Lynch law, and no side had the right to reproach the others for it, since the Republic in America had used it just as the monarchy in Europe had. This Lynch law was also mixed with mistakes. On one day of rioting, a young poet named Paul Aimé Garnier was chased across the Place Royale, with a bayonet at his back, and escaped only by taking shelter under the porte-cochère of No. 6. They shouted, “There’s another of those Saint-Simonians!” and wanted to kill him. In fact, he had a volume of the memoirs of the Duc de

Saint-Simon under his arm. A National Guard soldier had read the words Saint-Simon on the book and shouted, “Death!”

On June 6, 1832, a company of National Guards from the suburbs, commanded by Captain Fannicot mentioned above, deliberately got itself decimated in the Rue de la Chanvrerie. Strange as it may seem, this was established by the judicial inquiry opened after the insurrection of 1832. Captain Fannicot, a bold and impatient bourgeois, a kind of condottiere of the sort we have just described, was a fanatical and unbending supporter of the government. He could not resist the urge to fire too soon and to win the barricade single-handed—that is, with his company alone. Infuriated by the repeated appearance of the red flag and of the old coat, which he took for the black flag, he loudly criticized the generals and corps commanders. They were in council and did not think the moment for the decisive assault had yet come. They were letting “the insurrection fry in its own fat,” to use the famous phrase of one of them. Fannicot, for his part, thought the barricade was ready, and since what is ripe ought to fall, he made the attempt.

He commanded men as determined as he was—“raging fellows,” as one witness called them. His company, the same one that had shot the poet Jean Prouvaire, was the first in the battalion stationed at the corner of the street. At the moment when they least expected it, the captain hurled his men at the barricade. The move showed more eagerness than strategy, and it cost Fannicot’s company dearly. Before they had crossed two-thirds of the street, the barricade answered with a general volley. Four of the boldest men, who had rushed ahead, were

cut down at point-blank range at the very foot of the redoubt. This brave group of National Guards—courageous men, but without military staying power—was forced to fall back after a brief hesitation, leaving fifteen bodies on the pavement. That moment of hesitation gave the insurgents time to reload, and a second, highly destructive volley hit the company before it could get back to the corner of the street, its shelter. A moment later, it was caught between two fires and was struck by the volley from the artillery piece, which had kept firing because it had received no order to stop.

The fearless and reckless Fannicot was among those killed by the grapeshot. The cannon killed him—that is to say, he was killed by order.

This attack was more violent than effective, and it annoyed Enjolras. “Idiots!” he said. “They’re getting their own men killed, and they’re wasting our ammunition for nothing.”

Enjolras spoke like the true commander of the uprising that he was. An uprising and a government crackdown do not fight with equal weapons. An uprising burns through its strength quickly. It has only so many shots to fire and only so many fighters to lose. An empty cartridge box and a dead man cannot be replaced. Repression, on the other hand, has the army, so it does not count its men; and because it has Vincennes, it does not count its ammunition. Repression has as many regiments as the barricade has men, and as many arsenals as the barricade has cartridge boxes. So these are battles of one against a hundred, and they almost always end with the barricade being crushed—unless the revolution suddenly rises and throws its

flaming archangel’s sword into the balance. Sometimes that does happen. Then everything surges up, the pavements seem to boil, and popular strongholds spring up everywhere. Paris trembles with its highest energy, the $_{quid}$ divinum_ reveals itself, a 10th of August is in the air, a 29th of July is in the air, a marvelous light appears, the gaping mouth of brute force falls back, and the army—that lion—finds standing before it, upright and calm, that prophet: France.

CHAPTER XIII—PASSING GLIMPSES

In the chaos of feelings and passions that defend a barricade, there is a little of everything: bravery, youth, honor, enthusiasm, idealism, conviction, the gambler's recklessness, and, above all, sudden flashes of hope.

One of those flashes, one of those faint tremors of hope, suddenly ran through the barricade in the Rue de la Chanvrerie at the very moment when no one expected it.

"Listen," Enjolras suddenly cried, still keeping watch. "It seems to me that Paris is waking up."

It is certain that, on the morning of June 6, the insurrection flared up again for an hour or two, at least to some extent. The stubborn alarm bell of Saint-Merry revived people's hopes and fears. Barricades began to rise 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 a squadron of cavalry by himself. Out in full view on the open boulevard, he dropped to one knee, took aim, fired, killed the squadron's commander, and walked away, saying, "That's one more who will do us no harm."

He was cut down. In the Rue Saint-Denis, a woman fired on the National Guard from behind a lowered blind. The slats shook with every shot. A fourteen-year-old boy was arrested in the Rue de la Cossonerie with his pockets full of cartridges. Many posts came under attack. At the entrance to the Rue Bertin-Poirée, a sharp and completely unexpected burst of

gunfire greeted a regiment of cuirassiers led by Marshal General Cavaignac de Baragué. In the Rue Planche-Mibray, people hurled broken pottery and household utensils down on the soldiers from the rooftops—a bad sign. And when this was reported to Marshal Soult, Napoleon's old lieutenant turned thoughtful, remembering Suchet's remark at Saragossa: "We are lost when the old women empty their pots de chambre on our heads."

These widespread signs, appearing just when people thought the uprising had been confined to one area—this fever of anger, these sparks flying here and there above those deep masses of fuel called the faubourgs of Paris—all of it disturbed the military leaders. They hurried to stamp out these first beginnings of a blaze.

They put off the attack on the Maubuée, de la Chanvrerie, and Saint-Merry barricades until these flare-ups had been stamped out, so they could deal with the barricades alone and crush them in a single blow. Columns of troops were sent into the streets where unrest was brewing, sweeping through the major streets and searching the smaller ones to the right and left, sometimes slowly and carefully, sometimes at a full charge. The soldiers forced their way into houses from which shots had been fired; at the same time, cavalry maneuvers scattered the groups gathered on the boulevards. This crackdown did not happen without disturbance, or without the wild uproar that always marks clashes between the army and the people. This was what Enjolras had been hearing in the pauses between the cannon fire and the musket shots. He had also seen wounded

men being carried past the end of the street on litters, and he said to Courfeyrac, “Those wounded men are not from our side.”

Their hope did not last long; the brief glow quickly faded. In less than half an hour, whatever had seemed to be stirring in the air was gone. It had been a flash of lightning without any thunder, and once again the insurgents felt that heavy weight descend on them—the weight that the people’s indifference lays over men who are stubborn, abandoned, and alone.

The general uprising, which had seemed to be taking shape in some vague way, had failed; and now the minister of war and the generals could focus all their attention and strategy on the three or four barricades still standing.

The sun was rising above the horizon.

One of the insurgents called out to Enjolras.

“We’re hungry here. Are we really going to die like this, with nothing to eat?”

Enjolras, still leaning on his elbows at the opening in the barricade, nodded yes without taking his eyes off the end of the street.

CHAPTER XIV—IN WHICH THE NAME OF ENJOLRAS' MISTRESS WILL APPEAR

Courfeyrac, sitting on a paving stone beside Enjolras, went on mocking the cannon, and every time that dark storm of projectiles called grape-shot passed overhead with its dreadful roar, he answered it with a fresh burst of irony.

"You're wearing out your lungs, you poor brutal old fool. You're making me feel sorry for you; you're wasting your effort. That's not thunder, it's a cough."

And the others nearby laughed.

Courfeyrac and Bossuet, whose cheerful courage only grew as the danger increased, were like Madame Scarron: they made up for the lack of food with wit, and since there was no wine, they poured out good spirits for everyone.

"I admire Enjolras," said Bossuet. "His calm daring amazes me. He lives alone, which may make him a little sad; Enjolras suffers from his own greatness, which condemns him to being alone. The rest of us have mistresses, more or less, who drive us mad—that is to say, make us brave. When a man is as much in love as a tiger, the least he can do is fight like a lion. It is one way of taking revenge for the tricks our grisettes play on us. Roland gets himself killed for Angélique; all our heroism comes from women. A man without a woman is a pistol without a trigger; it is the woman who fires the man. Well, Enjolras has no

woman. He is not in love, and yet he still manages to be fearless. It is unheard of for a man to be as cold as ice and as bold as fire."

Enjolras did not seem to be listening, but if anyone had been close to him, they would have heard him murmur softly: "Patria."

Bossuet was still laughing when Courfeyrac cried out:

"News!"

Then, taking the tone of an usher making an announcement, he added:

"My name is Eight-Pounder."

In fact, a new figure had entered the scene: a second cannon.

The artillerymen quickly went through their maneuvers and placed this second gun in line with the first.

This made the coming disaster clear.

A few minutes later, the two guns, worked rapidly, were firing point-blank at the redoubt, while platoon fire from the line troops and the soldiers from the suburbs supported the artillery.

Another cannonade could be heard in the distance. While the two guns were furiously attacking the redoubt from the Rue de la Chanvrerie, two other cannons, aimed from the Rue Saint-Denis and the Rue Aubry-le-Boucher, were tearing into the Saint-Merry barricade. The four cannons answered one another with a mournful echo.

The barking of these dark dogs of war answered back and forth.

One of the two guns now pounding the barricade in the Rue de la Chanvrerie was firing grapeshot; the other was firing solid balls.

The gun firing solid balls was aimed a little too high. The shot was directed so that each ball hit the outer edge of the top of the barricade and shattered the stone, sending it crashing down on the insurgents along with bursts of grapeshot.

The purpose of firing this way was to force the insurgents off the top of the redoubt and drive them to crowd together inside. In other words, it was a sign that the assault was about to begin.

Once the fighters had been driven from the top of the barricade by the cannonballs, and from the windows of the tavern by the grapeshot, the attacking columns could move into the street without being picked off. Perhaps they could even advance without being seen, quickly and suddenly climb the redoubt as they had the night before, and—who knew?—take it by surprise.

“We absolutely must lessen the trouble those guns are causing,” said Enjolras, and he shouted, “Fire on the artillerymen!”

Everyone was ready. The barricade, silent for so long, suddenly unleashed a desperate storm of fire. Seven or eight volleys came in quick succession, with a kind of fury and exultation. The street filled with blinding smoke, and after a few minutes, through the haze streaked with flame, two-thirds of the gunners

could be seen lying under the cannon wheels. Those still on their feet kept serving the guns with grim calm, but their fire had weakened.

“Things are going well now,” Bossuet said to Enjolras. “We’re succeeding.”

Enjolras shook his head and replied:

“If this success lasts another quarter of an hour, there won’t be a single cartridge left in the barricade.”

It seems that Gavroche overheard the remark.

CHAPTER XV—GAVROCHE OUTSIDE

Courfeyrac suddenly caught sight of someone at the foot of the barricade, outside in the street, in the middle of the bullets.

Gavroche had taken a bottle basket from the wine shop, slipped out through the opening, and was calmly 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?” Courfeyrac asked.

Gavroche lifted his face.

“I’m filling my basket, citizen.”

“Don’t you see the grapeshot?”

Gavroche answered:

“Well, it’s raining. So what?”

Courfeyrac shouted, “Come back in!”

“At once,” said Gavroche.

And with a single leap, he sprang into the street.

As you may remember, Fannicot’s company had left a trail of bodies behind them. Twenty corpses lay scattered along the pavement from one end of the street to the other. To Gavroche, twenty cartridge boxes meant a fresh supply of ammunition for the barricade.

The smoke in the street was like fog. Anyone who has seen a cloud sink into a mountain pass between two steep ridges can picture it, only this smoke was heavier and thicker, hemmed in by two dark rows of tall houses. It rose slowly and was constantly renewed. Because of that, a dim twilight spread through the street and drained even the full daylight of its brightness. The fighters could barely see one another from one end of the street to the other, short as it was.

This darkness, which the commanders directing the attack on the barricade had probably intended and counted on, worked in Gavroche's favor.

Hidden by the folds of that smoky veil, and helped by his small size, he could move fairly far into the street without being seen. He emptied the first seven or eight cartridge boxes with little danger.

He crawled flat on his stomach, raced on all fours, carried his basket in his teeth, twisted, slipped, and wriggled his way from one dead body to the next, emptying each cartridge box or cartouche the way a monkey cracks open a nut.

Those at the barricade, so close by, did not dare call out for him to come back, for fear of drawing attention to him.

On one body, a corporal's, he found a powder flask.

"For thirst," he said, slipping it into his pocket.

By pushing forward, he reached a spot where the smoke from the gunfire began to thin. Then the sharpshooters from the line, posted on watch behind their paving-stone barricade, and the

sharpshooters from the banlieue, gathered at the street corner, suddenly pointed out to one another something moving through the smoke.

Just as Gavroche was taking cartridges from a sergeant lying near a stone doorway, a bullet hit the body.

“Fichtre!” cried Gavroche. “They’re killing my dead men for me.”

A second bullet struck the pavement beside him and sent up a spark. A third knocked over his basket.

Gavroche looked and saw that the shots were coming from the men of the banlieue.

He jumped to his feet and stood straight, his hair blowing 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, It’s Voltaire’s fault; And dull at Palaiseau, It’s Rousseau’s fault.”

Then he picked up his basket and put back the cartridges that had spilled out, not losing a single one. Moving closer to the gunfire, he began rifling 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, It’s Voltaire’s fault; I’m a little bird, It’s Rousseau’s fault.”

A fifth bullet did nothing but draw a third verse from him.

“Joie est mon caractère, C’est la faute à Voltaire; Misère est mon trousseau, C’est la faute à Rousseau.”

“Joy is my nature, It’s Voltaire’s fault; Misery is my dowry, It’s Rousseau’s fault.”

And so it went on for a while.

It was a beautiful and terrible thing to see. Gavroche, under fire, was mocking the gunfire itself. He looked as if he were having enormous fun. He was like a sparrow pecking at the hunters. Every time they fired, he answered with a couplet. They kept aiming at him and kept missing. The National Guardsmen and the soldiers laughed as they took their shots. He dropped flat, sprang up again, slipped into a doorway, then leaped out, vanished, reappeared, darted off, came back, and answered the grapeshot with his thumb to his nose. All the while, he went on plundering the cartridges, emptying cartridge-boxes, and filling his basket. The insurgents, breathless with anxiety, watched him with their eyes fixed on him. The barricade shook; he sang. He was neither child nor man, but some strange street-urchin fairy. You might have called him the invulnerable dwarf of the battle. Bullets chased him, but he was quicker than they were. He was playing a dreadful game of hide-and-seek with death; whenever the flat-nosed face of the specter came near, the boy flicked it away.

At last, though, one bullet—better aimed or more treacherous than the others—struck the child, that little will-o'-the-wisp. Gavroche was seen to stagger, then sink to the ground. A cry rose from the whole barricade. But there was something of Antæus in that tiny figure: for the gamin, touching the pavement was what touching the earth was for the giant. Gavroche had fallen only to get up again. He stayed sitting upright, with a long streak of blood running down his face. He lifted both arms into the air, looked toward the place the shot had come from, 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 ground, It is Voltaire's fault; With my nose in the gutter, It is the fault of . . . "

He did not finish. A second bullet from the same marksman cut him off. This time he fell face down on the pavement and did not move again. That great little soul had flown away.

CHAPTER XVI—HOW A BROTHER BECOMES A FATHER

At that same moment, in the Luxembourg Gardens—for the story must keep its eyes everywhere—two children were walking hand in hand. One looked about seven years old, the other five. Soaked by the rain, they moved along the sunny side of the paths. The older child led the younger. Both were pale and dressed in rags, with the look of wild birds. The smaller one said, “I am very hungry.”

The older child, already acting a little like a protector, led his brother with his left hand and carried a small stick in his right.

They were alone in the garden. It was deserted. The gates had been closed by police order because of the insurrection. The troops who had been camped there had left for the needs of the fighting.

How had these children come to be there? Perhaps they had slipped out of some guardhouse left partly open. Perhaps nearby, at the Barrière d’Enfer, or on the Esplanade de l’Observatoire, or at the neighboring crossroads beneath the pediment bearing the words _Invenerunt parvulum pannis involutum_, there had been some showman’s booth from which they had run away. Perhaps, the evening before, they had escaped the notice of the garden inspectors at closing time and spent the night in one of those sentry boxes where people read the newspapers. In any case, they were stray lambs, and they seemed free. To be stray and seem free is to be lost. These

poor little creatures were indeed lost.

These were the same two children over whom Gavroche had once taken some trouble, as the reader may remember. They were the children of the Thénardiers, hired out to Magnon, passed off as belonging to M. Gillenormand, and now like leaves fallen from all those rootless branches and blown along the ground by the wind. Their clothes, once clean in Magnon's time and useful to her as a kind of advertisement with M. Gillenormand, had by now turned into rags.

From this point on, these children belonged to the category the statistics call "abandoned children," the sort the police note down, pick up, lose track of, and find again on the pavements of Paris.

It took a day of upheaval like that to explain why those poor little children were in the garden. If the supervisors had seen them, they would have thrown those ragged little figures out at once. Poor children are not allowed into public gardens; still, people ought to remember that, as children, they have a right to flowers.

The children were there because the gates were locked. They were there against the rules. They had slipped into the garden and stayed there. Locked gates do not send the inspectors away; supervision is supposed to continue. But it grows lax and settles into idleness, and the inspectors, stirred by the public alarm and more concerned with what was happening outside than inside, no longer looked into the garden and had not noticed the two little trespassers.

It had rained the night before, and a little that morning as well. But in June, showers do not matter much. An hour after a storm, you can barely tell that the beautiful fair-haired day has been crying. In summer, the earth dries as quickly as a child's cheek. At that point in the solstice, the full light of noon is almost sharp. It seizes everything. It presses itself onto the earth with a kind of thirsting pull. You might think the sun was thirsty. A shower is only a glass of water, and even a downpour is swallowed at once. In the morning everything was dripping; by afternoon everything was dusted over.

Nothing is more beautiful than foliage washed by rain and dried by sunlight; it is freshness made warm. Gardens and meadows, with water at their roots and sun on their flowers, become like censers of incense, sending up all their scents at once. Everything smiles, sings, and offers itself. You feel gently intoxicated. Spring is a temporary paradise, and the sun helps man endure with patience.

Some people ask for nothing more. They are mortals who, once they have the blue of the sky above them, say, "It is enough!" They are dreamers lost in wonder, almost worshipping nature, indifferent to good and evil. They contemplate the cosmos and, dazzled by it, forget humanity. They cannot understand how anyone can concern themselves with one person's hunger, another's thirst, the poor without clothes in winter, the weak curve of a child's spine, the straw bed, the attic, the dungeon, or the rags of shivering young girls, when one might simply dream beneath the trees. They are peaceful and terrible spirits, pitiless in their contentment. Strangely enough, the infinite is enough

for them. They ignore that great human need: the finite, the thing that can be held. They give no thought to the finite that allows progress and noble labor. The indefinite, born from the human and divine union of the infinite and the finite, escapes them. As long as they stand face to face with immensity, they smile. Never joy; always ecstasy. Their life consists in surrendering their personality to contemplation. For them, the history of humanity is only a detailed sketch. The whole is not there; the true All lies beyond it. Why trouble oneself with that detail, man? Humanity suffers—that may well be true; but look at Aldebaran rising! A mother has no milk left, and her newborn child is dying. I know nothing about that, but look at the marvelous rosette a slice of pine wood-cells shows under the microscope! Try, if you can, to compare the finest Mechlin lace to that! These thinkers forget how to love. The zodiac fills their minds so completely that they cannot see the weeping child. God darkens their souls. This is a kind of mind that is both great and small at once. Horace was one of them; Goethe too. La Fontaine perhaps as well: magnificent egoists of the infinite, calm spectators of suffering, who do not notice Nero if the weather is fine, for whom the sun hides the funeral pyre, who would watch a guillotine execution while looking for an effect of light, who hear neither the cry nor the sob, nor the death rattle nor the alarm bell, for whom everything is well because it is May, who, so long as purple and gold clouds hang above them, declare themselves satisfied, and who are determined to be happy until the radiance of the stars and the songs of the birds are exhausted.

These are dark lights. They have no idea that they should be pitied, though they certainly should. Whoever does not weep does not truly see. They deserve both admiration and pity, like a being who is at once night and day, with no eyes beneath his lashes but a star on his brow.

Some people say the indifference of these thinkers is a higher kind of philosophy. Perhaps it is; but even in that greatness there is a weakness. One may be immortal and still limp: Vulcan is proof of that. One may be more than human and less than human at the same time. Nature contains forms of vastness that are incomplete. Who knows whether the sun itself may not be a blind man?

But then what? Whom can we trust? _Solem quis dicere falsum audeat?_ Who would dare say that the sun is false? So then, might certain geniuses themselves, those very lofty mortals, those human stars, be mistaken? Might that which stands so high, at the summit, at the crest, at the zenith—that which pours so much light down on the earth—see little, see badly, or not see at all? Is that not a desperate thought? No. For what is above the sun? God.

On June 6, 1832, at about eleven in the morning, the Luxembourg was empty, quiet, and beautiful. The rows of trees and the flower-beds gave off fragrance and dazzling beauty in the sunlight. The branches, alive with the brilliant noon light, seemed to be reaching out to embrace one another. In the sycamores, linnets made a clamor, sparrows chirped in triumph, and woodpeckers climbed the chestnut trees, tapping lightly at the bark. The flower-beds acknowledged the rightful royalty of

the lilies; the noblest of perfumes is the one that comes from whiteness. The spicy scent of carnations could be smelled. Marie de Medici's old crows were courting in the tall trees. The sun gilded, purpled, kindled, and lit up the tulips, which are really every variety of flame turned into flowers. Around the tulip beds, the bees—the sparks of those fiery flowers—hummed. Everything was graceful and joyful, even the coming rain. That passing shower, which the lilies of the valley and the honeysuckle would benefit from, had nothing troubling about it; the swallows made a charming threat by flying low. Anyone there would have breathed in happiness. Life smelled sweet. All nature seemed to give off innocence, help, comfort, fatherliness, tenderness, and dawn. The thoughts descending from heaven were as gentle as a baby's little hand when one kisses it.

The statues beneath the trees, white and bare, wore shifting robes of shadow cut through with light. Sunlight seemed to tear across these goddesses in bright patches, with rays hanging from them on every side. Around the great fountain, the ground had already dried so completely that it looked scorched. There was just enough breeze to stir up little rebellions of dust here and there. A few yellow leaves left from autumn chased one another merrily, as if they were playing tricks on each other.

This flood of light had something deeply reassuring about it. Life, sap, warmth, and fragrance overflowed everywhere. Beneath creation, one sensed the vastness of its source. In all this air steeped in love, in this exchange of echoes and reflections, in this marvelous lavishness of rays, in this endless

pouring out of liquid gold, one felt the generosity of the inexhaustible. And behind this splendor, like behind a curtain of flame, one caught a glimpse of God, that millionaire of stars.

Thanks to the sand, there was not a spot of mud; thanks to the rain, not a grain of dust. The clusters of blossoms had just been washed clean. Every kind of velvet, satin, gold, and gloss that rises from the earth in the form of flowers was flawless. This magnificence was spotless. The great silence of happy nature filled the garden—a heavenly silence that still allowed for a thousand kinds of music: the cooing in nests, the buzzing of swarms, the flutter of the breeze. The whole harmony of the season came together in one graceful unity. Spring made its entrances and exits in proper order: the lilacs were ending, the jasmines were beginning; some flowers were late, some insects early; the advance guard of the red butterflies of June mingled with the rear guard of the white butterflies of May. The plane trees were putting on their new bark. The breeze carved waves through the magnificent mass of the chestnut trees. It was splendid. A veteran from the nearby barracks, looking through the fence, said, “Here is Spring presenting arms, in full uniform.”

All of nature was eating breakfast. Creation was at the table; this was its hour. A vast blue cloth was spread across the sky, and a vast green cloth across the earth, and the sun lit everything brilliantly. God was serving this universal meal. Every creature had its pasture or its portion. The ring-dove found hemp seed, the chaffinch found millet, the goldfinch found chickweed, the robin found worms, the greenfinch found flies, the fly found infusoria, and the bee found flowers. It is true that

they also ate one another to some extent, which is the sorrow of evil mixed with good; but not one of them had an empty stomach.

The two little abandoned children had reached the area near the great fountain, and, somewhat dazzled by all that light, they tried to hide themselves. It was the instinct of the poor and the weak in the presence of even impersonal splendor. They stayed behind the swans' hutch.

Now and then, whenever the wind rose, shouts, clamor, a kind of chaotic death rattle that was gunfire, and heavy thuds that were cannon shots reached the ear in a confused blur. Smoke hung over the rooftops in the direction of the Halles. Far off, a bell was ringing with the sound of an appeal.

The children did not seem to notice any of these sounds. From time to time, the younger one repeated, "I am hungry."

Almost at the same moment as the children, another pair came toward the great basin. It was a respectable man of about fifty leading a little boy of six by the hand. Clearly, they were father and son. The six-year-old had a large brioche.

At that time, certain houses along the river in the Rue Madame and Rue d'Enfer had keys to the Luxembourg garden, which the tenants were allowed to use when the gates were closed, a privilege that was later abolished. This father and son no doubt came from one of those houses.

The two poor little children watched "that gentleman" coming closer and hid themselves more carefully.

Father and son stopped near the fountain where two swans were at play. This bourgeois seemed to have a particular admiration for the swans. In one respect he resembled them: he walked like them.

At the moment, the swans were swimming, which was their chief talent, and they were magnificent.

If the two poor little creatures had been listening, and if they had been old enough to understand, they might have caught the words of this solemn man. The father was saying to his son:

“A wise man is content with very little. Look at me, my son. I have no love of pomp. You will never see me dressed in clothes trimmed with gold lace and jewels; I leave that false splendor to people with disordered minds.”

At that moment, the loud cries coming from the direction of the Halles broke out again, with an even greater clash of bells and uproar.

“What is that?” the child asked.

The father replied:

“It is the Saturnalia.”

All at once, he noticed the two little ragged boys behind the green swan-house.

“There is the beginning of it,” he said.

Then, after a pause, he added:

“Anarchy is making its way into this garden.”

Meanwhile, his son took a bite of his brioche, spat it out, and suddenly burst into tears.

“What are you crying for?” his father demanded.

“I’m not hungry anymore,” said the child.

The father’s smile grew broader.

“You do not have to be hungry to eat cake.”

“I’m tired of my cake. It’s stale.”

“You don’t want any more of it?”

“No.”

The father pointed to the swans.

“Throw it to those waterfowl.”

The child hesitated. A person may not want any more of his cake, but that is no reason to give it away.

The father went on:

“Be humane. You must show compassion to animals.”

And, taking the cake from his son, he threw it into the basin.

The cake landed very close to the edge.

The swans were far away, in the middle of the basin, busy with some prey. They had noticed neither the bourgeois nor the brioche.

The bourgeois, realizing that the cake might go to waste and stirred by this pointless shipwreck, began waving and fussing

about like a telegraph signal, until at last he caught the swans' attention.

They spotted something floating and, like the ships they were, steered toward the shore. Slowly they made their way to the brioche with the dull majesty that suits white creatures.

"The swans [$_{\text{cygnes}}$–] understand signs [$_{\text{signes}}$–]," said the bourgeois, pleased with his joke.

At that moment, the distant uproar from the city suddenly grew louder again. This time it sounded ominous. Some gusts of wind speak more clearly than others, and the one blowing then carried distinct drumbeats, shouting, platoon fire, and the grim answering sounds of the tocsin and the cannon. At the same instant, a black cloud suddenly covered the sun.

The swans still had not reached the brioche.

"Let us go home," said the father. "They are attacking the Tuileries."

He took his son's hand again. Then he went on:

"From the Tuileries to the Luxembourg, there is only the distance that separates Royalty from the peerage; it is not far. Shots will soon be raining down."

He looked at the cloud.

"Perhaps actual rain is about to fall as well; the sky is joining in. The younger branch is doomed. Let us go home quickly."

"I would like to see the swans eat the brioche," said the child.

The father answered:

“That would be unwise.”

And he led his little bourgeois away.

Sorry to leave the swans, the boy kept turning to look back at the basin until a corner of the quincunxes hid it from view.

Meanwhile, the two little waifs had come up to the brioche at the same time as the swans. It was floating on the water. The younger one stared at the cake, while the older watched the bourgeois as he walked away.

Father and son entered the maze of paths that leads to the broad flight of steps near the clump of trees on the Rue Madame side.

As soon as the others were out of sight, the older boy quickly threw himself flat on his stomach along the rounded edge of the basin. Gripping it with his left hand and leaning so far over the water that he was almost falling in, he reached out with his stick in his right hand toward the cake. The swans, sensing an enemy, hurried forward. As they did, the movement of their breasts pushed the water back, and one of the soft, widening ripples gently carried the brioche toward the child’s stick. Just as the swans arrived, the stick touched the cake. The boy gave it a sharp tap, pulled the brioche in, scared off the swans, grabbed the cake, and jumped to his feet. The cake was soaked, but they were hungry and thirsty. The older boy broke it into two pieces, one large and one small, kept the smaller piece for himself, gave the larger one to his brother, and said:

“Stuff that into your mouth.”

CHAPTER XVII—MORTUUS PATER FILIUM MORITURUM EXPECTAT

Marius rushed out from the barricade, with Combeferre right behind him. But he was too late. Gavroche was dead. Combeferre brought back the basket of cartridges; Marius carried the child.

“Alas!” he thought. “What the father had done for his own father, he was now repaying to the son. Only Thénardier had brought his father back alive; he was bringing the child back dead.”

When Marius came back into the redoubt with Gavroche in his arms, his face, like the child’s, was covered in blood.

At the moment he had bent down to lift Gavroche, a bullet had grazed his head; he had not noticed it.

Courfeyrac untied his cravat and used it to bandage Marius’s forehead.

They laid Gavroche on the same table as Mabeuf and spread the black shawl over both bodies. It was enough to cover both the old man and the child.

Combeferre handed out the cartridges from the basket he had brought in.

That gave each man fifteen rounds.

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 kind of eccentric,” Combeferre said quietly to Enjolras. “He’s found a way not to fight at this barricade.”

“That does not stop him from defending it,” Enjolras replied.

“Heroism comes in its own unique forms,” Combeferre went on.

And Courfeyrac, who had overheard them, added:

“He is a different kind from Father Mabeuf.”

One thing must be noted: the gunfire battering the barricade hardly disturbed what was happening inside. Anyone who has never passed through the whirlwind of this kind of war cannot imagine the strange moments of calm mixed in with such violence. Men came and went. They talked, joked, and lounged about. Someone we know heard a fighter say to him in the middle of the grape-shot, “We are here as if at a bachelor breakfast.” We repeat, the redoubt in the Rue de la Chanvrerie seemed very calm within. Every change and every phase had either already run its course or was about to. The position had gone from critical to threatening, and from threatening it was probably about to become desperate. As the situation grew darker, the glow of heroism spread more and more deeply across the barricade. Enjolras, grave and commanding, stood over it like a young Spartan offering his bare sword to the dark genius, Epidotas.

Combeferre, wearing an apron, was dressing wounds. Bossuet and Feuilly were making cartridges with the powder-flask Gavroche had taken from the dead corporal, and Bossuet said to Feuilly, “We shall soon be taking the coach to another planet.” Near Enjolras, Courfeyrac was laying out and arranging on a few paving stones he had kept for himself a whole arsenal—his sword-cane, his gun, two holster pistols, and a cudgel—with the care of a young girl putting a little dunkerque in order. Jean Valjean stared silently at the wall opposite him. One workman was tying Mother Hucheloup’s large straw hat onto his head with a string, “for fear of sunstroke,” he said. The young men from the Cougourde d’Aix were chatting gaily among themselves, as if eager to speak patois one last time. Joly, who had taken Widow Hucheloup’s mirror from the wall, was using it to examine his tongue. Some of the fighters had found a few rather moldy crusts of bread in a drawer and were eagerly eating them. Marius was troubled by what his father was about to say to him.

CHAPTER XVIII—THE VULTURE BECOMES PREY

We must emphasize one psychological fact unique to barricades. We should leave out nothing that belongs to that astonishing kind of street warfare.

Whatever strange inner calm we have just described, the barricade still remains, for those inside it, like a vision.

There is something apocalyptic about civil war. All the mists of the unknown mix with violent flashes. Revolutions are like sphinxes, and anyone who has lived through a barricade feels as though he has passed through a dream.

We have already pointed out, in Marius's case, the feelings that take hold of a person in such places, and we shall see what comes of them. They are both more and less than life. When one comes out of a barricade, one no longer knows what one saw there. One has done terrible things without realizing it. One has been surrounded by clashing ideas that wore human faces. One's mind has stood in the light of the future. Corpses lay stretched on the ground, and phantoms stood upright. The hours were immense and seemed like hours of eternity. One had lived inside death. Shadows passed by. What were they?

One has seen hands stained with blood. There was a deafening horror, and also a terrible silence. Some open mouths were shouting, while others stayed open and said nothing. One was in the middle of smoke, perhaps of night as well. One imagined having touched the sinister slime of unknown depths, and then

stared at something red beneath one's fingernails. Afterward, one remembers nothing clearly.

Let us return to the Rue de la Chanvrerie.

Suddenly, between two volleys, they could hear the distant sound of a clock striking the hour.

"It is midday," said Combeferre.

Before the clock had finished striking twelve, Enjolras leaped to his feet and, from the top of the barricade, shouted in a voice of thunder:

"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. We do not have a minute to lose."

A squad of sappers and miners, their axes on their shoulders, had just appeared in battle formation at the end of the street.

This could only be the front of a column. But which column? Clearly the assault column; the sappers sent to tear down the barricade always had to go ahead of the soldiers who would climb over it.

They were clearly on the edge of the moment M. Clermont-Tonnerre, in 1822, called "the tug of war."

Enjolras's order was carried out with the swift efficiency typical of ships and barricades, the only two battlefields where there is no escape. In less than a minute, two thirds of the stones Enjolras had piled at the door of the Corinthe were carried up to the first floor and the attic. Before another minute had passed,

those stones, carefully stacked, had blocked the first-floor sash window and the roof windows to half their height. A few loopholes, carefully designed by Feuilly, the chief architect, let the gun barrels pass through. It was all the easier to fortify the windows because the grape-shot had stopped. The two cannons were now firing solid shot at the center of the barricade to open a hole there and, if possible, make a breach for the assault.

Once the stones meant for the final defense were in place, Enjolras had the bottles he had stored under the table where Mabeuf lay carried up to the first floor.

“Who is supposed to drink that?” Bossuet asked him.

“They are,” Enjolras replied.

Then they barricaded the lower window and kept ready the iron crossbars used to fasten the wine-shop door at night.

The fortress was complete. The barricade was the outer wall; the wine-shop was the keep. With the stones that were left, they blocked the exit.

The defenders of a barricade always have to conserve their ammunition, and the attackers know it. So the attackers make their preparations with a kind of maddening slowness. They expose themselves to fire before they need to, more in appearance than in reality, and act at their leisure. Preparations for an assault are always made with a certain methodical calm; then the lightning strikes.

That delay gave Enjolras time to inspect everything and improve everything. He felt that, since such men were going to die, their death should be a masterpiece.

He said to Marius, “We’re the two leaders. I’ll give the final orders inside. You stay outside and keep watch.”

Marius took up his post as lookout on top of the barricade.

Enjolras had the kitchen door nailed shut; as the reader will remember, the kitchen served as the infirmary.

“Don’t disturb the wounded,” he said.

He gave his last orders in the taproom in a brief but deeply calm voice; Feuilly listened and answered for everyone.

“On the first floor, keep your axes ready to chop through the staircase. Do you have them?”

“Yes,” said Feuilly.

“How many?”

“Two axes and a pole-axe.”

“Good. We now have twenty-six fighters on foot. How many guns do we have?”

“Thirty-four.”

“Eight too many. Keep those eight guns loaded like the others and close at hand. Put your swords and pistols in your belts. Twenty men to the barricade. Six hidden at the attic windows and at the first-floor window, to fire on the attackers through the loopholes in the stones. Not a single worker here is to

remain idle. In a moment, when the drum signals the assault, let the twenty downstairs rush to the barricade. The first ones there will get the best positions."

When these arrangements were made, he turned to Javert and said:

"I haven't forgotten you."

And, setting a pistol on the table, he added:

"The last man to leave this room will smash this spy's skull."

"Here?" a voice asked.

"No. Let's not mix his corpse with ours. The small barricade in Mondétour lane can be climbed; it's only four feet high. The man is securely bound. He'll be taken there and executed."

At that moment, someone was even more impassive than Enjolras: Javert. Then Jean Valjean appeared.

He had been lost in the group of insurgents. He stepped forward and said to Enjolras:

"You're the commander?"

"Yes."

"You thanked me a little while ago."

"In the name of the Republic: the barricade has two saviors, Marius Pontmercy and you."

"Do you think I deserve a reward?"

"Certainly."

“Then I ask for one.”

“What is it?”

“That I may blow that man’s brains out.”

Javert lifted his head, saw Jean Valjean, made an almost imperceptible movement, and said:

“That is fair.”

Meanwhile, Enjolras had begun reloading his rifle; he glanced around him:

“No objections.”

Then he turned to Jean Valjean:

“Take the spy.”

Jean Valjean did exactly that, taking charge of Javert as he sat down at the end of the table. He picked up the pistol, and a faint click showed that he had cocked it.

Almost at the same moment, the sound of trumpets could be heard.

“Look out!” Marius shouted from the top of the barricade.

Javert began to laugh with the silent laugh that was peculiar to him, and, staring hard at the insurgents, he said:

“You are no better off than I am.”

“Everyone out!” shouted Enjolras.

The insurgents rushed out in confusion, and as they went they received in the back—if we may use the phrase—this parting shot from Javert:

“We shall see each other again very soon!”

CHAPTER XIX—JEAN VALJEAN TAKES HIS REVENGE

When Jean Valjean was alone with Javert, he untied the rope fastened around the prisoner's waist, the knot hidden under the table. Then he signaled for him to stand up.

Javert obeyed with that indefinable smile that seemed to sum up the superiority of authority even in chains.

Jean Valjean took Javert by the martingale, the way one might take a beast of burden by its breast-strap, and slowly led him out of the wine-shop, dragging him along because Javert, with his legs hindered, could move only in very short steps.

Jean Valjean held the pistol in his hand.

That was how they crossed the inner trapezoid of the barricade. The insurgents were all focused on the attack, which was about to begin, and had their backs to the two men.

Only Marius, posted on one side at the far left of the barricade, saw them go by. He saw this pair—the victim and the executioner—lit by the grave, deathlike light he carried within his own soul.

Jean Valjean, with some difficulty but without loosening his grip for even a moment, helped Javert, bound as he was, climb over the small entrenchment in the Mondétour lane.

Once they were over the barrier, they were alone in the lane. No one saw them. In the pile nearby, they could make out a pale

face, hair hanging loose, a hand pierced through, and the half-bare breast of a woman. It was Éponine. The corner of the houses hid them from the insurgents. A few steps away stood the dreadful heap of bodies carried from the barricade.

Javert glanced sideways at the body and, perfectly calm, said in a low voice:

“I think I know that girl.”

Then he turned to Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean slipped the pistol under his arm and fixed Javert with a look that needed no words: “Javert, it is I.”

Javert answered:

“Take your revenge.”

Jean Valjean took a knife from his pocket and opened it.

“A pocketknife!” Javert exclaimed. “Yes, you’re right. That suits you better.”

Jean Valjean cut the strap Javert had around his neck. Then he cut the cords binding his wrists. Then, bending down, he cut the cord around his feet. Straightening up again, he said to him:

“You are free.”

Javert was not a man who was easily surprised. Even so, self-controlled as he was, he could not help starting. He stood there motionless, mouth open.

Jean Valjean went on:

“I do not think I will get out of this place alive. But if by some chance I do escape, I live under the name of Fauchelevent, at No. 7 Rue de l’Homme Armé.”

Javert gave a tigerish snarl, opening one corner of his mouth slightly, and muttered through his teeth:

“Be careful.”

“Go,” Jean Valjean said.

Javert spoke again:

“You said Fauchelevent, Rue de l’Homme Armé?”

“Number 7.”

Javert repeated softly, “Number 7.”

He buttoned his coat again, straightened into his usual rigid, military posture, turned halfway around, folded his arms, and rested his chin on one hand. Then he started off toward the Halles. Jean Valjean watched him go.

A few minutes later, Javert turned back and shouted to Jean Valjean:

“You’re tormenting me. Better to kill me.”

Javert himself did not realize that he was no longer addressing Jean Valjean as “thou.”

“Go on,” said Jean Valjean.

Javert moved away slowly. A moment later, he disappeared around the corner of the Rue des Prêcheurs.

Once Javert was gone, Jean Valjean fired his pistol into the air.

Then he went back to the barricade and said:

“It is done.”

Meanwhile, this is what had happened.

Marius, more focused on what was happening outside than inside, had not yet taken a good look at the bound spy in the dark back part of the tap-room.

But when he saw him clearly in daylight, crossing the barricade on his way to death, he recognized him. Something suddenly came back to him. He remembered the inspector from the Rue de Pontoise and the two pistols the man had given him—pistols Marius had used on this very barricade. He remembered not only the man’s face, but his name as well.

But the memory was vague and confused, like all his thoughts.

He did not tell himself this as a certainty, but as a question:

“Isn’t that the police inspector who told me his name was Javert?”

Perhaps there was still time to step in on that man’s behalf. But first he had to know whether this really was Javert.

Marius called to Enjolras, who had just taken up position at the far end of the barricade:

“Enjolras!”

“What?”

“What is that man’s name over there?”

“Which man?”

“The police agent. Do you know his name?”

“Of course. He told us.”

“What is it?”

“Javert.”

Marius jumped to his feet.

At that moment, they heard the pistol shot.

Jean Valjean appeared again and cried, “It is done.”

A dark chill passed through Marius’ heart.

CHAPTER XX—THE DEAD ARE RIGHT, AND THE LIVING ARE NOT WRONG

The barricade's death struggle was about to begin.

At that final moment, everything added to its tragic grandeur: a thousand mysterious crashes in the air; the breath of armed crowds moving through unseen streets; the broken gallop of cavalry; the heavy pounding of artillery on the move; volleys of gunfire; and cannon fire crossing through the maze of Paris. Battle smoke rose above the rooftops, gilded by the light. There were indescribable, vaguely terrifying cries, flashes of threat everywhere, and the bell of Saint-Merry, which now sounded almost like a sob. The gentle weather, the splendid sky full of sun and clouds, the beauty of the day, and the frightening silence of the houses all deepened the scene.

Since the evening before, the two rows of houses on the Rue de la Chanvrerie had become two walls—grim walls, with doors shut, windows shut, and shutters shut.

In those days—so unlike our own—when the moment had come, when people wanted to bring an end to a situation that had gone on too long, whether under a granted charter or in a constitutional country, when anger filled the air, when the city agreed to have its pavements torn up, when insurrection made the middle class smile by whispering its password in its ear, then the ordinary resident, deeply caught up in the revolt, became, in a sense, the fighter's ally, and the house joined

forces with the makeshift fortress built against it. But when the time was not ripe, when the uprising had not truly won acceptance, when the masses rejected the movement, the fighters were finished. The city became a desert around the revolt. Hearts turned cold, doors were barred, and the street became a narrow passage that helped the army seize the barricade.

You cannot, by catching them off guard, force a people to move faster than they want to. Woe to anyone who tries. A people does not simply throw itself into action at random. When it refuses to follow, it leaves the uprising to fend for itself. The insurgents then become dangerous, as if infected by a plague. A house becomes a cliff, a door becomes a refusal, a façade becomes a wall. That wall hears, sees, and will not act. It could open and save you. It does not. The wall becomes a judge. It looks at you and condemns you. What bleak things closed houses are. They seem dead, but they are alive. Life, though it seems suspended inside, still goes on there. No one has come out for twenty-four hours, yet no one is absent. Inside that stony shell, people move about, go to bed, and rise again. They remain there as a family. They eat and drink there. They are afraid—a terrible thing. Fear excuses this dreadful lack of hospitality; terror is mixed into it, and that partly explains it. Sometimes, as has actually been seen, fear turns into passion. Fright can become fury, just as caution can become rage. Hence the wise saying: “The enraged moderates.” There are eruptions of extreme terror from which anger rises like mournful smoke. “What do these people want? Why have they come here? Let them get themselves out of this mess. So much the

worse for them. It is their own fault. They are only getting what they deserve. It has nothing to do with us. Look at our poor street, shot through everywhere. They are a pack of scoundrels. Above all, do not open the door." And so the house takes on the look of a tomb. The insurgent is dying in front of that house. He sees the grapeshot and the bare swords coming closer. If he cries out, he knows they hear him and that no one will come. There are walls there that could shelter him. There are men there who could save him. But those walls have ears of flesh, and those men have hearts of stone.

Whom can he blame?

No one, and everyone.

Such are the unfinished times we live in.

Utopia always takes a grave risk when it turns into revolution, when philosophical protest becomes armed protest, and when Minerva becomes Pallas.

When Utopia grows impatient and turns into revolt, it knows what is coming; almost always, it arrives too soon. Then it becomes resigned and stoically accepts disaster instead of victory. It serves those who reject it without complaint, even making excuses for them and clearing them of blame. Its greatness lies in agreeing to be abandoned. It cannot be beaten by obstacles, yet it remains gentle in the face of ingratitude.

But is it really ingratitude?

Yes, from the standpoint of the human race.

No, from the standpoint of the individual.

Progress is the way humanity exists. The broad life of the human race is called Progress; the collective forward step of humanity is called Progress. Progress moves ahead. It carries out the great human journey on earth toward the heavenly and the divine. It has stopping places where it gathers the stragglers back together. It has stations where it pauses to reflect, with some splendid Canaan suddenly revealed on the horizon before it. It has nights when it sleeps. And one of the thinker's deepest anxieties is to see that shadow resting on the human soul and to grope through the darkness, unable to wake that sleeping Progress.

"God is dead, perhaps," Gérard de Nerval once said to the writer of these lines, confusing progress with God and mistaking a pause in movement for the death of Being.

Anyone who despairs is mistaken. Progress always wakes again, and in truth we may say that it keeps moving even while it sleeps, because it has grown. When we see it standing again, we find it taller. Constant peace depends on progress no more than it depends on a river: put up no dams, throw in no rocks. Obstacles make water foam and humanity seethe. That is where upheavals come from. But after those upheavals, we can see that ground has been gained. Until order—which is simply universal peace—has been established, until harmony and unity prevail, progress will have revolutions as its stopping places.

What, then, is progress? We have just said it: the enduring life of peoples.

Now, it sometimes happens that the temporary life of individuals resists the eternal life of the human race.

Let us admit, without bitterness, that each person has interests of their own and can rightly state and defend them without blame. The present has its understandable share of self-concern. Life in the moment has its rights, and it is not obliged to sacrifice itself constantly for the future. The generation now passing across the earth is not required to shorten its own life for the sake of later generations, who are, after all, its equals and will have their turn in time. “I exist,” murmurs that someone whose name is All. “I am young and in love. I am old and I want to rest. I am the father of a family. I work, I prosper, I succeed in business. I have houses to rent. I have money in government funds. I am happy. I have a wife and children. I have all this. I want to live. Leave me in peace.” Hence, at certain moments, a deep chill settles over the generous vanguard of the human race.

We must also admit that Utopia leaves its radiant sphere when it goes to war. It—the truth of tomorrow—borrows its method, battle, from the lie of yesterday. It—the future—acts like the past. It—pure idea—turns into an act of violence. Its heroism becomes entangled with a violence for which it is right to hold it accountable: a violence of circumstance and expediency, opposed to its own principles, and one for which it is inevitably punished. Utopia, in the form of insurrection, fights with the old military code in its hand. It shoots spies. It executes traitors. It destroys living beings and throws them into unknown darkness. It uses death, and that is a grave matter. It is as though Utopia

no longer trusted in radiance, in its irresistible and incorruptible power. It strikes with the sword. But no sword is simple. Every blade has two edges: whoever wounds with one is wounded by the other.

Having made that reservation, and made it with full severity, we still cannot help admiring those glorious fighters of the future, the witnesses of Utopia, whether they succeed or not. Even when they fail, they deserve reverence; and perhaps it is in failure that they possess the greatest majesty. Victory, when it serves progress, deserves the applause of the people; but a heroic defeat deserves their tender compassion. The one is magnificent; the other is sublime. For our part, we prefer martyrdom to success. John Brown is greater than Washington, and Pisacane is greater than Garibaldi.

Someone certainly needs to stand up for the defeated.

We are unfair to these great men who try to shape the future when they fail.

Revolutionaries are accused of spreading fear. Every barricade is treated as a crime. Their ideas are condemned, their purpose is distrusted, their hidden motives are feared, and their conscience is denounced. They are blamed for gathering and piling up, against the existing social order, a mass of misery, grief, injustice, wrongs, and despair, and for dragging up blocks of darkness from the very depths so they can build their defenses and fight from them. People cry out to them, “You are tearing up the pavements of hell!” They might answer, “That is because our barricade is made of good intentions.”

The best course, of course, is a peaceful solution. In short, let us admit that when we see the paving stones, we think of the bear, and that good intentions are what make society uneasy. But society has it in its power to save itself. It is to its own sense of goodwill that we appeal. No violent remedy is needed. Let evil be studied calmly, its existence proved, and then cured. That is what we urge society to do.

Be that as it may, even in defeat—and especially in defeat—these men are noble. Everywhere in the world, with their eyes fixed on France, they labor for the great cause with the unbending logic of the ideal. They freely offer their lives to progress. They carry out the will of Providence. They perform a sacred act. When the appointed hour comes, with the same selflessness as an actor answering his cue, obeying the divine stage-manager, they enter the grave. They accept this hopeless struggle, this stoic vanishing, in order to bring about the highest and most universal results of that 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—and this distinction should be added to those already made in another chapter—there are revolutions that are accepted and openly called revolutions, and there are revolutions that are rejected and called riots.

When an insurrection breaks out, it is really an idea being tested before the people. If the people reject it, the idea is already withered, and the insurrection is nothing more than a brief skirmish.

People are not meant to go to war every time they are called and whenever Utopia demands it. Nations are not always, at every moment, in the mood to be heroes and martyrs.

They are practical. By instinct, insurrection repels them, first because it often ends in disaster, and second because it always begins with an abstraction.

And this is something noble: those who sacrifice themselves do so always for the ideal, and for the ideal alone. An insurrection is a form of exaltation. Exaltation can turn to anger; that is why it takes up arms. But every insurrection aimed at a government or a regime is aiming at something higher as well. Thus, to insist on the point, what the leaders of the insurrection of 1832—and especially the young enthusiasts of the Rue de la Chanvrerie—were fighting was not exactly Louis Philippe. Most of them, when they spoke freely, judged fairly this king who stood between monarchy and revolution; no one hated him. What they attacked in Louis Philippe was the younger branch of divine right, just as they had attacked its elder branch in Charles X. And what they wanted to destroy by overthrowing royalty in France was, as we have explained, the usurpation of man over man, and of privilege over right, throughout the whole world. Paris without a king would lead to a world without despots. That was how they reasoned. Their goal was far off, no doubt, perhaps vague, and it receded as they struggled toward it; but it was great.

That is how it is. We sacrifice ourselves for these visions. For those who are sacrificed, they are almost always illusions, yet all human certainty is mixed up with them. We throw ourselves

into these tragic struggles and become drunk on what we are about to do. Who knows? We may succeed. We are few, and a whole army stands against us. But we are defending what is right: natural law, each person's sovereignty over himself, which cannot be surrendered, justice, and truth. And if necessary, we die like the three hundred Spartans. We are not thinking of Don Quixote, but of Leonidas. So we march straight ahead. Once committed, we do not turn back. We rush forward with our heads bent low, holding fast to the hope of an unprecedented victory, a completed revolution, progress set free once more, the enlargement of the human race, universal deliverance—and, if the worst comes, Thermopylæ.

These battles fought for the sake of progress often end in disaster, and we have just explained why. Crowds grow uneasy when faced with the impulses of champions. Great masses of people, fragile because of their very weight, are afraid of risky ventures; and the ideal always carries some element of risk.

And we must not forget this either: interests that have little sympathy for the ideal or for feeling stand in the way. Sometimes the stomach paralyzes the heart.

The greatness and beauty of France lie in this: she takes less direction from the stomach than other nations. She can tighten her belt more easily. She wakes first and sleeps last. She keeps moving forward. She is always searching.

This comes from the fact that she is an artist.

The ideal is simply the highest point of logic, just as the beautiful is simply 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, of civilization—was first carried by Greece, which passed it to Italy, which then handed it to France. Divine, illuminating nations of scouts! _Vitælampada tradunt_.

It is a wonderful thing when a people's poetry becomes part of its progress. The level of civilization can be measured by the strength of its imagination. But a people that civilizes must also remain strong. Corinth, yes; Sybaris, no. Whoever grows soft and effeminate corrupts himself. A people must be neither a dabbler nor a mere virtuoso; it must be artistic. In civilization, it must not become overrefined; it must become elevated. On that condition, it offers the human race a model of the ideal.

The modern ideal finds its model in art, and its instrument in science. Through science, it will bring to life that noble vision of the poets: social beauty. Eden will be rebuilt by A+B. At the stage civilization has now reached, precision is a necessary part of splendor, and artistic feeling is not only aided but completed by the scientific faculty; dreams must be calculated. Art, which conquers, should be supported by science, which carries it forward; the strength of the creature being ridden matters. The modern spirit is the genius of Greece borne by the genius of India: Alexander on the elephant.

Peoples hardened into dogma or corrupted by greed are not fit to lead civilization. Kneeling before an idol or before money weakens the muscles that walk and the will that moves forward. Being absorbed in religion or commerce reduces a people's power to shine, narrows its horizon by lowering its level, and

robs it of that understanding of the universal goal—at once human and divine—which makes nations into missionaries. Babylon has no ideal; Carthage has no ideal. Athens and Rome do, and through all the dark night of the centuries they keep their halos of civilization.

France belongs to the same great family of peoples as Greece and Italy. In matters of beauty, she is Athenian; in greatness, Roman. More than that, she is generous. She gives herself. More often than other peoples, she is moved by a spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion. But that spirit comes over her and then leaves her again. There lies the great danger for those who rush ahead when she wants only to walk, or who keep walking when she wants to stop. France has her relapses into materialism, and at certain moments the ideas clouding that sublime mind no longer reflect French greatness at all, but shrink to the scale of a Missouri or a South Carolina. What is to be done then? The giantess plays at being a dwarf; vast France has her fits of pettiness. That is all.

There is nothing to add to that. Peoples, like planets, have a right to their eclipses. Everything is well enough, provided the light returns and the eclipse does not turn into night. Dawn and resurrection mean the same thing. The return of light is the same as the persistence of the self.

Let us state these facts calmly. To die on the barricade or lie in a tomb in exile is a worthy occasion for devotion. The true name of devotion is selflessness. Let the abandoned endure abandonment, let the exiled endure exile, and let us limit ourselves to urging great nations not to retreat too far when

they do retreat. One must not descend too far under the pretext of coming back to reason.

Matter exists, the passing moment exists, self-interest exists, the stomach exists; but the stomach must not be our only wisdom. The needs of the moment have their rights, certainly, but lasting life has its rights as well. Alas, being raised up does not prevent a fall. History shows this more often than one would wish: a nation is great, it tastes the ideal, then it stoops to the mire and finds it good; and if asked how it came to abandon Socrates for Falstaff, it answers, “Because I love statesmen.”

One word more before we return to our subject: the conflict.

A battle like the one we are describing is nothing less than a violent struggle toward the ideal. When progress is held back, it grows unhealthy and suffers these tragic convulsions. In the course of this story, we have had to confront that sickness of progress: civil war. It is one of the fatal phases of the drama whose central force is a social condemnation, and whose true title is $_{\text{Progress}}$—both an act and an intermission in it.

Progress!

This cry, which we so often utter, contains our whole thought. And at this point in the drama, since the idea within it still has more trials to endure, perhaps we may not fully lift the veil, but at least let some of its light shine through.

The book now before the reader is, from beginning to end, in its whole design and in its details, whatever its interruptions, exceptions, and faults, the movement from evil to good, from

injustice to justice, from night to day, from appetite to conscience, from decay to life, from hell to heaven, from nothingness to God. Its starting point is matter; its destination is the soul. The hydra stands at the beginning, the angel at the end.

CHAPTER XXI—THE HEROES

Suddenly, the drum sounded the charge.

The attack struck like a hurricane. The evening before, in the dark, the barricade had been approached silently, like a boa. Now, in broad daylight, in that broadening street, surprise was clearly impossible. Open force had revealed itself, the cannon had begun to roar, and the army threw itself at the barricade. Fury had now become method. A powerful detachment of regular infantry, broken at fixed intervals by the National Guard and the Municipal Guard on foot, and backed by dense masses that could be heard though not seen, poured into the street at a run, with drums beating, trumpets blaring, bayonets lowered, and sappers at the front. Unshaken by the hail of projectiles, they charged straight at the barricade with the force of a bronze battering ram striking a wall.

The wall held firm.

The insurgents fired wildly. Once the barricade had been climbed, it blazed with flashes of gunfire. The attack was so fierce that, for a moment, it was swarmed over by assailants; but it threw the soldiers off the way a lion shakes off dogs. It was covered with attackers only as a cliff is covered with foam, only to rise again a moment later, sheer, black, and terrifying.

The column, forced back, stayed packed together in the street, exposed yet still formidable, and answered the redoubt with a devastating volley of musket fire. Anyone who has seen fireworks will remember the spray of crossing streaks of light

called a bouquet. Imagine that bouquet, no longer shooting upward but sideways, with a bullet, buckshot, or a biscaïen at the end of every jet of flame, striking men dead one after another from its blazing clusters. The barricade lay beneath it.

Both sides were equally determined. The courage shown there was almost savage, mixed with a kind of heroic ferocity that began with a willingness to sacrifice oneself.

This was a time when a National Guardsman fought like a Zouave. The troops wanted to finish it; the insurgents wanted to keep fighting. When young men in the full bloom of youth and health accept the agony of death, courage turns into frenzy. In this clash, each man seemed to grow larger in the hour of death. The street was littered with bodies.

Enjolras held one end of the barricade and Marius the other. Enjolras, who had the whole defense mapped out in his mind, kept himself protected and in reserve; three soldiers fell one after another beneath his firing slit without ever seeing him. Marius fought in the open. He made himself a target. He stood with more than half his body above the breastwork. No one is more recklessly extravagant than a miser once he loses control; no one is more terrifying in action than a dreamer. Marius was deadly and absorbed. In battle he seemed to move as if in a dream. One might have taken him for a phantom firing a gun.

The insurgents were running low on cartridges, but not on sarcasm. In that death-filled whirlwind where they stood, they laughed.

Courfeyrac was bareheaded.

“What did you do with your hat?” Bossuet asked him.

Courfeyrac answered:

“At last, they’ve taken it from me with cannonballs.”

Or they made proud, contemptuous remarks.

“Can anyone understand it,” Feuilly cried bitterly, “those men—” and he named names, well-known names, even famous ones, some from the old army—“who promised to join us, who swore to help us, who gave us their word of honor, who are our generals, and who now abandon us!”

And Combeferre only answered with a grave smile.

“Some people follow the rules of honor the way they look at the stars: from very far away.”

The inside of the barricade was so covered with torn cartridges that it looked as though snow had fallen there.

The attackers had strength in numbers; the insurgents had the advantage of position. They stood on top of a wall and fired straight at the soldiers, who stumbled over the dead and wounded and got tangled in the slope below. Built as it was, and solidly reinforced, this barricade was truly one of those places where a handful of men can hold an army at bay. Even so, the attacking column, constantly reinforced and growing larger under the rain of bullets, kept moving closer. Little by little, step by step, but steadily, the army tightened around the barricade like a vise closing on a winepress.

One assault came after another. The horror of the situation kept mounting.

Then, on that heap of paving stones in the Rue de la Chanvrerie, a battle broke out worthy of the walls of Troy. These gaunt, ragged, exhausted men had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours. They had not slept. They had only a few rounds left to fire. They searched in pockets already emptied of cartridges. Nearly all of them were wounded, with heads or arms wrapped in black, bloodstained cloth, with blood seeping through holes in their clothes. They were barely armed, carrying only poor guns and nicked swords. Yet they became Titans. The barricade was attacked ten times—approached, assaulted, climbed—and never taken.

To picture this struggle, you have to imagine a crowd of fierce, fearless men set on fire, and then look into the blaze. It was not a battle so much as the inside of a furnace. Flames seemed to pour from their mouths, and their faces looked unnatural. The human form hardly seemed possible there. The fighters flashed in and out of view, and it was terrifying to watch those salamanders of the battle moving back and forth in the red glow.

We will not even try to describe, scene by scene, the many moments of that great slaughter as they unfolded all at once. Only epic poetry has the right to spend twelve thousand lines on a battle.

One might have taken it for that hell of Brahmanism, the most dreadful of the seventeen abysses, which the Veda calls the

Forest of Swords.

They fought hand to hand and foot to foot, with pistol fire, sword blows, and their bare fists. They fought at a distance and at close quarters, from above and from below, from every direction: from the rooftops, from the windows of the wine-shop, and from the cellar windows, where some had crawled. They were one against sixty.

The front of the Corinthe, half destroyed, was ghastly. The window, pocked by grapeshot, had lost both glass and frame and was now nothing but a misshapen opening, hastily blocked with paving stones.

Bossuet was killed. Feuilly was killed. Courfeyrac was killed. Combeferre, pierced by three bayonet thrusts in the chest just as he was lifting a wounded soldier, had only time to cast one look toward heaven before he died.

Marius kept fighting, but he was so covered with wounds, especially on the head, that his features vanished beneath the blood. His face looked as though it were wrapped in a red kerchief.

Enjolras alone remained untouched. When he had no weapon left, he stretched out his hands to either side, and some insurgent or other shoved a weapon into his grip. In the end, all he had were the broken remains of four swords—one more than François I had at Marignano. 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 heroic deeds, Esplandian attacks the giant marquis Swantibore with a cobbler's shoulder-stick set on fire, and the giant defends himself by hurling towers at the hero, tearing them up by the roots. Our ancient wall frescoes show the two Dukes of Bretagne and Bourbon, armed, emblazoned, and crested for war, mounted on horseback and riding toward each other with battle-axes in hand, iron masks over their faces, iron gloves on their hands, iron boots on their feet—the one trapped in ermine, the other clothed in azure. Bretagne bears his lion between the two points of his crown; Bourbon wears a helmet with a monstrous fleur-de-lis on the visor. But to be magnificent, a man does not need to wear, like Yvon, the ducal morion; or hold, like Esplandian, a living flame in his fist; or, like Phyles, father of Polydamas, bring back from Ephyra a fine suit of mail, a gift from the king of men, Euphetes. It is enough to give one's life for a conviction or for loyalty. Take this simple little soldier, who yesterday was a peasant from Beauce or Limousin and now prowls with his clasp-knife at his side around the children's nurses in the Luxembourg garden. Take this pale young student bent over a dissection or a book, this fair-haired youth who trims his beard with scissors. Breathe duty into both of them. Set them facing each other in the Carrefour Boucherat or the dead-end alley of Planche-Mibray. Let one fight for his flag and

the other for his ideal, and let both believe they are fighting for their country. The struggle will be colossal. And the shadow cast, on that great epic field where humanity is striving, by this raw recruit and this medical student locked in combat will equal the shadow of Megaryon, King of Lycia, filled with tiger-fury, crushing in his embrace the immense body of Ajax, peer of the gods.

CHAPTER XXII—FACE TO FACE

When none of the leaders were left alive except Enjolras and Marius, standing at the two ends of the barricade, the center finally collapsed. For a long time, Courfeyrac, Joly, Bossuet, Feuilly, and Combeferre had held it. The cannon had not opened a usable breach, but it had gouged out a wide hollow in the middle of the redoubt. There, the top of the wall had been blasted away by cannonballs and had crumbled. The fallen debris, piling up both inside and outside, had formed two sloping heaps on either side of the barrier, one within and one without. The outer slope gave the attackers an inclined path upward.

One last assault was launched there, and this time it succeeded. A mass of men bristling with bayonets rushed forward at a run and came on with irresistible force. Through the smoke, the tight battle line of the attacking column appeared along the top of the barricade. This time the outcome was final. The group of insurgents defending the center fell back in confusion.

Then, in some of them, the dark love of life woke again. Many, suddenly facing the muzzles of that forest of guns, did not want to die. In moments like this, the instinct for survival cries out, and the beast in man returns. Behind their redoubt stood the tall six-story house that formed its backdrop. That house might save them. The building had been barricaded and sealed up, as if walled shut from top to bottom. Before the regular troops had entered the inside of the redoubt, there was still time for a door to open and close again; the span of a lightning flash would

have been enough. For these desperate men, that door—opening suddenly a crack and shutting at once—meant life. Behind the house were streets, room to escape, open space. They began pounding on the door with their gunstocks and kicking it, shouting, calling, begging, wringing their hands. No one opened. From the small third-floor window, the head of the dead man looked down at them.

But Enjolras, Marius, and the seven or eight men gathered around them rushed forward to cover their retreat. Enjolras had shouted to the soldiers, “Don’t advance!” When an officer ignored the order, Enjolras killed him. Now he stood in the small inner courtyard of the barricade, his back against the Corinthe building, a sword in one hand and a rifle in the other, holding open the wine-shop door that he was defending against the attackers. He shouted to the desperate men, “There is only one door open—this one.” Then, shielding them with his own body and facing an entire battalion by himself, he let them pass behind him into the shop. They all rushed that way. Using his rifle like a staff, Enjolras swung it around his head in what stick-fighters call a “covered rose,” knocking aside the bayonets around him and in front of him. He was the last to go in. Then came a terrible moment, as the soldiers tried to force their way inside and the insurgents fought to keep them out. The door slammed shut so violently that when it crashed back into its frame, it left behind the five fingers of a soldier who had been clinging to it, severed and stuck to the doorpost.

Marius remained outside. A shot had just shattered his collarbone, and he felt himself growing faint and collapsing. At

that moment, with his eyes already closing, he felt the grip of a powerful hand seize him. The fainting spell that overwhelmed his senses left him barely enough time for one thought, mixed with a final memory of Cosette: “I’ve been taken prisoner. They’re going to shoot me.”

Not seeing Marius among those who had taken shelter in the wine-shop, Enjolras thought the same thing. But they had reached the point when no man has time to dwell even on his own death. Enjolras dropped the bar across the door, shot the bolt, and secured it again with key and chain, while outside the attackers pounded at it furiously—the soldiers with the butts of their muskets, the sappers with their axes. The assailants massed around that entrance. The siege of the wine-shop had begun.

It should be noted that the soldiers were furious.

The artillery sergeant’s death had filled them with rage, and then something even more tragic happened. In the few hours before the attack, word spread among them that the insurgents were mutilating prisoners, and that a soldier’s headless body was lying in the wine shop. This kind of deadly rumor usually comes with civil war, and it was a false rumor like this that later caused the catastrophe in the Rue Transnonain.

Once the door had been barricaded, Enjolras said to the others:

“Let us make them pay dearly for our lives.”

Then he went over to the table where Mabeuf and Gavroche lay. Under the black cloth, two straight, rigid shapes could be seen,

one large and one small, and their two faces were faintly outlined beneath the cold folds of the shroud. One hand stretched out from under the burial sheet and hung down near the floor. It was the old man's.

Enjolras bent down and kissed that venerable hand, just as he had kissed his forehead the night before.

They were the only two kisses he had given in his entire life.

Let us shorten the story. The barricade fought like the gate of Thebes; the wine shop fought like a house in Saragossa. This kind of resistance is relentless. No quarter. No possibility of a truce. The men were ready to die, so long as their enemies were willing to kill them.

When Suchet says, "Surrender," Palafox answers, "After the war of cannon comes the war of knives." Nothing was missing from the storming of the Hucheloup wine-shop: paving stones rained from the windows and roof onto the attackers, crushing soldiers horribly and driving the rest into a rage; shots came from the attic windows and the cellar; the assault was savage; and finally, when the door gave way, there was the wild madness of slaughter. The attackers burst into the wine-shop, stumbling over the shattered door panels that had been smashed in and thrown to the floor, and found not a single fighter there. The spiral staircase, chopped apart with an axe, lay in the middle of the taproom. A few wounded men were drawing their last breaths. Everyone who was still alive was on the first floor, and from there, through the hole in the ceiling where the stairs had been, a terrible fire poured down. These

were their last cartridges. When those were gone, when these fearsome men at the edge of death had no powder or bullets left, each seized two of the bottles Enjolras had set aside, which we mentioned earlier, and used those terribly fragile clubs to hold off the men climbing up. The bottles were filled with aquafortis.

We tell these dark scenes of slaughter as they happened. A man under siege, alas, turns everything into a weapon. Greek fire did not dishonor Archimedes, and boiling pitch did not dishonor Bayard. All war is terrible, and in war there is no real choice. The attackers' gunfire, though cramped and hindered because they had to shoot upward from below, was deadly. Very quickly, the edge of the hole in the ceiling was ringed with the heads of the dead, from which long red, steaming streams dripped down. The noise was beyond description. Thick, burning smoke almost turned this battle into night. Words fail when horror reaches this point. In this struggle, they were no longer men; it had become something infernal. They were no longer giants facing colossi. It belonged more to Milton and Dante than to Homer. Demons attacked; specters resisted.

It was heroism turned monstrous.

CHAPTER XXIII—ORESTES FASTING AND PYLADES DRUNK

At last, by climbing onto each other's backs, using the wreck of the staircase for support, scrambling up the walls, clinging to the ceiling, and fighting at the very edge of the trap-door, the attackers overcame the last defender. About twenty of them—soldiers, National Guardsmen, and municipal guardsmen—burst into the first-floor room in complete confusion. Most of them had been horribly wounded in the face during that terrible climb. Blood blinded them. They were enraged, brutalized, almost savage. Inside, they found only one man still standing: Enjolras. He had no cartridges left and no sword. All he still held was the barrel of his gun; he had smashed the stock over the heads of the men forcing their way in. He had set the billiard table between himself and his attackers and withdrawn into the corner of the room. There, with his head high, his gaze proud, and that broken weapon in his hand, he still looked so formidable that a clear space quickly opened around him. Then a cry went up:

"He's the leader! He's the one who killed the artilleryman. Good—he's put himself there. Let him stay there. Let's shoot him where he stands."

"Shoot me," said Enjolras.

He threw away the piece of gun-barrel, folded his arms, and bared his chest.

The boldness of a noble death always moves men. The moment Enjolras folded his arms and accepted his fate, the noise of battle died in the room, and the chaos suddenly gave way to a kind of grave solemnity. Enjolras, disarmed and motionless, seemed in his threatening majesty to weigh down the whole uproar. This young man—proud, bloodstained, and beautiful—was the only one without a wound. He stood there with the calm indifference of someone who could not be harmed, and the quiet authority of his gaze seemed to force this dark mob to kill him with respect. His beauty, heightened now by his pride, shone brilliantly. After the terrible twenty-four hours that had just passed, he still looked fresh and rosy, as if he were no more capable of weariness than of injury. Perhaps it was of him that a witness later spoke before the court-martial: “There was an insurgent whom I heard called Apollo.” A National Guardsman who had aimed at Enjolras lowered his gun and said, “It feels to me as though I’m about to shoot a flower.”

Twelve men formed a firing squad in the corner opposite Enjolras and silently prepared their guns.

Then a sergeant shouted:

“Ready!”

An officer stepped in.

“Wait.”

Then he turned to Enjolras:

“Do you want your eyes covered?”

“No.”

“Were you the one who killed the artillery sergeant?”

“Yes.”

Grantaire had woken up a few moments earlier.

As you may remember, Grantaire had been asleep since the previous evening in the upstairs room of the wine shop, sitting in a chair with his head resting on the table.

He gave the old phrase “dead drunk” its fullest meaning. The vile mixture of absinthe, porter, and alcohol had sunk him into a stupor. Since his table was small and useless for the barricade, they had left it to him. He was still in the same position, his chest bent over the table, his head flat on his arms, surrounded by glasses, beer mugs, and bottles. He slept with the heavy, sodden sleep of a sluggish bear or an overfed leech. Nothing had disturbed him: not the gunfire, not the cannonballs, not the grapeshot that had come through the window into the room where he lay, not even the terrible roar of the assault. Every now and then he answered the cannonade with a snore. He seemed to be waiting for a bullet that would save him the trouble of waking up. Bodies lay scattered around him, and at first glance there was nothing to set him apart from those deep sleepers of death.

Noise does not wake a drunken man; silence does. As everything collapsed around him, Grantaire only sank deeper into his stupor; the ruin of all things became his lullaby. The

sudden pause in the uproar before Enjolras struck this heavy sleep like a shock. It was like a carriage racing along and then stopping dead. The passengers dozing inside wake at once. Grantaire jerked to his feet, stretched out his arms, rubbed his eyes, stared, yawned, and understood.

As a bout of drunkenness wears off, it is like a curtain being ripped away. In a single instant, you see everything it had hidden, all at once and as a whole. Everything suddenly returns to memory, and the drunkard, who has known nothing of what happened over the last twenty-four hours, has only to open his eyes to understand it all completely. His thoughts come back with sudden clarity; the haze of intoxication, like a kind of vapor clouding the brain, lifts and gives way to the clear, sharp insistence of reality.

Pushed off into a corner and hidden behind the billiard table, Grantaire had gone unnoticed by the soldiers, whose eyes were fixed on Enjolras. The sergeant was about to repeat his order, “Take aim!” when suddenly they heard a powerful voice cry out beside them:

“Long live the Republic! I’m one of them.”

Grantaire had risen. The full blaze of the battle he had missed, and in which he had played no part, shone in the radiant look of the drunken man, now transformed.

He repeated, “Long live the Republic!” then crossed the room with a steady stride and took his place in front of the guns beside Enjolras.

“Kill us both with one shot,” he said.

Then, turning gently to Enjolras, he said:

“Do you allow it?”

Enjolras smiled and pressed his hand.

The smile had not yet faded when the gunshot rang out.

Enjolras, pierced by eight bullets, remained leaning against the wall, as if the shots had nailed him there. Only his head had fallen forward.

Grantaire fell at his feet as if struck by lightning.

A few moments later, the soldiers drove out the last insurgents, who had taken shelter at the top of the house. They fired into the attic through a wooden lattice. They fought right under the roof. They hurled bodies out the windows, some of them still alive. Two light infantry soldiers tried to lift the shattered omnibus and were killed by two shots from the attic. A man in a blouse was thrown down from above with a bayonet wound in his abdomen, and he died on the ground. A soldier and an insurgent slipped together on the sloping roof tiles, and because neither would let go of the other, they fell locked in a savage embrace. The same kind of struggle was going on in the cellar. Shouts, gunfire, furious trampling. Then silence. The barricade had been taken.

The soldiers began searching the surrounding houses and chasing the fugitives.

CHAPTER XXIV—PRISONER

Marius was, in fact, a prisoner.

The hand that had seized him from behind—the grip he had felt as he fell and lost consciousness—was Jean Valjean's.

Jean Valjean took no part in the fighting except to place himself in the midst of it. If not for him, in that final extremity of suffering, no one would have thought of the wounded. Thanks to him, always present in the slaughter like a providential force, the fallen were picked up, carried to the taproom, and tended. In the pauses, he appeared again on the barricade. But his hands did nothing that looked like striking, attacking, or even defending himself. He said nothing and gave help. Besides, he had received only a few scratches. The bullets seemed to spare him. If suicide had been part of what he intended when he came to this sepulchral place, this spot, he had not succeeded. But we doubt that he had thought of suicide, an irreligious act.

In the thick smoke and confusion of the battle, Jean Valjean seemed not to notice Marius; in truth, he never took his eyes off him. When a shot brought Marius down, Jean Valjean sprang forward with the agility of a tiger, threw himself on him as if on prey, and carried him away.

At that moment, the force of the attack was so fiercely focused on Enjolras and on the wine-shop door that no one noticed Jean Valjean carrying the unconscious Marius in his arms, crossing the rough open ground inside the barricade, and vanishing behind the corner of the Corinthe building.

The reader will remember that corner, which jutted into the street like a kind of cape. It offered shelter from bullets, grapeshot, and prying eyes, and provided a few square feet of space. Sometimes, in the middle of a fire, one room remains untouched. Sometimes, in stormy seas, beyond a headland or at the end of a blind alley of reefs, there is a quiet refuge. It was in just such a hidden fold within the inner trapezium of the barricade that Éponine had drawn her last breath.

There Jean Valjean stopped, lowered Marius gently to the ground, leaned his back against the wall, and looked around.

The situation was dire.

For a moment—perhaps two or three—this patch of wall gave him shelter. But how was he to escape this slaughter? He remembered the terror he had felt in the Rue Polonceau eight years earlier, and how he had managed to get away then. It had been difficult then; now it was impossible. In front of him stood that mute, pitiless house, six stories high, seemingly inhabited by no one but a dead man leaning from a window. On his right was the fairly low barricade blocking the Rue de la Petite Truanderie. Crossing it might have seemed easy, but beyond its crest he could see a line of bayonets. Regular troops were stationed there, waiting behind the barricade. It was obvious that to climb over it was to walk straight into a volley, and that any head daring to rise above that wall of stones would become a target for sixty guns. On his left lay the battlefield. Death waited just around the corner of the wall.

What could he do?

Only a bird could have escaped from such a trap.

He had to decide at once, to find some way out, to make a choice. Fighting was happening only a few steps away. Luckily, everyone was focused on one spot: the door of the wine-shop. But if even one soldier happened to come around the corner of the house, or attack him from the side, everything would be lost.

Jean Valjean looked at the house in front of him, then at the barricade beside him, and then down at the ground, desperate and bewildered, as if he wanted to bore a hole through it with his eyes.

As he kept staring, something dimly suggestive in the midst of his anguish began to take shape at his feet, as though the force of his gaze were making the thing he needed reveal itself. A few steps away, at the base of the small barrier so mercilessly guarded and watched from the outside, beneath a jumbled heap of paving stones that partly hid it, he saw an iron grating lying flat with the ground. The grating, made of thick crossbars, was about two feet square. The ring of paving stones that held it in place had been torn up, so it was, in a sense, already loosened.

Through the bars he could see a dark opening, like the flue of a chimney or the pipe of a cistern. Jean Valjean sprang forward. His old skill at escaping flashed back into his mind like a sudden light. He shoved aside the stones, lifted the grating, hoisted Marius—limp as a corpse—onto his shoulders, and climbed down into that well-like opening, using his elbows and knees, burdened by the weight on his back. Fortunately, it was not very deep. Then he let the heavy trap fall back into place behind him,

while the loosened stones rolled down over it again, and found his footing on a paved surface three metres below ground. He did all this as one does things in a dream, with a giant's strength and an eagle's speed. It took only a few minutes.

Jean Valjean found himself, with Marius still unconscious, in a kind of long underground passage.

There was deep peace, complete silence, and darkness.

The feeling he had once had when he fell from the wall into the convent came back to him. But today he was not carrying Cosette; he was carrying Marius. He could hardly hear the terrible uproar in the wine-shop as it was being stormed, only a faint murmur above him.

CHAPTER I—THE LAND MADE POOR BY THE SEA

Paris throws twenty-five million francs into the water every year. This is no metaphor. How does it do it? Day and night. For what purpose? None. With what intention? None. Why? For no reason. Through what organ? Through its intestine. And what is its intestine? The sewer.

Twenty-five million is the most conservative estimate that scientific experts have placed on it.

After a long period of uncertainty, science now knows that the richest and most effective fertilizer is human waste. The Chinese, we must admit to our shame, knew this before we did. As Eckberg says, not a Chinese peasant goes into town without bringing back, hanging from the two ends of a bamboo pole, two full buckets of what we call filth. Thanks to human manure, the soil in China is still as fresh as it was in Abraham's time. Chinese wheat returns a hundred times the seed sown. No guano is as fertile as the refuse of a great city. A large city is an immense producer of manure. If the city were used to fertilize the plain, the result would certainly be successful. If our gold is manure, then our manure, in turn, is gold.

And what is done with this golden manure? It is swept into the abyss.

Ships are sent out at great cost to gather the droppings of petrels and penguins at the South Pole, while the immeasurable wealth we already have at hand, we pour into the sea. If all the

human and animal manure the world wastes were returned to the land instead of thrown into the water, it would be enough to feed the world.

Those piles of filth by the gateposts, those carts of mud rattling through the streets at night, those dreadful barrels from the street department, those foul runoffs of underground mire hidden beneath the pavement—do you know what they are? They are flowering meadows, green grass, wild thyme, thyme and sage. They are game and livestock. They are the contented lowing of great oxen at evening. They are fragrant hay, golden wheat, the bread on your table, the warm blood in your veins. They are health, joy, life. Such is the law of that mysterious creation in which all things are transformed on earth and transfigured in heaven.

Return all this to the great crucible, and abundance will come from it. What feeds the plains also feeds mankind.

You have the power to throw away this wealth—and then laugh at me as well. That would be the crowning achievement of your ignorance.

Statisticians have calculated that France alone pours half a milliard into the Atlantic every year through the mouths of its rivers. Consider this: with five hundred million, we could pay a quarter of our national budget. Yet human ingenuity is such that we prefer to dump those five hundred million into the gutter. The very substance of the people is being carried away—here drop by drop, there wave by wave—as our sewers empty miserably into the rivers, and our rivers in vast volume empty

into the sea. Every belch of our sewers costs us a thousand francs. Two results follow: the land is impoverished, and the water is polluted. Hunger rises from the furrow, and disease from the stream.

It is well known, for example, that at this very moment the Thames is poisoning London.

As for Paris, it has lately become necessary to move the sewer outlets farther downstream, beyond the last bridge.

A two-pipe system, fitted with valves and sluices to draw water in and send it back out—a basic drainage system, as simple as human lungs, and already fully operating in many communities in England—would be enough to bring clean water from the fields into our cities and return the nutrient-rich water of the cities to the fields. This easy exchange, the simplest thing in the world, would keep among us the five hundred million now being wasted. But people are occupied with other matters.

The method now in use does harm while meaning to do good. The intention is good; the result is dismal. In trying to cleanse the city, we leave the population pale like plants grown in a cellar. A sewer is a mistake. When drainage everywhere, with its double purpose of giving back what it takes, replaces the sewer—which merely washes wealth away and leaves poverty behind—then, combined with the principles of a true social economy, the earth’s yield will increase tenfold, and the problem of misery will be greatly eased. End parasitism as well, and it will be solved.

Meanwhile, public wealth is flowing off into the river, and the loss continues. Loss is the right word. Europe is being ruined this way, by exhaustion.

As for France, we have just given the figures. Paris contains one twenty-fifth of the total population of France, and since Parisian guano is the richest of all, we are actually understating the case when we estimate Paris's share of the annual loss at twenty-five million out of the half-billion that France throws away each year. Those twenty-five million, used for relief and pleasure, would double the splendor of Paris. Instead, the city pours them into its sewers. So we may say that Paris's great extravagance, its marvelous festival, its Beaujon folly, its orgy, its stream of gold from open hands, its pomp, its luxury, its magnificence—is its sewer system.

This is how, through the blindness of a misguided political economy, we drown the well-being of all and let it float downstream, lost in the depths. There ought to be nets at Saint-Cloud to catch the public fortune.

From an economic point of view, the matter can be put simply: Paris is wasteful. Paris—that model city, that patron of well-ordered capitals which every nation tries to copy, that metropolis of the ideal, that august land of initiative, impulse, and effort, that center and home of minds, that city-nation, that hive of the future, that marvelous blend of Babylon and Corinth—would make even a peasant from Fo-Kian shrug his shoulders, from the point of view we have just described.

Copy Paris, and you will ruin yourselves.

What is more, especially in this ancient and senseless form of waste, Paris is itself only copying others.

These astonishing displays of stupidity are nothing new; this is not some recent folly. The ancients did the same as the moderns. “The sewers of Rome,” says Liebig, “have absorbed all the well-being of the Roman peasant.” When the Roman sewer ruined the Campagna of Rome, Rome drained Italy; and when it had emptied Italy into its sewer, it drew in Sicily, then Sardinia, then Africa. The sewer of Rome swallowed the world. This cesspool offered its devouring mouth to the city and to the universe: _Urbi et orbi_. Eternal city, bottomless sewer.

Rome sets the example in this, as in so many other things.

Paris follows that example with all the foolishness that seems peculiar to intelligent cities.

To serve the needs of the system we have just described, Paris has another Paris beneath it: a Paris of sewers, with its streets, crossroads, squares, dead ends, arteries, and circulation—made of filth, and without the human form.

Nothing should be flattered, not even a great people; where everything exists, disgrace stands beside greatness. And if Paris contains Athens, the city of light; Tyre, the city of power; Sparta, the city of virtue; and Nineveh, the city of wonders, it also contains Lutetia, the city of mud.

Yet the mark of its power is there as well, and the gigantic sewer of Paris achieves among monuments that strange ideal which certain men—like Macchiavelli, Bacon, and

Mirabeau—have embodied in humanity: magnificent vileness.

If you could see beneath the surface of Paris, the ground below would look like a gigantic coral formation. In the six-league stretch of earth around the great old city, there are as many divisions and channels as in a sponge. And that is without counting the catacombs, which are a separate underground realm; without counting the tangled web of gas pipes; and without counting the vast system of water pipes that feeds the fountain columns. The sewers alone make up an enormous, shadowy network beneath both banks of the river—a labyrinth whose downward slope serves as its guiding thread.

Out of the damp mist appears the rat, as though it were the creature Paris itself had bred.

CHAPTER II—EARLY HISTORY OF THE SEWER

Imagine Paris lifted away like a lid. Seen from above, the underground sewer system would trace, along the riverbanks, something like a great branch grafted onto the river. On the right bank, the main encircling sewer would form the trunk; the smaller channels would form the branches; and the dead ends would be the twigs.

This image is only a rough summary, and only partly accurate, since the right angle—the usual angle in this kind of underground branching—is very rare in plant life.

A more exact picture of this strange geometric design would be to imagine some bizarre Eastern alphabet, as tangled as a thicket, spread across a background of shadow, with its misshapen letters fused together in seeming confusion, almost at random, sometimes by their corners and sometimes by their ends.

Drains and sewers played a major role in the Middle Ages, in the later Roman Empire, and in the ancient East. People looked on these channels of decay, these monstrous breeding grounds of death, with a fear that was almost religious. The vermin-filled ditch of Benares inspired no less dread than the lions' ditch of Babylon. According to the rabbinical books, Teglath-Phalasar swore by the sink of Nineveh. It was from the sewer of Münster that John of Leyden brought forth his false moon, and it was from the cesspool of Kekscheb that the Eastern wonder-worker

Mokanna, the veiled prophet of Khorassan, made his false sun rise.

The history of humanity is mirrored in the history of sewers. The Cloaca Maxima told the story of Rome. The sewer of Paris has long been something ancient and terrifying. It has been a tomb, and it has also been a refuge. Crime, intelligence, social revolt, freedom of conscience, thought, theft—everything that human laws persecute or once persecuted—has hidden in that hole: the _maillotins_ in the fourteenth century, the _tire-laine_ in the fifteenth, the Huguenots in the sixteenth, Morin's _illuminated_ in the seventeenth, the _chauffeurs_ [brigands] in the eighteenth. A hundred years ago, the dagger's blow in the night came out of it, and the pickpocket in danger slipped into it. The forest had its cave; Paris had its sewer. Vagrancy, that Gallic _picareria_, took the sewer as an extension of the Cour des Miracles, and in the evening it returned there, fierce and cunning, through the Maubuée outlet, as if going back to a bedroom.

It was only natural that people whose daily workplace was the blind alley of Vide-Gousset [Empty-Pocket] or the Rue Coupe-Gorge [Cut-Throat] should make their home at night in the culvert of the Chemin-Vert or the catch basin of Hurepoix. That is why the place is crowded with memories. All kinds of phantoms haunt those long, lonely corridors. Everywhere there is rot and foul air. Here and there are air holes where Villon below speaks with Rabelais above.

In old Paris, the sewer was the meeting place of every kind of waste and every kind of scheme. Political economy sees detritus there; social philosophy sees what is left over.

The sewer is the city's conscience. Everything ends up there, and everything collides there. In that pale, ghastly place, there are shadows, but there are no secrets anymore. Everything shows its real shape, or at least its final one. Filth has this one virtue: it does not lie. Candor has taken refuge there. The mask of Basil is there, but you can see the cardboard, the strings, the inside as well as the outside, all made even clearer by the honest mud. Scapin's false nose lies beside it. All the uncleanness of civilization, once it has served its purpose, drops into this trench of truth, where the great social slide comes to an end. Things are swallowed up there, but they also reveal themselves. This mixture is a confession. There are no more false appearances there, no covering anything up. Filth strips itself bare. Total nakedness drives off every illusion and mirage. Nothing remains except what truly exists, taking on the grim shape of something that is finished and dying. There, the bottom of a bottle points to drunkenness, and a basket handle tells of domestic life. There, the core of an apple that once entertained literary opinions becomes simply an apple core again. The image on the big sou openly turns green with verdigris. Caiaphas's spittle meets Falstaff's vomit. A louis-d'or from the gambling house knocks against the nail that once held the suicide's rope. A pale fetus rolls along wrapped in the sequins that danced at the Opera last Shrove Tuesday. A cap that once passed judgment on men wallows beside a heap of decay that used to be Margoton's petticoat. It is more than

fraternizing; it is the same as calling each other thou. Everything that was once rouged is washed clean of it. The last veil is torn away. A sewer is a cynic. It tells all.

There is something pleasing, and restful to the soul, in the honesty of filth. After spending one's time on earth enduring the spectacle of all the grand airs put on by reasons of state, by oaths, by political wisdom, by human justice, by professional integrity, by the solemn demands of position, by supposedly incorruptible robes, it is a relief to enter a sewer and see the mud that truly suits them.

This is instructive too. We have just said that history passes through the sewer. The Saint Bartholomew's massacres seep through it, drop by drop, between the paving stones. Great public murders, political and religious slaughters, pass through this underground channel of civilization and dump their corpses there. To a thinking eye, all the murderers of history are there, in that dreadful half-light, on their knees, wearing a scrap of their shroud like an apron, grimly scrubbing away at what they have done. 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, scraping at the stones and trying to erase the traces of their actions. Beneath those vaults, one hears the brooms of ghosts. One breathes in the vast stench of social catastrophes. In the corners, one sees reddish gleams. A terrible stream runs there, where bloody hands have been washed.

The observer of society should enter these shadows. They are part of his laboratory. Philosophy is the microscope of thought. Everything wants to escape it, but nothing does. Evasion is useless. What part of oneself appears in attempts to dodge it? The shameful part. Philosophy follows with its gaze, probes evil, and does not allow it to vanish into nothingness. In the erasure of things that disappear, in watching things fade away, it recognizes everything. It rebuilds the purple robe from a rag, and the woman from a scrap of her dress. From the cesspool, it reconstructs the city; from mud, it reconstructs manners; from a potsherd, it infers the amphora or the jug. From the mark of a fingernail on a piece of parchment, it recognizes the difference between the Jewry of the Judengasse and the Jewry of the Ghetto. In what remains, it rediscovers what once was: good, evil, truth, the bloodstain of the palace, the ink blot of the cavern, the drop of sweat from the brothel, sufferings endured, temptations embraced, orgies cast off, the direction characters took as they sank lower, the trace of prostitution in souls made capable of it by their coarseness, and on the clothing of the porters of Rome, the mark left by Messalina’s elbow.

CHAPTER III—BRUNESEAU

Paris's sewer system in the Middle Ages was notorious. In the sixteenth century, Henri II tried to drill a passage, but the effort failed. Less than a hundred years ago, Mercier says, the cesspit was simply left to itself and managed as best it could.

That was old Paris: given over to quarrels, hesitation, and blind fumbling. For a long time, it was fairly foolish. Later, 1789 showed how cities can come to understand. But in those so-called good old days, the capital had little sense. It did not know how to govern its own affairs, either morally or materially, and it could no more clear away filth than it could get rid of abuses. Everything became an obstacle; everything turned into a problem. The sewer, for example, resisted every attempt at mapping it. You could no more find your way in the sewer than understand your place in the city. Above was the unintelligible; below, the inextricable. Beneath the confusion of tongues ruled the confusion of caverns. Daedalus stood behind Babel.

Sometimes the Paris sewer seemed to decide to overflow, as if this misunderstood Nile had suddenly flown into a rage. Shameful as it is to say, the sewer did flood. At times, that stomach of civilization digested badly. The cesspit rose back into the city's throat, and Paris got a taste of its own filth. These moments, when the sewer resembled remorse, had their value: they were warnings. But they were badly received. The city grew indignant at the insolence of its own mire and refused to accept that filth would return unless it was driven out more effectively.

The flood of 1802 is still remembered by Parisians who have reached the age of eighty. Mud spread in a cross shape across the Place des Victoires, where the statue of Louis XIV stands. It entered the Rue Saint-Honoré through the two sewer openings in the Champs-Élysées; the Rue Saint-Florentin through the Saint-Florentin sewer; the Rue Pierre-à-Poisson through the Sonnerie sewer; the Rue Popincourt through the Chemin-Vert sewer; and the Rue de la Roquette through the sewer of the Rue de Lappe. It covered the drain in the Rue des Champs-Élysées to a height of thirty-five centimetres. To the south, through the Seine outlet, which was now working in reverse, it pushed into the Rue Mazarine, the Rue de l'Échaudé, and the Rue des Marais, where it stopped one hundred and nine metres in, only a few steps from the house where Racine had lived—as though, in the seventeenth century, it showed more respect for the poet than for the King. It reached its greatest depth in the Rue Saint-Pierre, where it rose three feet above the paving stones at the water-spout, and its greatest extent in the Rue Saint-Sabin, where it spread for two hundred and thirty-eight metres.

At the start of this century, the sewers of Paris were still a mystery. Mud never has a good reputation, but here its bad name had become something truly frightening. Paris had a vague sense that a terrible cavern lay beneath it. People spoke of it the way they spoke of that monstrous bed of Thebes, crawling with centipedes fifteen feet long and fit to serve as Behemoth's bathtub. Even the sewer workers, in their heavy boots, never went beyond a few familiar points. This was still close to the time when the scavengers' carts—those on whose heights Sainte-Foix rubbed shoulders with the Marquis de

Créqui—dumped their loads straight into the sewer. And as for cleaning it out, that task was left to heavy rains, which clogged it more than they washed it away. Rome gave its sewer a touch of poetry and called it the Gemoniæ; Paris treated its own with contempt and named it the Polypus-Hole. Science and superstition agreed in their horror. The Polypus-Hole was as offensive to public health as it was to legend. The goblin was said to grow beneath the foul covering of the Mouffetard sewer. The bodies of the Marmousets had been thrown into the sewer of the Barillerie. Fagon blamed the terrible malignant fever of 1685 on the great opening of the Marais sewer, which gaped there until 1833 in the Rue Saint-Louis, almost opposite the sign of the _Gallant Messenger_. The mouth of the sewer in the Rue de la Mortellerie was notorious for the pestilences said to rise from it. With its iron grating, its spikes like a row of teeth, it looked like a dragon's jaws in that deadly street, breathing hell onto men. Popular imagination filled this dark Parisian underworld with some unspeakably hideous trace of the infinite. The sewer had no bottom. The sewer was the underworld. The police never even thought of exploring those diseased regions. Who would have dared test that unknown thing, drop a sounding line into that darkness, set out on a voyage of discovery into that abyss? It was terrifying. And yet someone did step forward. Even the cesspool had its Christopher Columbus.

One day in 1805, during one of the Emperor's rare appearances in Paris, the Minister of the Interior—Decrès, or Crétet, or someone of that sort—came to the master's private morning audience. In the Carrousel, you could hear the clatter of swords from all those remarkable soldiers of the great Republic and the

great Empire. Napoleon's door was crowded with heroes: men from the Rhine, the Escaut, the Adige, and the Nile; comrades of Joubert, Desaix, Marceau, Hoche, and Kléber; the balloon troops of Fleurus, the grenadiers of Mayence, the pontoon builders of Genoa, hussars who had fought under the gaze of the Pyramids, artillerymen splashed with mud by Junot's cannon fire, cuirassiers who had stormed the fleet anchored in the Zuyderzee. Some had followed Bonaparte onto the bridge of Lodi. Others had gone with Murat into the trenches at Mantua. Others had advanced ahead of Lannes on the sunken road at Montebello. The whole army of that time was there in the courtyard of the Tuileries, represented by a squadron or a platoon and standing guard while Napoleon rested. It was that brilliant moment when the grand army had Marengo behind it and Austerlitz ahead of it. "Sire," the Minister of the Interior said to Napoleon, "yesterday I saw the bravest man in your Empire." "What man?" the Emperor asked sharply. "And what has he done?" "He wants to do something, Sire." "What?" "He wants to visit the sewers of Paris."

This man was real, and his name was Bruneseau.

CHAPTER IV

The visit went ahead. It was a grueling operation: a nighttime struggle against disease and suffocation. At the same time, it was a journey of discovery. One of the survivors of this expedition, an intelligent laborer who had been very young at the time, described some striking details several years later. Bruneseau felt obliged to leave them out of his report to the prefect of police because they did not suit official style. At that time, disinfection methods were still extremely crude. Barely had Bruneseau entered the first sections of that underground network when eight of the twenty workers refused to go any farther. The operation was complicated. The inspection also required cleaning, so they had to move forward and clean at the same time. They had to record where the water entered, count the gratings and vents, map the branches in detail, mark the currents where they split, define the limits of the different basins, probe the small sewers attached to the main sewer, and measure the height to the keystone of each drain, as well as the width both at the spring of the vaults and at the bottom. All this was necessary in order to determine the arrangement of each water inlet, whether at the base of the arch or in the street soil above. They moved on with difficulty. The lanterns burned low in the foul air. From time to time, a sewer worker who had fainted had to be carried out. In certain places there were sheer drops. The ground had collapsed, the paving had broken apart, and the sewer had turned into a bottomless pit. They found no solid footing. A man would suddenly vanish, and they had great trouble pulling him back out. On Fourcroy’s advice, they

periodically lit large cages filled with tow soaked in resin in places that had been sufficiently disinfected. In some areas, the walls were covered with deformed fungi—like tumors. In that airless atmosphere, even the stone itself seemed diseased.

As Bruneseau continued his exploration, he moved downhill. At the point where the two channels of the Grand-Hurleur split, he made out the date 1550 on a jutting stone. That stone marked the farthest point reached by Philibert Delorme, whom Henri II had charged with inspecting the underground drains of Paris. It was the sixteenth century's mark on the sewer. Bruneseau later found seventeenth-century work again in the Ponceau drain of the old Rue Vieille-du-Temple, which had been vaulted between 1600 and 1650, and eighteenth-century work in the western section of the main collecting canal, which was lined and vaulted in 1740. Those two vaults, especially the newer one from 1740, were more cracked and worn out than the masonry of the belt sewer, which dated from 1412. That was the time when the fresh-water stream of Ménilmontant was raised to the rank of the Great Sewer of Paris—much like a peasant becoming first valet de chambre to the King, something like Gros-Jean turned into Lebel.

Here and there, especially beneath the Court-House, they thought they could identify the cavities of ancient dungeons cut directly into the sewer itself. Horrible in-pace cells. In one of them, an iron collar for the neck still hung on the wall. They sealed them all up. Some of what they found was strange. Among other things, there was the skeleton of an ourang-outan that had disappeared from the Jardin des Plantes in 1800—a

disappearance probably connected with the famous and unquestioned appearance 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.

Under this long vaulted drain, which ended at the Arche-Marion, a rag-picker's basket in perfect condition drew the admiration of every expert. Everywhere, in the mud that the sewer workers handled so fearlessly, valuable objects turned up: gold and silver jewelry, precious stones, coins. If a giant had strained this cesspool, he would have found the wealth of centuries in his den. At the point where the two branches leading toward the Rue du Temple and the Rue Sainte-Avoye divide, they picked up a curious Huguenot copper medal. On one side it showed a pig wearing a cardinal's hat, and on the other a wolf with a tiara on its head.

The most startling discovery came at the entrance to the Grand Sewer. The opening had once been sealed by an iron grating, but only the hinges were left. From one of them hung a filthy, shapeless scrap of cloth. It had likely been caught there as it drifted past in the darkness and had slowly torn itself to pieces. Bruneseau raised his lantern and looked at it closely. The fabric was very fine batiste, and in one corner, which was less frayed than the rest, they could make out a heraldic coronet embroidered above seven letters: LAVBESP. The coronet was that of a Marquis, and the letters stood for _Laubespine_. They realized that what lay before them was a fragment of Marat's shroud. In his youth, Marat had been involved in love affairs. This was during the time when he belonged to the household of

the Comte d'Artois as physician to the stables. From one of these historically attested affairs with a great lady, he had kept this sheet, whether as something cast off or as a keepsake. When he died, it was the only fine linen in his house, so they buried him in it. Some old women had wrapped him for the grave in that same cloth in which the tragic Friend of the People had once known pleasure. Bruneseau moved on. They left the rag hanging where it was; they did not finish tearing it away. Was that out of contempt or out of respect? Marat deserved both. Besides, fate had marked the thing so strongly that they hesitated to touch it. And in any case, things that belong to the tomb should be left where they come to rest. The relic, in short, was a strange one. A Marquise had slept in it. Marat had decayed in it. It had passed through the Pantheon only to end up among the sewer rats. This bedroom cloth, whose every fold Watteau would once have gladly sketched, had finally become something fit for the fixed gaze of Dante.

The entire exploration of Paris's underground river of filth lasted seven years, from 1805 to 1812. As he went on, Bruneseau planned, directed, and completed major works. In 1808, he lowered the arch of the Ponceau. In 1809, creating new routes throughout the system, he extended the sewer beneath the Rue Saint-Denis as far as the Fountain of the Innocents. In 1810, he carried it under the Rue Froidmanteau and the Salpêtrière. In 1811, he extended it beneath the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Pères, the Rue du Mail, the Rue de l'Écharpe, and the Place Royale. In 1812, he pushed it under the Rue de la Paix and the Chaussée d'Antin. At the same time, he had the entire network disinfected and made sanitary. In the second year of his work, Bruneseau

brought in the help of his son-in-law, Nargaud.

That was how, at the beginning of the century, old society cleaned out its hidden underside and attended to the grooming of its sewer. At least it was clean to that extent.

Seen in retrospect, the old Paris sewer was twisting, cracked, and unpaved. It was full of splits, crossed by channels, jerked about by abrupt bends, rising and falling without reason, foul, savage, threatening, and buried in darkness, with wounds in its paving and scars on its walls. It was terrifying. Branches ran in every direction. There were crossings, trench-like cuts, offshoots, goose-foot patterns, and star-shaped junctions, like military mines; dead ends, blind passages, vaults crusted with saltpeter, poisonous pools, clammy stains on the walls, drops falling from the ceilings, and darkness everywhere. Nothing could match the horror of that ancient sewer-crypt, that refuse-filled underworld, the digestive system of Babylon: a cavern, a ditch, an abyss tunneled through with streets, a gigantic mole’s burrow, where the imagination seems to see that enormous blind mole—the past—moving through the shadows, through the filth that was once splendor.

This, we repeat, was the sewer of earlier times.

CHAPTER V—PRESENT PROGRESS

Today the sewer is clean, cold, straight, and orderly. It comes close to the English ideal of what is called “respectable.” It is proper and gray, laid out by rule and measure, almost as if it had come fresh from a bandbox. It is like a shopkeeper who has risen to become a councillor of state. You can almost see clearly in it. Even the mud behaves with decency there. At first glance, one might easily mistake it for one of those underground passageways that were so common in earlier times, and so useful when monarchs and princes had to flee, in those good old days “when the people loved their kings.” The modern sewer is a handsome sewer. Pure style rules there. The classical, straight-lined alexandrine, driven out of poetry, seems to have taken refuge in architecture and to be mixed into every stone of that long, dark, whitish vault. Every outlet is an arcade. Even in the sewer, the Rue de Rivoli serves as the model. Still, if the geometric line belongs anywhere, it is surely in the drainage trench of a great city. There, everything should give way to the shortest route. Nowadays the sewer has taken on an official air. Even police reports, when they mention it, no longer fail to treat it with respect. The terms used for it in administrative language are sonorous and dignified. What used to be called a gutter is now called a gallery. What used to be called a hole is now called a surveying orifice. Villon would no longer find there his old temporary lodging. This network of cellars still has its ancient population of prowlers and rodents, swarming in greater

numbers than ever. From time to time, an old veteran rat ventures to put his head out at the sewer opening and look over the Parisians. But even these vermin have grown tame, so content are they with their underground palace. The cesspool has lost all trace of its original savagery. Rain, which once dirtied the sewer, now cleans it. Even so, do not trust it too much. Miasmas still live there. It is less blameless than it pretends, and more hypocritical than pure. The prefecture of police and the commission of health have done everything they could. But in spite of every method of disinfection, it still gives off a faint, suspicious odor, like Tartuffe after confession.

Let us admit that, taken as a whole, this cleansing is a kind of tribute the sewer pays to civilization. From that point of view, Tartuffe's conscience marks an advance over the Augean stables, and there is no doubt that the sewers of Paris have improved.

It is more than progress; it is a transformation. Between the old sewer and the modern one, there has been a revolution. What brought about that revolution?

The man whom everyone forgets, and whom we have already mentioned: Bruneseau.

CHAPTER VI—FUTURE PROGRESS

Excavating the Paris sewers has been no small undertaking. The last ten centuries have labored over it without managing to complete it, just as they have never managed to finish Paris itself. In fact, the sewer system feels every aftershock of the city's growth. Beneath the earth, it is like a mysterious polyp with a thousand feelers, spreading below as the city spreads above. Every time the city cuts a new street, the sewer reaches out another arm. The old monarchy had built only twenty-three thousand three hundred meters of sewers; that was the state of Paris in this respect on the first of January, 1806. From that point on, which we shall soon discuss, the work was resumed with energy and carried forward effectively. Napoleon built—these figures are striking—four thousand eight hundred and four meters; 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. Altogether, at the present time, there are two hundred and twenty-six thousand six hundred and ten meters: sixty leagues of sewers, the vast entrails of Paris. A hidden network, always at work; a construction both immense and unnoticed.

As the reader can see, the underground labyrinth of Paris is now more than ten times larger than it was at the beginning of the century. It is hard to imagine the persistence and labor required

to bring this cesspool to its present state of relative perfection. The old monarchical provostship, and later the revolutionary mayoralty during the last ten years of the eighteenth century, had struggled just to cut the five leagues of sewer that existed before 1806. Every kind of obstacle stood in the way. Some came from the nature of the ground itself; others from the prejudices of the hard-working people of Paris. Paris stands on soil that resists the pick, the hoe, the drill, and human effort of every kind. Few things are harder to break through than the geological foundation on which the marvelous historical creation called Paris has been built. The moment work begins in this stretch of alluvium, underground resistance appears everywhere. There are liquid clays, springs, hard rock, and those soft, deep bogs that specialists call _moutardes_. The pick moves forward only with difficulty through layers of limestone alternating with thin veins of clay, and through schist-like beds crusted with oyster shells, relics of oceans older than Adam. Sometimes a stream suddenly bursts through a half-finished vault and floods the workers. At other times a layer of marl is exposed and comes crashing down like a cataract, snapping the strongest support beams as if they were glass. Quite recently, at Villette, it became necessary to carry the collecting sewer beneath the Saint-Martin canal without stopping navigation or draining the canal. A crack opened in the canal basin. Water suddenly poured into the underground tunnel in quantities beyond the power of the pumps. A diver had to be sent down to inspect the fissure that had opened at the narrow entrance to the great basin, and it was only with great difficulty that it was sealed. Elsewhere, near the Seine, and even far from the river,

as at Belleville, Grand-Rue, and Passage Lumière, workers encounter quicksand in which they become trapped and in which a man can be seen sinking before your eyes. Add the danger of suffocation from foul vapors, burial under cave-ins, and sudden collapses of earth. Add typhus, which slowly infects the workers. In our own time, after excavating the gallery of Clichy, with a banquette to carry the main water conduit of Ourcq—a project carried out in a trench ten metres deep; after vaulting the Bièvre from the Boulevard de l'Hôpital to the Seine amid landslides, using excavations that were often putrid and constant shoring; after, to save Paris from the floods of Montmartre and to drain that lake-like pool of nine hectares lying near the Barrière des Martyrs, constructing 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, in a feat never before seen, building an underground sewer in the Rue Barre-du-Bec without a trench, six metres below the surface—the superintendent, Monnot, died. After vaulting three thousand metres of sewer in every part of the city, from the Rue Traversière-Saint-Antoine to the Rue de l'Ourcine; after freeing the Carrefour Censier-Mouffetard from rain floods by means of the branch of the Arbalète; after building the Saint-Georges sewer on rock and concrete in shifting sands; after directing the formidable lowering of the timbered vault floor in the Notre-Dame-de-Nazareth branch, the engineer Duleau died. There are no bulletins for acts of courage like these, though they are more useful than the brutal slaughter of the battlefield.

In 1832, Paris's sewers were nothing like they are today. Bruneseau had started the process, but it took the cholera outbreak to bring about the major rebuilding that came later. It is startling to realize, for instance, that in 1821 part of the belt sewer, called the Grand Canal, as in Venice, still lay open to the sky and stagnant in the Rue des Gourdes. Only in 1821 did the city of Paris manage to come up with the 260,080 francs and 6 centimes needed to cover that mass of filth. The three absorbing wells of Combat, Cunette, and Saint-Mandé—with their outlets, machinery, cesspools, and filtering branches—date only from 1836. Paris's intestinal sewer system has since been completely rebuilt, and, as we have said, it has been expanded more than tenfold in the last quarter of a century.

Thirty years ago, at the time of the insurrection of the 5th and 6th of June, many places still had almost the same old sewer system. A great many streets that are now raised in the middle were then sunken roadways. At the bottom of a slope, where the runoff from a street or crossroads collected, one often saw large square grates with heavy bars. The iron, worn smooth by countless footsteps, gleamed and became dangerously slippery for vehicles, causing horses to fall. In the official language of the Roads and Bridges department, these grates had the vivid name of _Cassis_.60

In 1832, in many 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, the Champs-Élysées, the Rue Jacob, and the Rue de Tournon—the old Gothic sewer still brazenly showed its gaping mouth. It took the form of enormous stone catch-basins, sometimes ringed with stone posts, displayed with monumental shamelessness.

In 1806, Paris still had almost the same amount of sewerage it had in 1663: five thousand three hundred fathoms. After Bruneseau, by January 1, 1832, it had forty thousand three hundred metres. Between 1806 and 1831, the city built an average of seven hundred and fifty metres a year. After that, it was constructing eight and even ten thousand metres of galleries every year, built in masonry with small stones, hydraulic mortar that hardens under water, and cement foundations. At two hundred francs per metre, the sixty leagues of Paris's sewers in the present day represent forty-eight million francs.

Along with the economic progress mentioned at the beginning, this vast question also involves serious issues of public health: the sewers of Paris.

Paris stands at the meeting point of two vast layers, one of water and one of air. The layer of water lies fairly deep underground, though two borings have already reached it. It is supplied by the bed of green clay between the chalk and the Jurassic limestone. This bed can be imagined as a disk twenty-five leagues around. Countless rivers and streams seep into it. In a glass of water from the well of Grenelle, one drinks

the Seine, the Marne, the Yonne, the Oise, the Aisne, the Cher, the Vienne, and the Loire. The water layer is healthy. It comes first from heaven and then from the earth. The layer of air is unhealthy. It comes from the sewer. All the miasmas of the cesspool mix with the city's breath; that is the source of its foul breath. Science has shown that air taken from above a dung-heap is purer than air taken from above Paris. In time, with the help of progress, machinery will improve, and as knowledge increases, the water layer will be used to cleanse the air layer—that is, to wash the sewer. The reader knows that by "washing the sewer" we mean returning filth to the earth, restoring dung and manure to the fields. By this simple act, society as a whole will suffer less misery and enjoy better health. At present, disease spreading out from Paris reaches fifty leagues around the Louvre, taken as the hub of this pestilential wheel.

We might say that for ten centuries the cesspool was Paris's disease. The sewer was the stain in the city's blood. Popular instinct was never wrong about it. In earlier times, the work of sewer laborers was almost as dangerous, and almost as loathsome to the public, as the work of the knacker, a trade long regarded with horror and left to the executioner. Masons had to be paid high wages before they would vanish into that foul mine. Even the cesspool cleaner's ladder seemed to hesitate before going down into it. People used to say, proverbially, "to go down into the sewer is to enter the grave." And, as we have said, all kinds of dreadful legends surrounded this colossal pit with terror—a fearful abyss that bears the marks of the earth's upheavals as well as humanity's revolutions, and where one

may find traces of every cataclysm, from the shells of the Deluge to a rag of Marat.

CHAPTER I—THE SEWER AND ITS SURPRISES

Jean Valjean found himself in the sewers of Paris.

Here was yet another likeness between Paris and the sea: as in the ocean, a diver could disappear there.

The transition was extraordinary. In the very heart of the city, Jean Valjean had escaped the city. In the blink of an eye—in the time it took to lift the cover and put it back—he had passed from broad daylight into total darkness, from noon to midnight, from uproar to silence, from the whirlwind of thunder to the stillness of the tomb, and, by a change even more overwhelming than the one in the Rue Polonceau, from the most extreme danger to complete concealment.

It was like a sudden plunge into a cavern, a disappearance through Paris's hidden trapdoor. To leave that street, where death surrounded him on every side, for that kind of sepulchre where life still remained—this was a strange moment. For several seconds he stood as if stunned, listening in bewilderment. The drain of safety had suddenly opened beneath his feet. Heavenly goodness had, in a sense, saved him by surprise. What marvelous ambushes providence prepares!

Only the wounded man did not move, and Jean Valjean did not know whether what he was carrying into that grave was a living man or a dead body.

At first, he felt blind. Suddenly, he could see nothing. It also seemed to him that he had gone deaf in the same instant. He could no longer hear anything. The murderous storm raging a few feet above his head reached him only faintly and indistinctly, muffled by the thick layer of earth between them, as we have said, like a distant rumble from the depths. He could feel that the ground beneath his feet was solid; that was all, but it was enough. He stretched out one arm, then the other, touched the walls on both sides, and realized that the passage was narrow. He slipped and so discovered that the pavement was wet. Carefully, he moved one foot forward, afraid of a hole, a pit, some abyss; he found that the paving went on. A foul gust of air told him where he was.

After a few minutes, he was no longer blind. A little light came down through the manhole by which he had descended, and his eyes adjusted to the cavern. He began to make things out. The passage into which he had burrowed—no other word describes it so well—was closed off behind him. It was one of those dead ends that the technical jargon calls branches. In front of him was another wall, a wall as dark as night. The light from the opening above died out ten or twelve paces from where Jean Valjean stood, and cast only a pale glow over a few metres of the damp sewer walls. Beyond that, the darkness was dense and solid; to go into it seemed dreadful, as though entering it meant being swallowed up. A man could still plunge into that wall of shadow, however, and Jean Valjean had to do exactly that. He had to hurry as well. It occurred to him that the grating he had noticed beneath the paving stones might also be seen by the soldiers, and that everything depended on that chance.

They too might come down into that shaft and search it. There was not a moment to lose. He had laid Marius on the ground; now he lifted him again—that is the true word for it—settled him once more on his shoulders, and moved on. He went resolutely into the darkness.

The truth was that they were less safe than Jean Valjean imagined. Other dangers, just as serious, and perhaps worse, were waiting for them. After the lightning-filled whirlwind of battle came the cavern of foul air and hidden traps; after chaos, the sewer. Jean Valjean had fallen from one circle of hell into another.

After he had gone about fifty paces, he had to stop. A new problem confronted him. The passage ended at another tunnel that crossed his path. He had two choices. Which way should he go? Left or right? How could he get his bearings in that black labyrinth? This labyrinth, as we have already pointed out, had one guiding clue: its slope. Follow the slope, and you reach the river.

Jean Valjean understood this at once.

He told himself that he was probably in the sewer of Les Halles. If he took the passage to the left and followed the downward slope, he would reach, in less than a quarter of an hour, some outlet on the Seine between the Pont au Change and the Pont-Neuf. In other words, he would emerge in broad daylight in the most crowded part of Paris. He might even come up through a manhole at a street crossing. Passers-by would be stunned to see two bleeding men rise out of the ground at their feet. The

police would arrive. The nearby guard post would be called out. They would be captured before they had even fully emerged. Better, then, to go deeper into that labyrinth, trust himself to that black darkness, and leave the outcome to Providence.

He went up the incline and turned right.

As soon as he turned the corner of the gallery, the faint glimmer from a distant air hole vanished. Darkness closed over him again, and he was blind once more. Even so, he moved forward as quickly as he could. Marius' arms were looped around his neck, and his feet dragged behind him. With one hand, he held both of those arms in place; with the other, he felt his way along the wall. Marius' bleeding cheek rested against his and stayed there. He could feel a warm stream from Marius running down over him and soaking beneath his clothes. But near his ear, where the wounded man's mouth touched him, he felt a warm, damp breath. That meant he was still breathing, and therefore still alive. The passage Jean Valjean was now following was not as narrow as the first one. Even so, he moved through it with great difficulty. The rain from the day before had not yet fully drained away, and a small current ran along the middle of the floor, forcing him to keep close to the wall to avoid stepping into the water.

So he moved forward through the darkness. He was like a creature of the night, feeling his way through the unseen, buried beneath the earth in channels of shadow.

Still, little by little, whether a faint, wavering light came from distant air-holes into that dense darkness, or whether his eyes

had simply adjusted to it, some dim sight returned. He began again to form a confused sense of things—now of the wall under his hand, now of the vault above him as he passed beneath it. The pupil widens in the dark, and the soul widens in suffering, until at last it finds God there.

It was not easy for him to find his way.

The course of the sewer, so to speak, repeats the course of the streets above it. At that time, Paris had two thousand two hundred streets. Let the reader imagine being beneath that forest of dark branches called the sewer. The sewer system that existed in that period, if laid end to end, would have stretched for eleven leagues. As we said above, the present network, thanks to the exceptional work of the last thirty years, extended no less than sixty leagues.

Jean Valjean's first mistake was a serious one. He thought he was under the Rue Saint-Denis, and it was unfortunate that he was not. Beneath the Rue Saint-Denis runs an old stone sewer dating from the time of Louis XIII. It goes almost straight to the main collecting sewer, known as the Grand Sewer, with only one bend to the right at the rise of the old Cour des Miracles, and one branch, the Saint-Martin sewer, whose four arms form a cross. But the channel of the Petite-Truanderie, whose entrance lay near the Corinthe wine-shop, had never connected with the Rue Saint-Denis sewer. It ended in the Montmartre sewer, and that was where Jean Valjean had become trapped. There were countless ways to lose oneself there. The Montmartre sewer was one of the most confusing parts of the old network. Fortunately, Jean Valjean had already left behind

the market sewers, whose neat, geometric layout looked like layers of parrots' perches stacked one above another. But ahead of him lay more than one difficult junction and more than one turning—because these really were streets—appearing in the darkness like question marks. First, on his left, was the vast Plâtrière sewer, a kind of Chinese puzzle, throwing out and tangling its chaos of T-shapes and Z-shapes beneath the Post Office and the rotunda of the Wheat Market, all the way to the Seine, where it ended in a Y. Second, on his right, was the winding passage of the Rue du Cadran, with its three prongs, which were also dead ends. Third, on his left, was the branch of the Mail, already complicated near its beginning by a kind of fork, then twisting from zigzag to zigzag until it reached the great vaulted outlet of the Louvre, cut short and branching in every direction. And finally there was the blind passage of the Rue des Jeûneurs, not to mention the smaller ducts here and there, before he could reach the belt sewer, which alone could lead him to an exit far enough away to be safe.

If Jean Valjean had had any sense of the details we have just described, he would quickly have realized, simply by touching the wall, that he was not in the underground passage of the Rue Saint-Denis. Instead of old stone, instead of that ancient architecture—proud and regal even in the sewer, with granite paving and courses set in mortar at a cost of eight hundred livres a fathom—he would have felt the cheap construction of his own time: cost-cutting methods, porous stone packed with mortar over a concrete base that cost two hundred francs a meter, and the middle-class masonry known as _à petits matériaux_—small stuff. But he knew nothing of any of this.

He moved forward anxiously, yet calmly, seeing nothing and knowing nothing, abandoned to chance—that is to say, swallowed up in providence.

Little by little, we must admit, a certain terror took hold of him. The darkness around him sank into his very soul. He was walking through a riddle. This sewer aqueduct is terrifying; it twists and crosses itself in a dizzying way. It is a bleak thing to be trapped in this shadowy Paris. Jean Valjean had to find his way—or rather invent it—without being able to see it. In that unknown world, every step he dared take might be his last. How was he to get out? Would he find a way out? Would he find it in time? Would that vast underground sponge, with its stone chambers, let itself be entered and pierced through? Would he run into some unexpected tangle in the dark? Would he come to something hopelessly tangled and impossible to pass? Would Marius die there from bleeding, and he himself from hunger? Would they both end by losing their way and leaving behind two

skeletons in some corner of that night? He did not know. He asked himself all these questions and answered none of them. The entrails of Paris are an abyss. Like the prophet, he was in the belly of the monster.

Suddenly, he was startled. At the most unexpected moment, and though he had never stopped walking straight ahead, he realized that he was no longer going uphill. The stream was now striking his heels instead of meeting his toes. The sewer was sloping downward now. Why? Was he about to reach the Seine all at once? That danger was serious, but the danger of turning back was even greater. He kept going.

He was not heading toward the Seine. The ridge formed by the ground of Paris on the right bank sends one watershed into the Seine and the other into the Grand Sewer. The crest of that ridge, which divides the flow of the waters, follows a very irregular line. Its highest point—the place where the currents separate—is in the Sainte-Avoye sewer, beyond Rue Michel-le-Comte, in the Louvre sewer near the boulevards, and in the Montmartre sewer near the Halles. Jean Valjean had reached that high point. He was making his way toward the belt sewer; he was on the right path. But he did not know it.

Whenever he came to a branch, he felt along its angles, and if he found that the opening before him was narrower than the passage he was in, he did not go into it but kept on his way. He rightly judged that any narrower passage must end in a dead end and could only take him farther from his goal—that is, the outlet. In this way he avoided the fourfold trap laid for him in the darkness by the four labyrinths we have just described.

At one point, he realized that he was leaving the Paris turned to stone by the uprising, where the barricades had stopped all movement, and passing beneath the living, ordinary Paris. Suddenly he heard overhead a sound like distant but unbroken thunder. It was the rumble of vehicles.

He had been walking for about half an hour, at least by his own estimate, and he still had not thought of resting; he had only shifted Marius to his other hand. The darkness was deeper than ever, but that very depth reassured him.

All at once, he saw his shadow in front of him. It stood out against a faint, barely visible reddish glow that dimly stained the vaulted floor below and the arch above, and cast a golden sheen along the two slimy walls on either side. Startled, he turned around.

Behind him, in the stretch of passage he had just crossed, and at a distance that seemed enormous to him, a kind of dreadful star blazed through the thick darkness, as though it were watching him.

It was the dark star of the police rising in the sewer.

Behind that star-like light, eight or ten figures moved about in confusion—black, upright, blurred, and terrifying.

CHAPTER II—EXPLANATION

On the sixth of June, an organized sweep of the sewers had been ordered. The authorities feared that the defeated insurgents might have taken refuge there. So Prefect Gisquet was to search hidden Paris while General Bugeaud swept visible Paris. It was a double operation, closely linked, and it required a double strategy from the public forces: above ground, the army; below ground, the police. Three teams of officers and sewer workers searched the underground drains of Paris: the first on the right bank, the second on the left bank, and the third in the city center. The police officers were armed with carbines, clubs, swords, and daggers.

The light aimed at Jean Valjean at that moment was the lantern of the right-bank patrol.

This patrol had just searched the curved gallery and the three dead ends beneath the Rue du Cadran. While they were shining their lantern into those dark passages, Jean Valjean had come to the entrance of the gallery. He saw that it was narrower than the main passage and did not go in. He kept moving. When the police came out of the Cadran gallery, they thought they heard footsteps in the direction of the main sewer. They were in fact Jean Valjean’s steps. The sergeant leading the patrol raised his lantern, and the squad began peering through the mist toward the place the sound had come from.

For Jean Valjean, it was an indescribable moment.

Fortunately, although he could see the lantern clearly, the lantern could barely make him out. It was in the light, and he was in shadow. He was far away and blended into the darkness of the place. He pressed himself against the wall and stopped. Besides, he did not understand what was moving behind him. Lack of sleep, lack of food, and everything he had gone through had left him in an almost hallucinatory state. He saw a glow, and around that glow, figures. What was it? He could not tell.

When Jean Valjean stopped, the sound stopped with him.

The men in the patrol listened and heard nothing. They looked and saw nothing. Then they conferred among themselves.

At that time, there was a kind of junction in this part of the Montmartre sewer, known as a _de service_ crossing. It was later removed because a small pool formed there and swallowed the rush of rainwater during heavy storms. The patrol could gather in this open space. Jean Valjean saw these shadowy figures draw together in a rough circle. Their bulldog-like heads bent close as they whispered among themselves.

The outcome of this council of watchdogs was that they had been mistaken. There had been no noise. There was no point in getting tangled up in the belt sewer; it would only waste time. They should hurry toward Saint-Merry instead. If there was anything to be done, or any “bousingot” to hunt down, it would be in that quarter.

From time to time, factions put old insults back into use. In 1832, the word bousingot filled the gap between the word jacobin, which had grown obsolete, and the word demagogue, which

has since been so usefully employed.

The sergeant ordered them to turn left, toward the Seine watershed.

If they had thought to split into two squads and search in both directions, Jean Valjean would have been caught. Everything depended on that single chance. The prefecture had probably instructed the patrol not to divide, anticipating the possibility of fighting and insurgents in force. The patrol moved on, leaving Jean Valjean behind. Of all this movement, Jean Valjean noticed only one thing: the lantern suddenly swung away and its light vanished.

Before leaving, the sergeant, to satisfy his policeman's conscience, fired his gun in Jean Valjean's direction. The shot rolled from echo to echo through the vault like the rumbling of some gigantic inner organ. A piece of plaster fell into the stream a few paces from Jean Valjean and splashed up water, warning him that the bullet had struck the arch above his head.

For a while, slow, measured footsteps echoed across the wooden structure, fading little by little as they moved farther away. The cluster of dark figures disappeared. A wavering light bobbed and drifted, casting a reddish glow across the vault that grew dimmer and then went out. Deep silence returned. The darkness became absolute again; blindness and deafness took back the shadows. Jean Valjean, still not daring to move, remained for a long time with his back against the wall, ears straining and eyes wide, watching that ghostly patrol vanish.

CHAPTER III—THE “SPUN” MAN

To be fair to the police of that time, even in the gravest public crises they carried out their duties in the sewers and their surveillance work with perfect calm. In their eyes, a revolt was no excuse for letting criminals run free or for neglecting society because the government was in danger. The ordinary work was done properly alongside the extraordinary work, and the latter did not disrupt it. In the middle of a vast political upheaval already under way, under the pressure of a possible revolution, a police agent kept tailing a thief without letting the insurrection and the barricades distract him.

Something exactly like this happened on the afternoon of the 6th of June on the bank of the Seine, along the slope of the right shore, a little beyond the Pont des Invalides.

That bank is gone now. The place looks different.

On that bank, two men, some distance apart, seemed to be watching each other while each tried to avoid the other. The man in front was trying to escape; the man behind was trying to catch up with him.

It was like a game of checkers played from a distance and in silence. Neither seemed to be in a hurry, and both walked slowly, as if each feared that moving too fast would make the other quicken his pace.

It looked like an appetite stalking its prey, carefully pretending not to. The prey was shrewd and alert.

The right relationship between the hunted polecat and the hunting dog was plain to see. The one trying to get away looked insignificant and unimpressive; the one trying to catch him had a coarse look and must have been rough to deal with.

The first man, aware that he was weaker, kept away from the second. But he did so with a fierce intensity. Anyone who could have watched him would have seen in his eyes the dark hostility of someone in flight, and all the threat that fear can hold.

The shore was deserted. No one was passing by. Not even a boatman or lighterman was in the skiffs moored here and there.

These two men were not easy to make out except from the opposite quay, and anyone studying them from that distance would have seen the man in front as a bristling, ragged, suspicious-looking creature, nervous and trembling under a torn blouse, while the other would have looked like a formal official figure, wearing the frock coat of authority buttoned up to the chin.

Perhaps the reader would recognize these two men if he saw them at closer range.

What did the second man want?

Probably to manage to dress the first man more warmly.

When a man clothed by the state chases a man in rags, it is to turn him into a man who is also clothed by the state. The whole matter, however, depends on the color. To be dressed in blue is

glorious; to be dressed in red is unpleasant.

There is also a purple that comes from below.

It was probably some trouble of this kind, and some such purple, that the first man was eager to avoid.

If the other man let him keep walking and had not seized him yet, it was apparently because he hoped the fugitive would lead him to some important meeting place and to some group worth arresting. This delicate operation is called “spinning.”

What makes this guess seem entirely likely is this: when the buttoned-up man, from the shore, spotted an empty hackney-coach passing along the quay, he signaled to the driver. The driver understood, clearly recognized the sort of person he was dealing with, turned around, and began following the two men along the top of the quay at a walking pace. The slouching, ragged figure ahead did not notice this.

The hackney-coach rolled along beside the trees of the Champs-Élysées. Above the parapet, you could see the driver’s upper body moving along, whip in hand.

One of the police authorities’ secret instructions to their agents included this rule: “Always keep a hackney-coach ready, in case of emergency.”

While the two men maneuvered, each on his own side and with flawless strategy, they came near a sloping ramp on the quay that led down to the shore. Cab drivers coming from Passy used it to reach the river and water their horses. That ramp was later removed for the sake of symmetry; horses may die of thirst, but

the eye is pleased.

The man in the blouse had probably meant to go up that watering ramp in order to escape into the Champs-Élysées, a place lined with trees but also heavily patrolled by policemen, where the other man could easily use force against him.

This spot on the quay is not far from the house brought to Paris from Moret in 1824 by Colonel Brack and known as “the house of François I.” A guardhouse stands nearby.

To the great surprise of the man watching him, the one being followed did not go up the watering ramp. He kept moving forward along the quay at the water’s edge.

His situation was clearly becoming dangerous.

What could he be planning to do, if not throw himself into the Seine?

From that point on, there was no way up to the quay. There was no other ramp, no staircase. And they were close to the place, marked by the bend in the Seine toward the Pont de Jéna, where the bank kept narrowing until it ended in a thin strip and disappeared into the water. There he would inevitably be trapped, with the sheer wall on his right, the river on his left and in front of him, and the authorities close behind.

The heap of rubbish formed a kind of outcropping at the water’s edge, extending like a small promontory as far as the quay wall.

The man being pursued reached this little mound and went around it, disappearing from the other man’s sight.

Since he could no longer be seen, the other man could move without being seen himself. He took advantage of that, dropped all pretense, and hurried forward. Within moments he had reached the rubbish heap and gone around it. There he stopped in complete astonishment. The man he had been chasing was gone.

The man in the blouse had vanished completely.

From the rubbish heap onward, the strip of shore was only about thirty paces long; then it dropped into the water beating against the quay wall. The fugitive could not have thrown himself into the Seine without the man following him seeing it. What had become of him?

The man in the buttoned-up coat walked to the end of the shore and stood there thinking for a moment, his fists clenched, his eyes searching. Suddenly he struck his forehead. He had just noticed, at the very point where the land ended and the water began, a large iron grating, low and arched, fitted with a heavy lock and three massive hinges. This grating, a kind of door set into the base of the quay, opened onto both the river and the shore. A dark stream flowed beneath it. This stream emptied into the Seine.

Beyond the heavy, rusty iron bars, he could make out a dark, vaulted passage. The man folded his arms and stared at the grating as if reproaching it.

When staring at it proved useless, he tried to force it aside. He shook it, but it held firm. It had probably just been opened, though no sound had been heard, which was strange for such a

rusty grating. But one thing was certain: it had been shut again. That meant the man for whom that door had just opened did not have a hook, but a key.

This fact suddenly flashed through the mind of the man struggling with the grating, and drew from him this indignant cry:

“This is too much! A government key!”

Then, quickly recovering himself, he gave voice to a whole storm of thoughts with this burst of almost ironic monosyllables: “Come! Come! Come! Come!”

After that, hoping for something—either that he might see the man come out or that others might go in—he took up his watch behind a heap of rubble, with the patient fury of a hunting dog on point.

The hackney carriage, which had been matching all its movements to his, had also stopped on the quay above him, close to the parapet. The driver, expecting a long wait, slipped feedbags of oats over his horses’ noses, those bags damp at the bottom and so familiar to Parisians—to whom, it may be added in passing, the Government sometimes applies the same treatment. The few people crossing the Pont de Jéna turned their heads before moving on, pausing for a moment to look at these two still figures in the scene: the man on the bank and the carriage on the quay.

CHAPTER IV—HE TOO BEARS HIS CROSS

Jean Valjean had resumed walking and did not stop again.

The march grew harder and harder. The height of these vaults changes, but on average they are about five feet six inches high, clearly built for a man of ordinary height. Jean Valjean had to stay bent over so that Marius would not strike the roof above them. At every step he had to stoop, straighten a little, and keep feeling along the wall without pause. The wet stone and the slimy wooden supports gave him almost nothing firm to hold with either hand or foot. He struggled forward through the city's foul heap of filth. The faint light that filtered in through the air-holes appeared only at long intervals, and it was so pale that broad daylight looked like moonlight. Everywhere else there was only haze, foul vapor, darkness, and blackness. Jean Valjean was both hungry and thirsty, but above all thirsty. Like the sea, this was a place full of water that a man could not drink. His strength, which the reader knows was extraordinary, and which age had barely diminished thanks to his pure and temperate life, began at last to fail. Weariness started to overtake him, and as his strength faded, the weight of what he carried seemed to grow heavier. Marius, who might already have been dead, dragged on him with the full heaviness of an inert body. Jean Valjean held him in a way that did not crush his chest, so that he could breathe as freely as possible. Between his legs he could feel rats darting quickly past. One of them was so frightened that it bit him. From time to time, a breath of fresh

air came to him through the sewer openings and revived him.

It may have been about three o'clock in the afternoon when he reached the belt-sewer.

At first, he was startled by this sudden widening. All at once he found himself in a passage so broad that, even with his arms stretched out, he could not touch both walls, beneath a vault high enough that his head no longer brushed it. The Grand Sewer is, in fact, eight feet wide and seven feet high.

Where the Montmartre sewer joins the Grand Sewer, two other underground passages—the Rue de Provence and the Abattoir—create a four-way junction. A less perceptive man might have hesitated there. Jean Valjean chose the widest passage, the belt-sewer. But the same question came up again: should he go down or up? He decided the situation demanded speed, and that he had to reach the Seine at any cost. In other words, he had to go downward. He turned left.

It was fortunate that he did, because it is a mistake to think the belt-sewer has two exits, one toward Bercy and the other toward Passy, and that it is, as its name suggests, the underground belt of Paris on the right bank. The Grand Sewer—remember, it was simply the old stream of Ménilmontant—ends, if you follow it upward, in a dead end, at its original starting point, its source, at the foot of the Ménilmontant hill. It has no direct connection with the branch that gathers the waters of Paris beginning at the Quartier Popincourt and empties into the Seine through the Amelot sewer above the old Isle Louviers. That branch, which

completes the collecting sewer, is cut off from it under the Rue Ménilmontant itself by a barrier marking the watershed between the upper and lower flow. If Jean Valjean had gone up that passage, he would have struggled on for a long time, then collapsed from exhaustion and reached, half dead in the darkness, a wall. He would have been lost.

If he had needed to, he could have turned back a short distance and entered the passage of the Filles-du-Calvaire. If he had managed the underground crossing at the Carrefour Boucherat without hesitation, then taken the Saint-Louis corridor, then the Saint-Gilles branch on the left, then turned right while avoiding the Saint-Sebastian gallery, he might have reached the Amelot sewer. From there, if he did not lose his way in the F-shaped section beneath the Bastille, he might have made it to the outlet on the Seine near the Arsenal. But to do that, he would have needed a complete knowledge of the vast coral-like maze of the sewers, with all its branches and exits. And we must repeat that he knew nothing about the dreadful drain through which he was making his way. If anyone had asked him where he was, he would have answered, “In the night.”

His instinct guided him well. Going downward was, in fact, the safest course.

He passed by, on his right, the two narrow passages that branch like a claw beneath the Rue Laffitte and the Rue Saint-Georges, as well as the long forked corridor of the Chaussée d’Antin.

A little beyond a side channel, probably the Madeleine branch, he stopped. He was utterly exhausted. A fairly large air-hole, probably the manhole in the Rue d'Anjou, let in a light that seemed almost bright. With the gentle care one brother would show another who was wounded, Jean Valjean laid Marius down on the sewer bench. In the pale light from the air-hole, Marius' blood-stained face looked like ashes at the bottom of a tomb. His eyes were closed. His hair was stuck to his temples like a painter's brushes dried in red wash. His hands hung limp, as if dead. A clot of blood had gathered in the knot of his cravat. His limbs were cold, and blood had dried at the corners of his mouth. His shirt had been forced into his wounds, and the cloth of his coat was rubbing against the open gashes in his living flesh. Jean Valjean carefully pushed the clothing aside with his fingertips and placed his hand on Marius' chest. His heart was still beating. Jean Valjean tore his own shirt, bound the young man's wounds as best he could, and stanched the bleeding. Then he bent over Marius, who still lay unconscious and barely breathing, and in that half-light he looked at him with inexpressible hatred.

As he straightened Marius's clothes, he found two things in his pockets: the roll that had been left there the night before, and Marius's pocketbook. He ate the roll and opened the pocketbook. On the first page he found the four lines Marius had written. The reader will remember 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 those four lines by the light from the air-hole and stood still for a moment, as if lost in thought, repeating softly, “Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, number 6, Monsieur Gillenormand.” He put the pocketbook back into Marius’s pocket. He had eaten, and his strength had returned. He lifted Marius onto his back again, carefully settled his head on his right shoulder, and continued down the sewer.

The Grand Sewer, laid out along the course of the Ménilmontant valley, is about two leagues long. A considerable part of it is paved from end to end.

Jean Valjean did not have this guiding torch of Paris street names that we are using to light his underground journey for the reader. Nothing told him what part of the city he was crossing or how far he had come. Only the growing dimness of the patches of light he came upon from time to time told him that the sun was leaving the streets above and that evening was near. The rumble of vehicles overhead had become occasional instead of constant, then had almost stopped altogether, and from this he concluded that he was no longer beneath central Paris. He was nearing some deserted area, close to the outer boulevards or the farthest quays. Where there are fewer houses and streets, the sewer has fewer air-holes. The darkness thickened around Jean Valjean. Still, he kept moving forward, feeling his way through the dark.

Suddenly, that darkness turned dreadful.

CHAPTER V—WITH SAND AS WITH WOMAN, THERE IS A FINENESS THAT BETRAYS

He felt himself stepping into water. There was no longer any pavement under his feet, only mud.

Sometimes, on certain coasts of Brittany or Scotland, a man—a traveler or a fisherman—may be walking along the beach at low tide, far from shore, when he suddenly realizes that for the past several minutes he has been walking with difficulty. The ground beneath his feet feels like pitch. His soles cling to it. It is no longer sand; it is like birdlime. The beach looks completely dry, yet with every step he takes, as soon as he lifts his foot, the print fills with water. And still, the eye has noticed no change. The vast stretch of beach lies smooth and calm. All the sand looks the same. Nothing marks the difference between firm ground and ground that is not firm. The cheerful little cloud of sand fleas keeps leaping busily beneath the passerby's feet.

The man keeps going. He walks on, turns toward land, and tries to make his way back to shore. He is not alarmed. Alarmed by what? He is only aware that his feet seem to grow heavier with every step. Then, all at once, he sinks. He goes down two or three inches. Clearly, he is not on safe ground. He stops to get his bearings. Suddenly he looks down at his feet. They have disappeared. The sand has swallowed them. He pulls his feet free and tries to retrace his steps. He turns back, but sinks even deeper than before. The sand is up to his ankles. He wrenches

himself loose and throws himself to the left; the sand rises to mid-leg. He throws himself to the right; the sand comes up to his knees. Then, in indescribable terror, he understands that he is trapped in quicksand, with beneath him that dreadful substance in which a man cannot walk and a fish cannot swim. If he is carrying anything, he throws it away. He tries to lighten himself, like a ship in distress. It is too late. The sand is already above his knees.

He shouts and waves his hat or handkerchief, but the sand keeps gaining on him. If the beach is empty, if the shore is too far away, if the sandbank has too evil a reputation and no rescuer is nearby, then all is lost: he is doomed to be swallowed up. He is doomed to that terrible burial—slow, certain, relentless. Nothing can delay it or speed it up. It lasts for hours and seems endless. It seizes you while you are still standing, free, and full of health. It pulls you down by the feet. With every struggle you make, with every cry you utter, it drags you a little lower, as though it were punishing your resistance by tightening its grip. It forces a man slowly back into the earth, while still leaving him time to look out at the horizon, the trees, the green countryside, the smoke rising from villages on the plain, the sails of ships at sea, the birds flying and singing, the sun, and the sky. This swallowing up is a grave that takes the form of a tide and rises from the depths of the earth toward a living man. Each minute lays him out more pitilessly for death. The miserable man tries to sit, to lie down, to climb out; every movement buries him deeper. He straightens himself and sinks again. He feels himself being devoured. He shrieks, begs, cries out to the clouds, wrings his hands, and gives way to despair.

Look at him: the sand is up to his belly; then it reaches his chest; now he is only a torso. He lifts his hands, lets out wild groans, digs his nails into the beach, tries to cling to that ash-like ground, props himself on his elbows to lift himself out of that soft casing, and sobs in frenzy; the sand rises higher. It has reached his shoulders; it climbs to his throat; now only his face can be seen. His mouth cries out; the sand fills it; silence. His eyes still stare outward; the sand closes over them; night. Then his forehead sinks lower; a little hair trembles above the sand; a hand juts out, breaks the surface of the beach, waves, and disappears. A sinister erasure of a man.

Sometimes a rider is swallowed up with his horse; sometimes a carter disappears with his cart. Everything goes under in that stretch of shore. It is shipwreck, but not in water. It is the earth drowning a man. The ground, soaked through with the ocean, turns into a trap. It looks like an open plain, yet it opens beneath you like a wave. The abyss has these treacherous ways.

This grim fate, always a possibility on certain seashores, could also happen, thirty years ago, in the sewers of Paris.

Before the major works begun in 1833, Paris's underground drainage system was vulnerable to these sudden cave-ins.

Water seeped into certain underlying layers of soil that were especially fragile. The walkway—made of flagstones in the old sewers, or of cement laid over concrete in the newer tunnels—lost its support and collapsed. When a floor like this buckles, it cracks and then breaks apart. The structure gave way over a stretch of ground. In technical language, this

opening—the start of a gulf of mud—was called a _fontis_. What is a _fontis_? It is like suddenly finding quicksand beneath the surface of the earth; it is the beach of Mont Saint-Michel inside a sewer. The soaked ground is almost in a liquid state; all its particles seem suspended in a soft mass. It is neither earth nor water. Sometimes it is very deep. Nothing could be more terrifying than coming upon such a thing. If water is the stronger element, death comes quickly and the man is swallowed at once; if earth is stronger, death comes slowly.

Can anyone imagine such a death? If being swallowed by the earth is terrible on the seashore, what must it be like in a cesspool? Instead of open air, broad daylight, a clear horizon, those great sounds, those free clouds from which life-giving rain falls; instead of boats visible in the distance, of hope appearing in every form, of help still possible to the very last moment—there is only deafness, blindness, a black vault, the inside of a tomb already waiting, death in filth under a lid. It is a slow suffocation in foulness, a stone box where asphyxia reaches out from the mire and grips you by the throat; stench mixed with the death-rattle; slime instead of shore, sulfuretted hydrogen instead of the storm wind, dung instead of the ocean. And all the while you may shout, grind your teeth, twist, struggle, and suffer in agony, with that enormous city above your head knowing nothing of it.

The horror of dying like this is beyond words. Death sometimes softens its brutality with a certain grim dignity. On a funeral pyre or in a shipwreck, a person can still be noble; in fire as in the sea, there can be something magnificent in the way one meets

the end. In such moments, a person seems transformed even while dying. But not here. This kind of death is foul. There is something degrading about dying this way. The final drifting visions are miserable. Mud means shame. It is mean, ugly, disgraceful. To die in a cask of Malvoisie, like Clarence, may be imaginable; to die in a scavenger's ditch, like Escoubleau, is horrifying. To struggle there is hideous; even in the agony of death, one is still thrashing and sinking. There is darkness enough to make it hell, and enough mire to turn it into nothing but a swamp, and the dying man does not know whether he is about to become a ghost or a frog.

Everywhere else the grave is sinister; here it is grotesquely misshapen.

The depth of the _fontis_ varied, as did their length and density, depending on how poor the subsoil was. Sometimes a _fontis_ was three or four feet deep, sometimes eight or ten; sometimes its bottom could not be found. In one place the mire was almost solid, in another almost liquid. In the Lunière fontis, it would have taken a man a whole day to disappear, while the Philippeaux slough would have swallowed him in five minutes. Mud supports weight more or less depending on how dense it is. A child may get out where a man would die. The first rule of survival is to throw off every burden. Any sewer worker who felt the ground giving way beneath him began by tossing aside his bag of tools, his back-basket, or his hod.

These cave-ins had many causes: crumbly soil; landslides deep underground, beyond human reach; violent summer storms; constant winter flooding; and long, steady drizzles. Sometimes

the weight of nearby houses, built on marl or sand, pushed out the arches of the underground galleries and bent them sideways. At other times, a floor vault gave way and split under the pressure. In this way, the piling up of the Parthénon erased part of the vaults under the hill of Saint-Geneviève a century ago. When a sewer collapsed under the weight of the houses above it, the damage sometimes showed itself in the street as a jagged gap between the paving stones, like the teeth of a saw. This crack would run in a wavering line along the whole length of the broken vault, and once the danger was visible, repairs could be made quickly. But often the destruction below left no mark on the surface, and then the sewer workers were in grave danger. If they entered the sewer without taking precautions, they could disappear. Old records mention several scavengers who were buried in cave-ins this way. They give many names, including that of a sewer worker swallowed by a bog beneath the manhole in the Rue Carême-Prenant: a man named Blaise Poutrain. This Blaise Poutrain was the brother of Nicholas Poutrain, who in 1785 was the last gravedigger of the cemetery called the Charnier des Innocents, at the time when that cemetery came to its end.

There was also the young and charming Vicomte d'Escoubleau, whom we have just mentioned, one of the heroes of the siege of Lérida, where the assault was made in silk stockings, with violins leading the way. D'Escoubleau, caught one night at the home of his cousin, the Duchesse de Sourdis, drowned in a bog in the Beautreillis sewer, where he had hidden to escape the Duke. When Madame de Sourdis was told of his death, she asked for her smelling salts and forgot to weep because she

was too busy sniffing them. In such moments, no love endures; the sewer puts it out. Hero refuses to wash Leander's body. Thisbe holds her nose before Pyramus and says, "Phew!"

CHAPTER VI—THE CAVE-IN

Jean Valjean found himself face to face with a cave-in.

This kind of quagmire was common at that time in the ground beneath the Champs-Élysées. It was hard to manage in hydraulic work and did a poor job of preserving underground structures because it was so fluid. It was even more unstable than the sands of the Quartier Saint-Georges, which could only be overcome by building in stone on a concrete base, and than the gas-filled clay layers of the Quartier des Martyrs, which were so soft that the only way to pass beneath the Galerie des Martyrs was through a cast-iron pipe. In 1836, when the old stone sewer under the Faubourg Saint-Honoré—the one where we now see Jean Valjean—was torn down to be rebuilt, the quicksand that forms the subsoil of the Champs-Élysées all the way to the Seine created such difficulties that the work took nearly six months. The delay caused loud complaints from the people living along the river, especially those with hotels and carriages. The work was not just unhealthy; it was dangerous. True, they also had four and a half months of rain and three floods of the Seine.

The fontis Jean Valjean had run into had been caused by the previous day's downpour. The paving, poorly supported by the sand underneath, had collapsed and blocked the flow of water. Water had seeped in, and then the ground had slipped. The broken floor had sunk into the muck. How far? No one could tell. The darkness there was thicker than anywhere else. It was a pit of mud inside a cavern of night.

Jean Valjean felt the pavement disappear beneath his feet. He stepped into the slime. Water lay on the surface, mud at the bottom. He had to cross it. Going back was impossible. Marius was dying, and Jean Valjean was exhausted. Besides, where could he go? He moved forward. At first, for the first few steps, the pit did not seem very deep. But the farther he went, the deeper his feet sank. Soon the mud was up to his calves and the water above his knees. He kept going, holding Marius in his arms as high above the water as he could. Now the mire reached his knees and the water his waist. He could no longer turn back. This mud, firm enough to hold one man, clearly could not support two. Marius and Jean Valjean might each have had some chance of getting out alone. Jean Valjean kept moving forward, carrying the dying man, who might already have been a corpse.

The water rose to his armpits. He felt himself sinking. It was hard to move through the deep sludge he had reached. The very thickness that held him up also held him back. He still kept Marius lifted high, and with an extraordinary effort he pushed on; but he was going under. Now only his head remained above the water, along with the two arms holding Marius up. In old paintings of the Flood, a mother is shown holding her child like this.

He sank deeper still. He turned his face backward to keep clear of the water so he could breathe. Anyone who had seen him in that darkness would have thought they were looking at a mask floating in shadow. Above him he caught a faint glimpse of Marius's drooping head and pale face. He made one desperate

effort and thrust his foot forward. His foot struck something solid—a place to stand. Not a moment too soon.

He straightened up and planted himself on that support with fierce determination. It felt like the first step on a staircase leading back to life.

The support he had found in the mud at that final moment was the beginning of the pavement's other slope, which had bent without breaking and had curved under the water in one solid piece like a plank. A well-built pavement forms a kind of arch and has this sort of strength. This piece of the arch, partly underwater but firm, was a true inclined plane, and once he was on it, he was safe. Jean Valjean climbed this slope and reached the far side of the quagmire.

As he came out of the water, he struck against a stone and fell to his knees. He felt that this was only right, and he stayed there for a while, his soul absorbed in words spoken to God.

He got to his feet, trembling, cold, foul-smelling, bent under the weight of the dying man he was dragging behind him, dripping with slime, and with his soul filled by a strange light.

CHAPTER VII—SOMETIMES YOU RUN AGROUND JUST WHEN YOU THINK YOU ARE LANDING

He started forward again.

But although he had not left his life behind in the sewer, he seemed to have left his strength there. That tremendous effort had drained him. He was now so weak that every three or four steps he had to stop for breath and lean against the wall. At one point he was forced to sit down on the raised walkway to shift Marius into a better position, and he thought he might have to stay there. But though his strength was gone, his will was not. He got up again.

He went on in desperation, moving almost quickly. He covered a hundred paces like that, hardly stopping to breathe, and suddenly ran into a wall. He had reached a bend in the sewer and, with his head lowered, had struck the wall at the turn. He looked up, and at the far end of the tunnel, far, very far ahead, he saw a light. This time it was not that dreadful light. It was a good, white light. It was daylight. Jean Valjean saw the exit.

A damned soul who, in the middle of the flames, suddenly caught sight of the way out of Gehenna would feel what Jean Valjean felt. It would fling itself wildly toward that shining opening with the stumps of its burned wings. Jean Valjean no longer felt tired. He no longer noticed Marius' weight. His legs

seemed made of steel again. He ran more than he walked. As he drew nearer, the exit took clearer shape. It was a pointed arch, lower than the vault, which gradually narrowed, and narrower than the passage, which tightened as the ceiling dropped. The tunnel ended like the inside of a funnel—a flawed design copied from prison gates, sensible in a prison, absurd in a sewer, and one that has since been corrected.

Jean Valjean reached the exit.

There he stopped.

It was certainly the exit, but he could not get through it.

The arch was blocked by a heavy iron grating, and the grating, which apparently rarely turned on its rusty hinges, was fastened to the stone frame by a thick lock. Red with rust, it looked like an enormous brick. The keyhole was visible, along with the solid bolt sunk deep into the iron catch. The gate was clearly locked twice over. It was one of those prison locks that old Paris was so fond of using everywhere.

Beyond the grating lay open air: the river, daylight, and the bank—very narrow, but enough for escape. In the distance were the quays, Paris, that vast gulf where a man could so easily disappear, the wide horizon, freedom. To the right, downstream, he could make out the bridge of Jéna; to the left, upstream, the bridge of the Invalides. It would have been a good place to wait for night and then get away. It was one of the loneliest spots in Paris, the bank facing the Grand-Caillou. Flies passed in and out through the bars of the grating.

It was perhaps half past eight in the evening. The light was fading.

Jean Valjean laid Marius down against the wall, on the dry part of the arch, then went to the grating and wrapped both fists around the bars. He shook it wildly, but it did not move. The grating did not budge. Jean Valjean grabbed the bars one by one, hoping he might tear out the weakest and use it as a lever to lift the gate or break the lock. Not one bar gave way. A tiger's teeth are not set more firmly in its jaws. There was no lever, no way to pry it open. The obstacle was impossible to overcome. There was no way to open the gate.

So he had to stop there? What could he do? What would become of him? He did not have the strength to go back and make the journey again. Besides, how could he cross that quagmire a second time, when he had escaped it the first time only by a miracle? And after the quagmire, would there not be the police patrol, which surely could not be avoided twice? And then where could he go? Which way should he take? Following the slope would not lead him where he needed to go. If he reached another outlet, he would find it blocked by a plug or a grating. No doubt every outlet was closed that way. Chance had left open the grating through which he had entered, but it was clear that all the other sewer mouths were barred. He had managed only to escape into a prison.

It was all over. Everything Jean Valjean had done had been useless. His exhaustion had ended in failure.

They were both trapped in death's vast, dark web, and Jean Valjean felt the terrible spider moving along those black threads, trembling in the shadows. He turned away from the grating and collapsed onto the pavement, thrown down rather than sitting, beside Marius, who still did not move, his head bowed between his knees. This was the final drop in his cup of anguish.

What was he thinking about in this deep despair? Not himself, and not Marius. He was thinking of Cosette.

CHAPTER VIII—THE TORN COAT-TAIL

In the middle of this collapse, a hand touched his shoulder, and a low voice said:

“Half shares.”

Someone in that darkness? Nothing feels more like a dream than despair. Jean Valjean thought he must be dreaming. He had heard no footsteps. Could it be true? He looked up.

A man was standing before him.

The man wore a blouse and was barefoot. He held his shoes in his left hand. He had clearly taken them off so he could reach Jean Valjean without making a sound.

Jean Valjean did not hesitate for a moment. Unexpected as this meeting was, he knew the man at once. It was Thénardier.

Though he had been jolted awake, so to speak, Jean Valjean was used to danger and hardened against sudden shocks that had to be met at once. He immediately recovered his self-control. Besides, the situation could not grow any worse. There is a point at which suffering can rise no higher, and Thénardier himself could add nothing to the darkness of that night.

There was a brief pause.

Thénardier lifted his right hand to his forehead to shade his eyes. Then he narrowed them, his lashes nearly closing, while

his mouth tightened slightly—the look of a shrewd man trying hard to recognize someone. He failed. As we have said, Jean Valjean stood with his back to the light, and besides, he was so battered, so covered in mud, and so bloody that even in broad daylight he would have been hard to know. Thénardier, on the other hand, was lit by the light from the grating—a cellar light, pale and ghastly, but sharp all the same—and, to use the vivid popular phrase, he instantly stood out in Jean Valjean's view. That difference alone gave Jean Valjean an advantage in the strange duel that was about to begin between these two men and their two positions. Jean Valjean entered the encounter concealed; Thénardier faced it exposed.

Jean Valjean immediately realized that Thénardier had not recognized him.

For a moment they looked each other over in the half-dark, as if sizing each other up. Thénardier spoke first.

"How are you going to get out?"

Jean Valjean did not answer. Thénardier went on:

"There's no way to pick the lock on that gate. But you still have to get out of here."

"That's true," said Jean Valjean.

"Then we split it in half."

"What do you mean?"

"You killed that man; fine. I have the key."

Thénardier pointed at Marius. Then he continued:

“I don’t know you, but I want to help you. You must be a friend.”

Jean Valjean began to understand. Thénardier was taking him for a murderer.

Thénardier went on:

“Listen, comrade. You didn’t kill that man without checking what was in his pockets. Give me my half, and I’ll open the door for you.”

And as he pulled a huge key partway out from under his ragged blouse, he added:

“Want to see what a key to freedom looks like? Here it is.”

Jean Valjean was left utterly stunned—to use the elder Corneille’s phrase—to the point that he doubted what he was seeing was real. It was as if Providence had appeared in a terrible form, and his guardian angel had risen out of the earth in the shape of Thénardier.

Thénardier shoved his fist into a large pocket hidden under his blouse, pulled out a rope, and held it out to Jean Valjean.

“Here,” he said, “I’ll throw in the rope as well.”

“What is the rope for?”

“You’ll need a stone too, but you can find one outside. There’s a pile of rubble there.”

“What am I supposed to do with a stone?”

“Idiot, if you’re going to throw that corpse into the river, you’ll need a stone and a rope. Otherwise it’ll float.”

Jean Valjean took the rope. Everyone, at times, accepts things in this automatic way.

Thénardier snapped his fingers, as if a sudden thought had come to him.

“By the way, comrade, how did you manage to get out of that swamp over there? I’ve never dared go into it myself. Whew! you smell awful.”

After a pause, he added:

“I’m asking you questions, but you’re quite right not to answer. It’s good practice for that cursed quarter of an hour in front of the examining magistrate. Besides, if you don’t talk at all, there’s no danger of talking too much. Never mind. I can’t see your face, and I don’t know your name, but you’re mistaken if you think I don’t understand who you are and what you want. I see it clearly. You’ve done that gentleman some damage, and now you want to hide him somewhere. The river—that great concealer of foolish acts—is what you need. I’ll help get you out of this mess. Helping a decent fellow when he’s in a tight spot suits me perfectly.”

Even while praising Jean Valjean for keeping quiet, he kept trying to make him speak. He nudged his shoulder, trying to catch a glimpse of his profile, and said, without raising his voice:

“Speaking of that bog, you’re a strong brute. Why didn’t you throw the man in there?”

Jean Valjean said nothing.

Thénardier went on, tugging the rag he used as a cravat up to his Adam’s apple, a gesture that completed his air of serious competence:

“All things considered, you were wise. When the workmen come tomorrow to seal up that hole, they would certainly have found the corpse left there, and from that they might have traced things back to you, bit by bit, straw by straw. Someone passed through the sewer. Who was it? Where did he come out? Did anyone see him? The police are very clever. The sewer is treacherous; it gives you away. A discovery like that is rare, and it draws attention. Very few people use the sewers for this kind of business, while the river belongs to everyone. The river is the real grave. After a month, they drag your man up in the nets at Saint-Cloud. Well, who cares? It’s just carrion. Who killed that man? Paris. And justice asks no questions. You did the right thing.”

The more Thénardier talked, the more silent Jean Valjean became.

Thénardier shook him by the shoulder again.

“Now let’s settle this matter. We’ll split it. You’ve seen my key; now show me your money.”

Thénardier looked haggard, fierce, and suspicious—somewhat threatening, yet still friendly.

One thing was strange: Thénardier's manner was not straightforward. He did not seem entirely at ease. Though he was putting on an air of mystery, he spoke in a low voice. From time to time he put a finger to his lips and muttered, "Hush!" It was hard to guess why. No one was there but the two of them. Jean Valjean thought that other ruffians might be hiding in some nearby corner, and that Thénardier did not want to share with them.

Thénardier went on:

"Let's settle accounts. How much did the corpse have in his bags?"

Jean Valjean searched his pockets.

As the reader will remember, he made a habit of always carrying some money on him. The hard life of constant makeshifts he had been forced into made that a necessity. But this time he had been caught off guard. The night before, when he put on his National Guardsman's uniform, he had forgotten to take his pocketbook, so absorbed was he in his grief. He had only a little loose change in his watch pocket. He turned out his pocket, dripping with slime, and spread on the stone bench of the vault one louis d'or, two five-franc pieces, and five or six large sous.

Thénardier pushed out his lower lip and gave a meaningful twist of the neck.

"You got him off cheap," he said.

He began going through the pockets of Jean Valjean and Marius with complete familiarity. Jean Valjean, mainly concerned with

keeping his back to the light, let him do as he pleased.

As he handled Marius's coat, Thénardier, with a pickpocket's skill and without Jean Valjean noticing, tore off a strip of cloth and hid it under his blouse. He was probably thinking that this scrap might later help identify the murdered man and the murderer. But he found nothing more than the thirty francs.

"That's true," he said. "The two of you together have no more than that."

Then, forgetting his own motto, "half shares," he took everything.

He hesitated for a moment over the large sous. After thinking it over, he took those too, muttering:

"No matter! You cut people's throats far too cheaply."

That done, he pulled the big key out from under his blouse again.

"Now, my friend, you have to go. It's like a fair here—you pay on your way out. You've paid, so now be off."

And he started to laugh.

When he lent this stranger the help of his key, and let someone other than himself go out through that gate, was his motive really the pure and selfless wish to save a murderer? We may be allowed to doubt it.

Thénardier helped Jean Valjean shift Marius back onto his shoulders. Then, standing on tiptoe and barefoot, he went to the grating and signaled for Jean Valjean to follow. He peered out,

pressed a finger to his lips, and stood still for several seconds, as if waiting in uncertainty. When he had finished looking, he put the key in the lock. The bolt slid back, and the gate opened. It did not scrape or creak. It moved almost silently.

It was clear that this gate and its hinges, carefully oiled, were opened more often than anyone would have guessed. That smooth, silent movement was suspicious. It suggested secret comings and goings, quiet entrances and exits by night, and the wolf-like step of crime.

The sewer was plainly helping some mysterious band. This silent grating was a hiding place for stolen goods.

Thénardier opened the gate just far enough for Jean Valjean to get through, then shut the grating again, turned the key twice in the lock, and disappeared back into the darkness without making more noise than a breath. He seemed to move with the velvet paws of a tiger.

A moment later, that dreadful providence had vanished back into the unseen.

Jean Valjean found himself out in the open air.

CHAPTER IX—MARIUS MAKES SOMEONE WHO CAN JUDGE SUCH THINGS FEEL THE EFFECT OF HIS BEING DEAD

He let Marius slide down onto the bank.

They were out in the open air!

The foul air, the darkness, and the horror were behind him. Pure, healthy, living, joyful air, easy to breathe, poured over him. Silence was everywhere around him, but it was that lovely silence that comes after sunset beneath a clear blue sky. Twilight had fallen. Night, the great deliverer, was coming on—the friend of all who need the shelter of darkness to escape their suffering. In every direction, the sky stretched out like a vast calm. At his feet, the river flowed with the sound of a kiss. In the elms of the Champs-Élysées, he could hear the airy conversation of birds in their nests saying good night to one another. A few stars, delicately piercing the pale blue high above and visible only to a dreaming eye, made tiny, almost imperceptible points of light in the immensity. Above Jean Valjean, evening was spreading all the sweetness of the infinite.

It was that exquisite, uncertain hour that says neither yes nor no. The night had advanced far enough that someone could disappear a short distance away, yet there was still enough light to recognize a face up close.

For several seconds, Jean Valjean gave himself over completely to that solemn, soothing calm. Such moments of forgetfulness do come to men. Suffering stops tormenting the miserable for a while. Every troubled thought fades. Peace settles over the dreamer like night. And beneath the glowing twilight, as if reflecting the lit sky above, the soul fills with stars. Jean Valjean could not help gazing at that vast, luminous shadow spread over him. Lost in thought, he let himself sink into that sea of ecstasy and prayer, in the majestic silence of the eternal heavens. Then he quickly bent over Marius again, as if his sense of duty had returned. Scooping up water in his cupped hand, he gently sprinkled a few drops on the young man's face. Marius's eyelids did not open, but his half-open mouth was still breathing.

Jean Valjean was about to dip his hand into the river again when, all at once, he felt an indescribable uneasiness—the feeling a person has when someone is standing behind him, unseen.

We have already mentioned this feeling, which everyone knows.

He turned around.

Someone really was behind him, just as there had been a little while earlier.

A tall man stood a few paces behind the place where Jean Valjean was crouched over Marius. He was wrapped in a long coat, his arms folded, and in his right fist he held a club whose lead-weighted head could be seen.

In the darkness, he looked almost like an apparition. An ordinary man would have been frightened by the twilight; a thoughtful man, by the club. Jean Valjean recognized Javert.

The reader has probably guessed that Thénardier's pursuer was none other than Javert. After his unexpected escape from the barricade, Javert had gone to police headquarters and given the Prefect a brief verbal report in person. He then immediately returned to duty. That duty involved—as the reader may remember from the note found on him—keeping watch on the bank of the Seine near the Champs-Élysées on the right side, a place that had been drawing police attention for some time. There he caught sight of Thénardier and followed him. The rest is already known.

So it is easy to understand that the grate so helpfully opened for Jean Valjean was one of Thénardier's clever tricks. Thénardier instinctively felt that Javert was still nearby; a man being watched has a sense for it that rarely fails. He needed to throw that sleuth-hound a bone. An assassin—what luck! Such a chance could not be wasted. By sending Jean Valjean out in his place, Thénardier gave the police someone else to chase, drew them off his own trail, made them forget him in the excitement of a larger affair, rewarded Javert for all his waiting—which always pleases a spy—earned thirty francs, and confidently expected to escape himself under cover of this distraction.

Jean Valjean had passed from one danger straight into another.

These two encounters—falling from Thénardier into Javert's hands one after the other—were a brutal shock.

Javert did not recognize Jean Valjean, who, as we have said, no longer looked like himself. He did not uncross his arms. With a barely noticeable movement, he made sure of the bludgeon in his hand and said in a short, calm voice:

"Who are you?"

“I.”

“Who is ‘I’?”

“Jean Valjean.”

Javert shoved his bludgeon between his teeth, bent his knees, leaned forward, and placed his two powerful hands on Jean Valjean’s shoulders, gripping them like vises. He studied him closely and recognized him. Their faces were almost touching. Javert’s stare was terrifying.

Jean Valjean remained motionless in Javert’s grip, like a lion yielding to the claws of a lynx.

“Inspector Javert,” he said, “I’m in your hands. In fact, I’ve considered myself your prisoner since this morning. I did not give you my address because I meant to escape. Take me. I ask only one favor.”

Javert seemed not to hear him. He kept his eyes fixed on Jean Valjean. His chin tightened, pushing his lips up toward his nose, a sign of fierce, brooding thought. At last he let go of Jean Valjean, drew himself up stiffly without bending, gripped his club firmly again, and, as if in a dream, murmured rather than spoke this question:

“What are you doing here? And who is this man?”

He still did not address Jean Valjean as _thou_.

Jean Valjean answered, and the sound of his voice seemed to bring Javert back to himself:

“It’s about him that I want to speak to you. Do with me whatever you think right, but first help me carry him home. That is all I ask.”

Javert’s face tightened, as it always did when anyone seemed to think he might make a concession. Even so, he did not say no.

He bent over again, took a handkerchief from his pocket, wet it in the water, and wiped the blood from Marius’ brow.

“This man was at the barricade,” he said in a low voice, as though speaking to himself. “He is the one they called Marius.”

He was a spy of the highest order, who had seen everything, heard everything, and understood everything, even when he believed he was about to die; who had gone on spying even in his agony; who, with his elbows resting on the first step of the tomb, had still been taking notes.

He took Marius’ hand and felt for his pulse.

“He is wounded,” said Jean Valjean.

“He is a dead man,” said Javert.

Jean Valjean answered:

“No. Not yet.”

“So you brought him here from the barricade?” Javert said.

His distraction must indeed have been very deep, since he did not press him about this alarming escape through the sewer, and did not even notice that Jean Valjean gave no answer to his

question.

Jean Valjean, for his part, seemed to have only one thing on his mind. He went on:

“He lives in the Marais, on Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, with his grandfather. I do not remember his name.”

Jean Valjean felt through Marius’s coat, took out his pocketbook, opened it to the page where Marius had written in pencil, and held it out to Javert.

There was still enough light to read by. Besides, Javert’s eyes had the catlike glow of a night bird’s. He made out the few lines Marius had written and muttered, “Gillenormand, Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, No. 6.”

Then he called out, “Coachman!”

The reader will remember that the hired carriage was waiting in case it was needed.

Javert kept Marius’s pocketbook.

A moment later, the carriage had come down the sloping path of the watering place and reached the shore. Marius was laid on the back seat, and Javert sat on the front seat beside Jean Valjean.

The door slammed, and the carriage quickly drove off, climbing the quays toward the Bastille.

They left the quays and entered the streets. The coachman, a dark shape on his box, urged on his thin horses with the whip. An icy silence filled the carriage. Marius sat motionless, his

body slumped in the corner, his head fallen onto his chest, his arms hanging, his legs stiff. He seemed to be waiting only for a coffin. Jean Valjean seemed made of shadow, and Javert of stone. In that carriage full of darkness, the inside turned deathly pale each time they passed a streetlamp, like a flash of lightning breaking at intervals. Chance had brought together, and seemed to be carrying face to face, three figures of tragic stillness: the corpse, the specter, and the statue.

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

At every jolt of the wheels over the paving stones, a drop of blood ran from Marius's hair.

Night had completely fallen by the time the carriage reached No. 6, Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire.

Javert got out first. He checked the number on the carriage gate with a quick glance, then lifted the heavy old-fashioned wrought-iron knocker, decorated with a he-goat and a satyr facing each other, and pounded it hard. The gate opened a little, and Javert pushed it wider. The porter appeared halfway, yawning, only half awake, with a candle in his hand.

Everyone in the house was asleep. In the Marais, people go to bed early, especially on days of revolt. This respectable old neighborhood, frightened by revolution, takes shelter in sleep, the way children, hearing the Bogeyman coming, quickly hide their heads under the covers.

Meanwhile, Jean Valjean and the coachman had taken Marius out of the carriage, with Jean Valjean holding him under the arms and the coachman supporting him under the knees.

As they carried Marius, Jean Valjean slipped his hand under the young man's badly torn clothes, felt his chest, and made sure that his heart was still beating. It was even beating a little less weakly, as if the motion of the carriage had brought back some

fresh spark of life.

Javert spoke to the porter in the tone of a government official addressing the porter of a suspicious person.

“Someone named Gillenormand?”

“Yes, here. What do you want with him?”

“His son has been brought back.”

“His son?” the porter said blankly.

“He is dead.”

Jean Valjean, standing behind Javert in his filthy, torn clothes, and at whom the porter was staring with some horror, shook his head to show that this was not true.

The porter seemed to understand neither Javert’s words nor Jean Valjean’s gesture.

Javert went on:

“He went to the barricade, and here he is.”

“To the barricade?” the porter cried.

“He got himself killed. Go wake his father.”

The porter did not move.

“Go on!” Javert repeated.

Then he added:

“There will be a funeral here tomorrow.”

In Javert's mind, the ordinary events of the public street were neatly sorted into fixed categories—the basis of vigilance and control. Every possibility had its own place. It was as though every possible event had been filed away in separate drawers, ready to be pulled out as needed: street noise, riot, carnival, funeral.

The porter did no more than wake Basque. Basque woke Nicolette, and Nicolette roused old Aunt Gillenormand.

As for the grandfather, they let him go on sleeping, thinking he would hear about it soon enough anyway.

They carried Marius up to the first floor without anyone else in the house noticing, and laid him on an old sofa in M. Gillenormand's antechamber. Basque went to fetch a doctor, and Nicolette opened the linen cupboards. At that moment, Jean Valjean felt Javert touch him on the shoulder. He understood, and went downstairs, with Javert following close behind.

The porter watched them leave just as he had watched them arrive, in a state of sleepy terror.

They got back into the carriage, and the coachman climbed up to his seat.

"Inspector Javert," said Jean, "grant me one more favor."

"What is it?" Javert asked roughly.

"Let me go home for just a moment. After that, you may do whatever you please with me."

Javert was silent for a few moments, his chin drawn down into the collar of his overcoat. Then he lowered the front window and said:

“Driver,” he said, “Rue de l’Homme Armé, No. 7.”

CHAPTER XI—A SHOCK TO THE ABSOLUTE

They did not speak again for the rest of the ride.

What did Jean Valjean want? To finish what he had started: to warn Cosette, tell her where Marius was, perhaps give her some other useful information, and, if he could, make certain final arrangements. As for himself, his own story was over. Javert had arrested him, and he had not resisted. Another man in the same situation might perhaps have had some vague thoughts about the rope Thénardier had given him, or about the bars of the first cell he would be locked in. But let us make this clear to the reader: after the Bishop, Jean Valjean had always felt a deep reluctance in the face of any violence, even violence directed at himself.

Suicide—that mysterious act of violence against the unknown, which may in some measure involve the death of the soul—was impossible for Jean Valjean.

At the entrance to the Rue de l'Homme Armé, the carriage stopped, because the street was too narrow for vehicles to go in. Javert and Jean Valjean got out.

The coachman respectfully pointed out to "monsieur l'Inspecteur" that the Utrecht velvet in his carriage was covered with the blood of the murdered man and with mud from the murderer. That was how he understood the matter. He added that he was owed compensation. At the same time, pulling his certificate book from his pocket, he asked the inspector if he

would kindly write him “a little attestation.”

Javert pushed aside the book the coachman was holding out and said:

“How much do you want, including the time you waited and the drive?”

“That makes seven hours and a quarter,” the man replied, “and my velvet was perfectly new. Eighty francs, Mr. Inspector.”

Javert took four napoleons from his pocket and sent the carriage away.

Jean Valjean thought that Javert meant to take him on foot to the post at the Blancs-Manteaux or the post at the Archives, both of which were nearby.

They went into the street. As usual, it was deserted. Javert walked behind Jean Valjean. They reached No. 7. Jean Valjean knocked. The door opened.

“Good,” said Javert. “Go upstairs.”

Then he added, with a strange expression, as if speaking this way took effort:

“I’ll wait for you here.”

Jean Valjean looked at Javert. This way of doing things was very unlike Javert. Still, he was not too surprised that Javert now seemed to have a kind of proud confidence in him—the confidence of a cat that lets the mouse roam as far as its claws—since Jean Valjean had decided to give himself up and put an end to it. He opened the door, went into the house, called

to the porter, who was in bed and had pulled the bell-cord from his couch, “It’s me!” and went upstairs.

When he reached the first floor, he stopped. Every road of sorrow has its stopping places. The window on the landing was open; it was a sash window. As in many old houses, the staircase was lit from outside and looked out onto the street. The streetlamp directly opposite threw some light onto the stairs, saving the house the need for more lighting.

Jean Valjean, either to get some air or simply by instinct, put his head out of the window. He leaned over the street. It was short, and the lamp lit it from one end to the other. Jean Valjean was stunned with amazement: no one was there any longer.

Javert was gone.

CHAPTER XII—THE GRANDFATHER

Basque and the porter had carried Marius into the drawing room, where he still lay stretched out and motionless on the sofa where they had placed him when he arrived. The doctor who had been sent for had hurried there. Aunt Gillenormand was up.

Aunt Gillenormand rushed back and forth in terror, wringing her hands and able to do nothing but cry, “Heavens! Can it be possible?” Now and then she added, “Everything will be covered in blood.” Once her first shock began to fade, she started to see a kind of grim logic in what had happened, and that thought came out as: “It was bound to end this way!” She did not go so far as to say, “I told you so!” as people often do in such moments. On the doctor’s orders, a camp bed was set up beside the sofa. The doctor examined Marius and found that his pulse was still beating, that the wound in his chest was not very deep, and that the blood at the corners of his mouth had come from his nose. He then had him laid flat on the bed, without a pillow, with his head level with the rest of his body, or even slightly lower, and with his chest uncovered to make breathing easier. When Mademoiselle Gillenormand saw that they were undressing Marius, she withdrew. She went to her own room and began to say her prayers with her rosary.

His torso had suffered no internal injury. A bullet, slowed by the pocketbook, had glanced aside and traveled around his ribs, leaving a dreadful tear that was not very deep and therefore not

dangerous. The long journey underground had worsened the displacement of his broken collarbone, and that injury was serious. His arms had been cut by saber blows. Not a single scar marked his face, but his head was covered with wounds. What would come of those injuries to the head? Had they stopped at the scalp, or had they reached the brain? It was still impossible to tell. One serious sign was that they had caused him to faint, and people do not always recover from such fainting spells. Besides that, the wounded man had been drained by loss of blood. From the waist down, the barricade had shielded the lower part of his body from harm.

Basque and Nicolette tore up linen and made bandages; Nicolette stitched them, and Basque rolled them. Since there was no lint, the doctor used layers of cotton wool for the moment to stop the bleeding. Beside the bed, three candles burned on a table where the surgical instruments had been laid out. The doctor washed Marius's face and hair with cold water. A full pail turned red almost at once. The porter stood by with a candle to give them light.

The doctor seemed to be thinking sadly. Every so often, he shook his head, as if answering some question he had silently asked himself.

When a doctor has these silent conversations with himself, it is a bad sign for the patient.

Just as the doctor was wiping Marius's face and lightly touching his still-closed eyes with his finger, a door opened at the far end of the drawing-room, and a tall, pale figure appeared.

It was the grandfather.

For the past two days, the uprising had deeply disturbed, angered, and consumed M. Gillenormand's thoughts. He had been unable to sleep the night before, and he had been feverish all day. That evening he had gone to bed very early, after ordering that everything in the house be securely fastened, and sheer exhaustion had finally lulled him into a light sleep.

Old men sleep lightly. M. Gillenormand's room was next to the drawing-room, and despite all the precautions that had been taken, the noise woke him. Startled by the strip of light he saw under his door, he got out of bed and felt his way toward it.

He stood astonished on the threshold, one hand on the handle of the half-open door, his head bent slightly forward and trembling. His body was wrapped in a white dressing-gown, straight and without folds, like a shroud. He looked like a ghost staring into a tomb.

He saw the bed, and on the mattress the young man, bleeding, white with a waxy whiteness, his eyes closed and his mouth open, his lips pale, stripped to the waist, gashed everywhere with crimson wounds, motionless and brightly lit.

The grandfather trembled from head to foot, as much as stiff old limbs could tremble. His eyes, whose corneas had turned yellow with age, were clouded with a glassy shine. In an instant, his whole face took on the hollow, earthy lines of a skull. His arms dropped limp, as if some spring inside him had snapped, and his shock showed in the way the fingers of both his aged hands spread apart and shook. His knees bent inward, and

through the opening of his dressing-gown one could see his poor bare legs, bristling with white hair. He murmured:

“Marius!”

“Sir,” said Basque, “Monsieur has just been brought back. He went to the barricade, and....”

“He’s dead!” the old man cried in a dreadful voice. “Ah, the wretch!”

Then a kind of deathly change came over the hundred-year-old man, and he drew himself up as straight as a young man.

“Sir,” he said, “you are the doctor. First, tell me one thing. He is dead, isn’t he?”

The doctor, at the height of his anxiety, said nothing.

M. Gillenormand wrung his hands and burst into terrible laughter.

“He is dead! He is dead! He is dead! He got himself killed on the barricades! Out of hatred for me! He did it to spite me! Ah, you blood-drinker! So this is how he comes back to me! Misery of my life, he is dead!”

He went to the window and flung it wide open, as if he were suffocating. Then he stood upright before the darkness and began speaking out into the street, into the night:

“Shot through, cut down, wiped out, slashed, hacked to pieces! Just look at that, the scoundrel! He knew perfectly well that I was waiting for him, that I had his room made ready, and that I had put at the head of my bed his portrait taken when he was a little child! He knew perfectly well that all he had to do was come back, and that I had been calling him back for years, and that I sat by my fireside with my hands on my knees, not knowing what to do, half mad with it! You knew perfectly well that all you had to do was come back and say, ‘It is I,’ and you would have been master of the house, and I would have obeyed you, and you could have done whatever you liked with your old fool of a grandfather! You knew that perfectly well, and you said:

“No, he is a Royalist, I will not go!’ And you went to the barricades, and got yourself killed out of spite! To take revenge for what I said to you about Monsieur le Duc de Berry. It is

monstrous! Go to bed then and sleep peacefully! He is dead, and this is how I wake."

The doctor, now beginning to worry on both sides, left Marius for a moment, went over to M. Gillenormand, and took him by the arm. The grandfather turned, looked at him with eyes that seemed unnaturally large and bloodshot, and said calmly:

"Thank you, sir. I am calm. I am a man. I saw Louis XVI die. I know how to endure what happens. But one thing is terrible: to think that your newspapers are the cause of all this harm. You will have scribblers, gossips, lawyers, orators, tribunes, debates, progress, enlightenment, the rights of man, freedom of the press—and this is how your children will be brought back to you. Ah, Marius! It is monstrous! Killed! Dead before my eyes! A barricade! Ah, the wretch! Doctor, you live in this neighborhood, I believe? Oh, yes, I know you well. I see your cabriolet pass my window. I will tell you this: you are wrong to think I am angry. One does not rage against a dead man. That would be foolish. This is a child I raised. I was already old when he was still very young. He used to play in the Tuileries garden with his little shovel and his little chair, and so the inspectors would not complain, I filled in the holes he dug in the ground with my cane. One day he cried, 'Down with Louis XVIII!' and off he went. That was not my doing. He was rosy and fair-haired. His mother is dead. Have you ever noticed that all little children are blond? Why is that? 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 taller than that. He could not pronounce his Ds. He had such a sweet, blurred way of speaking that you would

have thought a bird was chirping. I remember that once, in front of the Hercules Farnese, people gathered around to admire him and marvel at him, he was so beautiful, that child! He had the kind of head you see in paintings. I spoke in a deep voice and threatened him with my cane, but he knew perfectly well it was only to make him laugh. In the morning, when he came into my room, I would grumble, but he was still like sunlight to me. You cannot defend yourself against those little rascals. They get hold of you, they keep hold of you, and they never let you go. The truth is, there was never a cupid like that child. And now what do you have to say for your Lafayettes, your Benjamin Constants, and your Tirecuir de Corcelles, who have killed him? This cannot be allowed to pass like this."

He went over to Marius, who still lay pale and motionless, while the doctor remained beside him, and once again began wringing his hands. The old man's bloodless lips moved almost mechanically, letting out words that were barely audible, like breaths from someone in the throes of death:

"Ah! Heartless boy! Ah! Club man! Ah! Wretch! Ah! Septembrist!"

They were reproaches, spoken in the faint voice of a dying man and addressed to a corpse.

Little by little, as buried feelings must always come to the surface, his words began to return. But the grandfather no longer seemed to have the strength to speak them. His voice was so weak and faded that it seemed to rise from the far side of an abyss:

“It’s all the same to me. I’m going to die too, I know I am. And just think—there isn’t a hussy in Paris who wouldn’t have been thrilled to make this miserable boy happy! A scoundrel who, instead of enjoying himself and living his life, went off to fight and got himself shot down like an animal! And for whom? For what? For the Republic! Instead of going dancing at the Chaumière, which is what young people ought to be doing! What’s the point of being twenty years old? The Republic—what a damned piece of nonsense! Poor mothers, go on, bear fine sons! There, he’s dead. That makes two funerals going out under the same carriage gate. So this is what you’ve done to yourself for the sake of General Lamarque’s handsome eyes! What had General Lamarque ever done for you? A swordsman! A windbag! To get yourself killed for a dead man! Isn’t that enough to drive anyone mad? Just think of it! At twenty! And without even turning your head to see whether you were leaving anything behind! That’s how poor, good old men are made to die alone nowadays. Die in your corner, you owl! Well, after all, so much the better—that’s what I was hoping for. This will kill me on the spot. I’m too old. I’m a hundred years old, a hundred thousand years old. I should have been dead long ago. This blow finishes it. So it’s all over—what happiness! What’s the use of making him breathe ammonia and all that pile of medicines? You’re wasting your time, you fool of a doctor! Come now, he’s dead, completely dead. I know all about it. I’m dead myself. He certainly didn’t do things by halves. 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 prophets, of your doctors, of your good-for-nothing writers, of your scoundrelly

philosophers, and of all the revolutions that for the last sixty years have been frightening the flocks of crows in the Tuileries! But it was cruel of you to get yourself killed like this. I won't even mourn you, do you hear, you murderer?"

At that moment, Marius slowly opened his eyes, and his gaze, still clouded with sleepy bewilderment, came to rest on M. Gillenormand.

"Marius!" cried the old man. "Marius! My little Marius! My child! My beloved son! Your eyes are open, you're looking at me, you're alive—thank God!"

And he fainted.

CHAPTER I

Javert moved slowly down the Rue de l'Homme Armé.

For the first time in his life, he walked with his head bowed and his hands clasped behind his back.

Until that day, Javert had copied only the poses of Napoleon that showed resolve: arms folded across the chest. The pose that suggested doubt—hands behind the back—was foreign to him. Now something had changed. His whole figure, slow and dark, was marked by anxiety.

He went on into the silent streets.

Even so, he kept to a fixed course.

He took the shortest way to the Seine, reached the Quai des Ormes, followed the quay, passed the Grève, and stopped some distance from the post at the Place du Châtelet, at the corner of the Pont Notre-Dame. There, between Notre-Dame and the Pont au Change on one side, and the Quai de la Mégisserie and the Quai aux Fleurs on the other, the Seine widens into a kind of square basin cut through by a swift current.

Boatmen feared this part of the Seine. Nothing was more dangerous than that current, confined there and, at that time, made even more violent by the piles of the mill on the bridge, which has since been demolished. The two bridges, standing so close together, increased the danger. The water rushed fiercely through the arches. It rolled in huge, terrible waves. It gathered and heaped itself up there. The flood struck at the bridge piles

as if trying to tear them out with great ropes of water. Men who fell in at that spot never came back up; even the strongest swimmers drowned there.

Javert leaned both elbows on the parapet and rested his chin in his hands. As his nails mechanically twisted through his thick whiskers, he thought.

Something new, something like a revolution, a disaster, had just taken place in the depths of his soul, and he had to examine himself in light of it.

Javert was enduring terrible suffering.

For several hours, Javert had stopped being simple and certain. He was deeply troubled. That mind, so clear in its blindness, was no longer transparent; the crystal had gone cloudy. In his conscience, duty itself felt divided, and he could not hide that from himself. When he had unexpectedly come upon Jean Valjean on the banks of the Seine, he had felt something of the wolf tightening its hold on its prey, and something of the dog finding its master again.

He saw two paths before him, both equally straight, yet there were two of them, and that terrified him—him, who in all his life had never known more than one straight line. And the sharpest pain was this: the two paths ran in opposite directions. One of those straight lines ruled out the other. Which one was the true path?

His situation was beyond description.

To owe his life to a criminal, to accept that debt and repay it; to find himself, against his will, on equal terms with a fugitive from justice, and to return one service with another; to let that man say to him, “Go,” and then to say in return, “Be free”; to sacrifice duty—that general obligation—to personal motives, while feeling that those personal motives also contained something universal, perhaps even something higher; to betray society in order to remain faithful to his conscience—all these contradictions had become real and had piled up on him. That was what crushed him.

One thing had astonished him: that Jean Valjean had done him a kindness. And one thing had frozen him in shock: that he, Javert, had done Jean Valjean a kindness.

Where did he stand? He tried to understand his position, but he could no longer find his way.

What was he supposed to do now? To hand Jean Valjean over was wrong; to leave Jean Valjean free was wrong. In the first case, the man of authority sank lower than the galley convict. In the second, a convict rose above the law and trampled it underfoot. In either case, Javert was dishonored. Whatever decision he made, disgrace lay in it. Destiny has certain edges that rise straight up out of the impossible, beyond which life becomes nothing but a cliff. Javert had reached one of those edges.

One of his deepest anxieties was being forced to think. The sheer force of all these clashing emotions drove him to it. Thinking was something he was not used to, and it caused him

particular pain.

Thought always carries a certain kind of inner rebellion, and it angered him to feel that rebellion inside himself.

For him, thinking about anything outside the narrow limits of his official duties would in any case have been useless and exhausting. Thinking about the day that had just passed was torture. And yet, after such shocks, he had to examine his conscience and give himself an account of himself.

What he had just done made him shudder. He, Javert, had chosen to order a man's release in defiance of all police regulations, the whole social and judicial order, and the entire code. It had pleased him to do so. He had put his own concerns in place of the public's. Was that not inexcusable? Whenever he forced himself to face this nameless act he had committed, he trembled from head to foot. What was he to decide? Only one course seemed left: to hurry back to the Rue de l'Homme Armé and send Jean Valjean to prison. Clearly, that was what he ought to do. He could not.

Something blocked him from going that way.

Something? What? Could there really be anything in the world outside the courts, enforced sentences, the police, and authority? Javert was overwhelmed.

A galley-slave made sacred! A convict whom the law could not touch! And this by Javert's own doing!

Was it not terrifying that Javert and Jean Valjean—the man made to act with force and the man made to submit—these two

men, both creatures of the law, had come to this point, where both had placed themselves above it? What then? Such monstrous things were to happen, and no one was to be punished? Jean Valjean, stronger than the whole social order, was to remain free, while he, Javert, was to go on living on the government's pay?

His brooding gradually turned terrible.

In the middle of this troubled reflection, he might also have blamed himself for what had happened to the insurgent taken to the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire. But he did not think of that at all. The smaller wrong disappeared before the greater one. Besides, that insurgent was plainly a dead man, and in the eyes of the law, death ends all pursuit.

Jean Valjean was the burden pressing on his soul.

Jean Valjean threw him into confusion. Every principle that had supported him throughout his life collapsed in the presence of this man. Jean Valjean's generosity toward him—Javert—overwhelmed him. Other things he now remembered, which he had once dismissed as lies or foolishness, came back to him as undeniable truths. M. Madeleine appeared again behind Jean Valjean, and the two figures merged until they became one, and that one was worthy of reverence. Javert felt something terrible entering his soul: admiration for a convict. Respect for a galley-slave—could such a thing be possible? He recoiled from it, yet he could not free himself from it. However hard he struggled, he was forced to admit, in the deepest part of his heart, the greatness of that

wretch. It was hateful.

A criminal who was kind, merciful, gentle, helpful, forgiving; a convict who returned good for evil, answered hatred with pardon, chose pity over vengeance, chose to destroy himself rather than destroy his enemy, saved the man who had struck him, and stood on such heights of virtue that he seemed closer to an angel than to a man. Javert was forced to admit to himself that this monster existed.

Things could not continue like this.

Certainly—and we must insist on this—he had not surrendered to that monster, that infamous angel, that terrifying hero, without a struggle. Jean Valjean filled him with almost as much fury as astonishment. Twenty times, sitting across from him in that carriage, the law's tiger had roared inside Javert. Again and again he had been tempted to throw himself at Jean Valjean, seize him, and devour him—that is, arrest him. What could have been simpler? At the first post they passed, he could have cried out, "Here is a fugitive from justice who has broken his ban!" He could have called the gendarmes and said, "This man is yours!" Then he could have gone on his way, leaving the condemned man there, refusing to concern himself with anything else. This man belonged forever to the law; the law could do with him as it pleased. What could have been more just? Javert had said all this to himself. He had wanted to go through with it, to act, to seize the man. And yet, just as now, he had been unable to do it. Every time his arm jerked upward toward Jean Valjean's collar, his hand dropped back again, as if crushed by some enormous weight. And deep in his mind he heard a voice—a strange

voice—crying out to him: “Very well. Hand over your savior. Then bring for yourself the basin of Pontius Pilate and wash your claws.”

Then his thoughts turned back to himself, and beside the glorified Jean Valjean he saw himself—Javert—brought low.

A convict had been his benefactor!

But then why had he allowed that man to let him live? He had had the right to die on that barricade. He should have claimed that right. It would have been better to call the other insurgents to help him against Jean Valjean, to force them to shoot him.

What tormented him most was the loss of certainty. He felt uprooted. The code was no longer anything but a broken stick in his hand. He now had to face scruples of a kind he had never known. Something emotional had awakened in him, completely separate from the legal certainty that had always been his only measure. Simply remaining as upright as he had been before was no longer enough. A whole chain of unexpected truths had appeared and taken hold of him. A new world was opening in his soul: kindness given and returned, devotion, mercy, leniency, pity forcing its way through severity, respect for the individual, no final condemnation, no absolute judgment, the possibility of tears in the eyes of the law, some mysterious justice of God running opposite to the justice of men. In the darkness, he saw the terrible rise of an unknown moral sun. It filled him with horror even as it dazzled him. Like an owl made to stare into the eyes of an eagle.

He told himself that exceptional cases did exist; that authority could be shaken; that a rule might fail when faced with a fact; that not everything could be contained within the written code; that the unforeseen demanded to be obeyed; that the virtue of a convict might trap the virtue of an officer; that destiny did indeed lay such ambushes; and he reflected in despair that he himself had not even been prepared against surprise.

He was forced to admit that goodness did exist. This convict had been good. And he himself—an unheard-of thing—had just been good as well. So, in his own eyes, he was becoming corrupt.

He discovered that he was a coward. He felt horror at himself.

Javert's ideal was not to be human, or great, or sublime. It was to be beyond reproach.

And now he had just failed in that.

How had he come to this? How had it all happened? He could not have said. He gripped his head in both hands, but whatever he did, he could not make himself understand it.

He had always meant to return Jean Valjean to the law that held Jean Valjean prisoner and that he, Javert, served as a slave. Not for a moment, while he had Valjean in his power, had he admitted to himself that he might let him go. Somehow, without fully realizing it, his grip had loosened and he had set him free.

A storm of questions flashed before his eyes. He questioned himself and answered himself, and his own answers terrified him. He asked: "What has that convict done—that desperate

man whom I hunted almost to the point of persecution, who had me under his foot, who could have taken revenge, and who had every reason, both from hatred and for his own safety, to spare my life and show me mercy? Was it his duty? No. It was something more. And when I, in turn, showed mercy to him, what did I do? My duty? No. Something more. Then is there something beyond duty?" At that thought, he was seized with fear. His inner balance broke apart. One scale dropped into the abyss; the other rose toward heaven, and Javert was just as terrified by what was above as by what was below. He was not in any sense what people call a follower of Voltaire, or a philosopher, or an unbeliever. On the contrary, by instinct he respected the established Church, but only as a majestic part of the social order. Order was his creed, and it was enough for him. Ever since he had become a man and an official, he had placed almost all his religion in the police. He was—using the words with complete seriousness and no irony, as we have said—a spy in the way other men are priests. He had a superior, M. Gisquet. Until that day, he had never imagined another superior: God.

Now he suddenly became aware of this new chief, God, and he felt uneasy in His presence. This unexpected authority threw him completely off balance. He did not know how to deal with such a superior. He knew very well that a subordinate must always bow, must not disobey, criticize, or argue, and that when a superior overwhelms him too completely, the only thing left for the inferior to do is resign.

But how was he supposed to resign from God?

However matters stood—and he kept coming back to this point—one fact outweighed everything else for him: he had just committed a terrible violation of the law. He had just closed his eyes to an escaped convict who had broken the terms of his release. He had just set a galley-slave free. He had just taken from the law a man who belonged to it. That was what he had done. He no longer understood himself. Even the reasons for what he had done slipped away from him; all that remained was the dizzying shock of it. Until that moment, he had lived by the blind faith that stern integrity can produce. That faith had left him; that integrity had abandoned him. Everything he had believed in was melting away. Truths he did not want to face were pressing in on him relentlessly. From now on, he would have to be a different man. He was suffering the strange pain of a conscience suddenly operated on, as though cataracts had been removed from its eyes. He saw what he could hardly bear to see. He felt hollowed out, useless, disconnected from his whole past life, cast aside, undone. Authority was dead within him. He no longer had any reason to exist.

A terrible state to be in—to be shaken like this.

To be granite and yet begin to doubt! To be the very statue of Punishment, cast in a single piece from the mold of the law, and then suddenly realize that beneath that bronze chest one carries something absurd and rebellious that almost looks like a heart! To find oneself returning good for good, after telling oneself all one's life that such goodness was evil! To be the watchdog, and then lick the intruder's hand! To be ice and melt! To be the pincers and become a hand! To suddenly feel one's

fingers opening! To loosen one's grip—what a terrible thing!

The human projectile no longer knew its course and was falling back!

To be forced to admit this to oneself: infallibility is not infallible; error may exist within doctrine; a code does not say the final word; society is not perfect; authority is mixed with uncertainty; even the unchangeable may crack; judges are only men; the law can be wrong; courts can make mistakes! To see a split in the vast blue pane of the sky!

What was happening inside Javert was like the Fampoux disaster of a conscience that had always run in a straight line: the derailment of a soul, the shattering of an integrity that had been driven irresistibly forward until it crashed against God. It was a strange thing indeed—that the fireman of order, the engineer of authority, riding the blind iron horse along its rigid track, could be thrown off by a flash of light; that what was fixed, direct, correct, geometric, passive, and perfect could bend; that even this locomotive could have its road to Damascus.

God is always present within a person, resisting the false conscience as the true one. He forbids the spark from going out. He commands the ray to remember the sun. He orders the soul to recognize the real absolute when it stands before a false one: humanity, which cannot be lost; the human heart, which cannot be destroyed. This splendid phenomenon—perhaps the finest of all our inner wonders—did Javert understand it? Did he grasp it? Could he explain it to himself? Clearly, he could not.

But under the pressure of that undeniable mystery, he felt as though his brain were splitting apart.

He was not so much a man transformed as a man overwhelmed by a miracle. In all of this, he saw only the terrible difficulty of living. It seemed to him that from now on he would never breathe freely again. He was not used to having something unknown hanging over him.

Until now, everything above him had seemed to him like a smooth, clear, simple surface. There had been nothing incomprehensible, nothing obscure; nothing undefined, badly arranged, disconnected, vague, or open-ended. Everything was precise, bounded, exact, limited, closed, and fully accounted for. Authority was a flat surface. There was no drop in it, no vertigo in facing it. Javert had never seen the unknown except below him. Irregularity, the unforeseen, the chaotic opening of disorder, the possibility of slipping over a precipice—those belonged to the lower depths, to rebels, the wicked, and the miserable. But now Javert recoiled, and for the first time he was terrified by an unprecedented sight: an abyss above.

What! Everything had been torn apart from top to bottom! Everything had been thrown into confusion, completely! What could anyone trust now? What had been settled was collapsing! What! A noble-hearted wretch could expose a flaw in society's armor! What! A loyal servant of the law could suddenly find himself trapped between two crimes—the crime of letting a man escape and the crime of arresting him! So the orders the State gave its officials did not settle everything after all! Duty could lead into dead ends! What—was all this real? Could it be true

that a former ruffian, burdened by convictions, could stand upright and end up in the right? Was that believable? Could there be cases where the law had to step aside before a crime transformed, and mutter its excuses? Yes, that was the truth of it. Javert saw it. Javert had touched it. And not only could he not deny it, he had taken part in it. These were facts. It was monstrous that facts could become so distorted. If facts did their duty, they would simply serve as proof of the law; facts are sent by God. Was anarchy, then, about to descend from above?

Could this be endured? No.

It was a violent inner crisis, if ever there was one. There were only two ways out of it. One was to go straight to Jean Valjean and send the galley convict back to his cell. The other....

Javert left the parapet and, this time with his head held high, walked firmly toward the police station marked by a lantern at one corner of the Place du Châtelet.

When he arrived, he saw a police sergeant through the window and went in. Policemen recognize one another by the way they open the door of a station house. Javert gave his name, showed his card to the sergeant, and sat down at the desk where a candle was burning. On the table were a pen, a lead inkstand, and paper, kept ready for possible reports and the orders of the night patrols. That table, with its straw-bottomed chair, is an institution. It exists in every police station. It is always furnished with a little boxwood saucer full of sawdust and a cardboard wafer box filled with red wafers. It is the first rung of official writing. There the literature of the State begins.

Javert took up 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.

“First: I beg Monsieur le Préfet to take notice of this.

“Second: after examination, prisoners remove their shoes and stand barefoot on the stone floor while they are searched. Many of them come back to prison coughing. This leads to hospital expenses.

“Third: the method of tracking a man by using relays of police agents posted at intervals is good. But on important occasions, at least two agents should remain constantly in sight of each other, so that if one agent, for any reason, becomes weak in the performance of his duty, the other can watch him and take his place.

“Fourth: it is hard to understand why the special regulation of the prison of the Madelonettes forbids a prisoner to have a chair, even if he pays for it.

“Fifth: in the Madelonettes, there are only two bars at the canteen window, so the canteen woman can touch the prisoners with her hand.

“Sixth: the prisoners known as barkers, who call the other prisoners to the visiting room, make a prisoner pay them two sous if he wants his name called clearly. This is theft.

“Seventh: in the weaving shop, ten sous are deducted for a broken thread. This is an abuse by the contractor, since the cloth is not damaged by it.

“Eighth: it is inconvenient for visitors to La Force to have to pass through the boys’ yard in order to reach the parlor of Sainte-Marie-l’Égyptienne.

“Ninth: it is a fact that, on any day, gendarmes can be heard in the prefecture courtyard repeating the questions magistrates have put to prisoners. For a gendarme, who ought to be bound to secrecy, to repeat what he has heard in the examination room is a serious abuse.

“Tenth: Mme. Henry is an honest woman, and her canteen is very clean; but it is wrong to have a woman keep the wicket of the mouse-trap of the secret cells. This is beneath the Conciergerie of a great civilization.”

Javert wrote these lines in his calmest, most precise handwriting. He did not leave out a single comma, and his pen made the paper screech. Beneath the last line he signed:

“Javert,

“Inspector, 1st class.

“Post of the Place du Châtelet.

“June 7, 1832, at about one o’clock in the morning.”

Javert dried the fresh ink, folded the paper like a letter, sealed it, and wrote on the back, _Note for the administration_. He left it on the table and went out of the post. The glazed, barred door shut behind him.

Once again he crossed the Place du Châtelet diagonally, reached the quay, and returned with mechanical precision to the exact spot he had left a quarter of an hour earlier. He leaned on his elbows and found himself once more in the same position, on the same paving stone of the parapet. He seemed not to have moved at all.

The darkness was complete. It was that tomb-like hour after midnight. A ceiling of clouds hid the stars. Not a single light burned in the houses of the city. No one passed by. All the streets and quays in view were empty. Notre-Dame and the towers of the Court-House seemed like features of the night itself. A streetlamp cast a red glow along the edge of the quay. In the mist, the bridges stretched one behind another, their outlines formless. The recent rains had swollen the river.

The place where Javert was leaning, as the reader may remember, was directly above the rapids of the Seine, right over that terrible spiral of whirlpools that loosened and tightened

again like an endless screw.

Javert lowered his head and looked down. Everything was black. Nothing could be made out. He could hear the sound of foam, but he could not see the river. At times, in that dizzying depth, a glimmer of light appeared and moved vaguely; water has the strange power to catch light from no one knows where and turn it into something like a snake. Then the light disappeared, and everything became blurred again. It seemed as though immensity had opened there. What lay below was not water but an abyss. The wall of the quay, steep and indistinct, blending with the mist and instantly lost from sight, looked like the edge of infinity. Nothing could be seen, but he could feel the hostile cold of the water and smell the stale odor of the wet stones. A harsh breath rose from that gulf. The swollen river, sensed more than seen, the tragic whisper of the waves, the melancholy vastness of the bridge arches, the imagined plunge into that dark void, into all that shadow, filled the place with horror.

Javert stood motionless for several minutes, staring into that opening of darkness. He studied the invisible with an intensity that looked like concentration. The water roared. Suddenly he took off his hat and set it on the edge of the quay. A moment later, a tall black figure, which some late passerby in the distance might have mistaken for a phantom, appeared standing upright on the parapet of the quay. It bent toward the Seine, then straightened, and dropped straight down into the darkness. A dull splash followed, and only the shadows knew what convulsions shook that dim form after it vanished beneath the

water.

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

Some time after the events we have just described, Sieur Boulatruelle went through a strong surge of emotion.

Sieur Boulatruelle was the road-mender of Montfermeil whom the reader has already encountered in the darker parts of this book.

Boulatruelle, as the reader may perhaps remember, was a man involved in various troublesome pursuits. He broke stones and preyed on travelers along the highway.

Though he was both a road-mender and a thief, he held on to one dream: he believed treasure was buried in the forest of Montfermeil. He hoped that one day he would find money hidden in the ground at the foot of a tree. Until then, he made his living searching the pockets of passers-by.

Even so, for a moment he was cautious. He had just made a narrow escape. As the reader knows, he had been arrested in Jondrette's garret along with the other ruffians. Here was one use of a vice: his drunkenness had saved him. The authorities had never been able to decide whether he had been there as a robber or as a man who had been robbed. A _nolle prosequi_, based on well-proven evidence that he had been drunk on the evening of the ambush, had set him free. He had fled. He returned to his stretch of road from Gagny to Lagny, where,

under administrative supervision, he broke stones for the good of the state. He did it with lowered eyes and in a deeply thoughtful mood, his eagerness for theft somewhat cooled. But he remained just as devoted as ever to the wine that had so recently saved him.

As for the sharp emotion he felt shortly after returning to his turf-thatched road-mender's hut, this is what happened:

One morning, as Boulatruelle was on his way, as usual, to his work—and perhaps also to his ambush—a little before daybreak, he caught sight of a man through the branches of the trees. He saw only the man's back, but the shape of his shoulders, at least from that distance and in the dim early light, seemed oddly familiar. Boulatruelle, though often drunk, had an accurate and clear memory, a defensive weapon indispensable to anyone who lives in even the slightest conflict with the law.

"Where the devil have I seen someone built like that man over there?" he said to himself. But he could come up with no answer, except that the man resembled someone his memory held only as a vague trace.

Still, even though he had not been able to identify the man, Boulatruelle pieced things together and worked it out. The fellow was not from that area. He had only just arrived. He was clearly on foot. No public carriage passed through Montfermeil at that hour. He must have walked all night. Where had he come from? Not from very far, since he carried neither knapsack nor bundle. From Paris, most likely. Why was he in those woods? Why was he there at that hour? What had brought him there?

Boulatruelle thought of the treasure. As he searched his memory, he vaguely recalled that many years earlier he had felt a similar uneasiness about a man who had struck him as possibly being this very same person.

“By heaven,” said Boulatruelle, “I’ll find him again. I’ll find out where that churchgoer comes from. This Patron-Minette prowler has a reason for being here, and I mean to know it. No one gets to keep secrets in my forest without my having a hand in it.”

He took up his pickaxe, which had a very sharp point.

“There now,” he muttered, “here’s something that can dig into the earth—and into a man as well.”

Then, as one ties one thread to another, he picked up the trail again, moving as fast as he could in the direction the man must have taken, and pushed on through the thickets.

After he had gone about a hundred paces, the growing daylight helped him. Footprints pressed into the sand, weeds trampled here and there, heather crushed, and young branches in the underbrush bent over and slowly springing back again—with the graceful slowness of a pretty woman stretching her arms when she wakes—showed him a kind of path. He followed it, then lost it. Time was passing quickly. He went deeper into the woods and reached a sort of rise. The sight of an early hunter in the distance, walking along a path and whistling the tune of Guillery, gave him the idea of climbing a tree. Old as he was, he was still agile. Nearby stood a great beech tree, worthy of Tityrus and of Boulatruelle. Boulatruelle climbed the beech as

high as he could.

It was a good idea. As he scanned the lonely stretch on the side where the forest grew thickest and wildest, Boulatruelle suddenly caught sight of his man.

He had barely caught sight of the man before he lost him again.

The man stepped—or rather glided—into an open clearing some distance away, partly hidden by large trees, but one Boulatruelle knew perfectly well. He recognized it because, near a large heap of porous stones, there stood a sickly chestnut tree wrapped with a sheet of zinc nailed straight onto the bark. This clearing was the place once called the Blaru-bottom. The pile of stones, meant for some purpose no one ever knew, which could be seen there thirty years ago, is no doubt still there. Nothing lasts like a heap of stones, unless it is a wooden fence. They are makeshift things. What a reason for enduring!

With the speed that joy gives, Boulatruelle dropped from the tree rather than climbed down. The hiding place had been found; now the thing was to catch the beast. That famous treasure from his dreams was probably there.

Reaching that clearing was no easy matter. By the worn paths, which wandered in a thousand annoying twists, it took a good quarter of an hour. In a straight line through the underbrush—which in that area was especially thick, thorny, and hostile—it took a full half hour. Boulatruelle made the mistake of not understanding this. He believed in the straight line, a respectable optical illusion that has ruined many a man. The bristling thicket seemed to him the best route.

“Let’s take the wolves’ Rue de Rivoli,” he said.

Boulatruelle, who was used to taking crooked paths, made the mistake this time of going straight.

He threw himself resolutely into the tangled undergrowth.

He had to fight his way through holly, nettles, hawthorn, eglantine, thistles, and extremely ill-tempered brambles. He was badly torn up.

At the bottom of the ravine he came upon water, which he had to cross.

At last, after forty minutes, he reached the Blaru-bottom, sweating, soaked, out of breath, scratched, and furious.

There was no one in the clearing. Boulatruelle rushed to the heap of stones. It was still there. No one had carried it off.

As for the man, he had disappeared into the forest. He had escaped. Where? In what direction? Into what thicket? There was no way to guess.

And, heartbreaking as it is to say, there behind the pile of stones, in front of the tree with the sheet of zinc, was freshly turned earth, a pickaxe left behind or forgotten, and a hole.

The hole was empty.

“Thief!” Boulatruelle shrieked, shaking his fist at the horizon.

CHAPTER II—MARIUS, EMERGING FROM CIVIL WAR, PREPARES FOR DOMESTIC WAR

For a long time, Marius hovered between life and death. For many weeks he lay in a fever, delirious and suffering from fairly serious symptoms affecting the brain, caused less by the wounds themselves than by the shock of the blows to his head.

All through the night he repeated Cosette's name, with the sad, endless talk of fever and the dark stubbornness of a man in agony. Some of his injuries were serious enough to be dangerous. When large wounds suppurate, the matter can always be reabsorbed and, under certain weather conditions, kill the patient. At every change in the weather, at the slightest storm, the doctor grew anxious.

"Above all," he kept saying, "the wounded man must not be subjected to any emotional shock." Dressing the wounds was complicated and difficult, since adhesive materials for securing splints and bandages had not yet been invented at that time. Nicolette used up a sheet "as big as the ceiling," as she said, making lint. The chlorinated lotions and the nitrate of silver overcame the gangrene, but not without difficulty. As long as there was still danger, M. Gillenormand sat in despair beside his grandson's bed and, like Marius, seemed neither alive nor dead.

Every day, and sometimes twice a day, a very well-dressed white-haired gentleman—the porter described him this way—came to ask about the wounded man and left a large bundle of lint for the dressings.

At last, on the 7th of September, exactly four months after the sorrowful night when he had been brought back to his grandfather at the point of death, the doctor declared that he would answer for Marius's recovery. His convalescence began. But because of the effects of his broken collarbone, Marius had to remain stretched out on a long chair for two more months. There is always one last wound of that kind that refuses to close and drags out the dressings indefinitely, to the great annoyance of the patient.

But this long illness and slow recovery saved him from any pursuit. In France, even public anger dies out within six months. In the current state of society, revolts are so much everyone's fault that they are followed by a kind of necessity to look the other way.

Let us add that Gisquet's indefensible order, which instructed doctors to report the wounded, had outraged public opinion—not only public opinion, but the King first of all. Because of that indignation, the wounded were shielded and protected. Except for those who had been captured in the middle of the fighting, the military tribunals did not dare bother anyone. So Marius was left in peace.

M. Gillenormand first went through every kind of anguish, and then every kind of joy. It was hard to keep him from spending

every night beside the wounded man. He had his large armchair brought to Marius' bedside, and he insisted that his daughter use the finest linen in the house for compresses and bandages. Mademoiselle Gillenormand, with the practical wisdom of an elderly woman, managed to save the fine linen while letting the grandfather believe he was being obeyed. M. Gillenormand would not allow anyone to explain that batiste is far inferior to coarse linen for making lint, and that new linen is not nearly as good as old. He attended every dressing of the wounds, from which Mademoiselle Gillenormand modestly stayed away. When dead flesh was cut away with scissors, he cried, "Aïe! aïe!" Nothing was more touching than the sight of him, with his gentle old man's tremor, offering the wounded man a cup of his cooling drink. He overwhelmed the doctor with questions. He did not notice that he kept asking the same ones again and again.

On the day the doctor told him that Marius was out of danger, the good old man was beside himself with joy. He gave his porter three louis. That evening, when he returned to his own room, he danced a gavotte, snapping his thumb and forefinger like castanets, and sang the following song:

"Jeanne was born at Fougère. Love, you live in her, a true shepherdess's nest; for it is in her eyes that you place your quiver. I adore her petticoat, you rogue, you tease!

"I sing of her, and I love, more than Diana herself, Jeanne and her firm Breton breasts."61

Then he knelt on a chair, and Basque, watching through the half-open door, was sure he was praying.

Until then, he had not believed in God.

With each new stage of recovery, as the improvement grew more and more obvious, the grandfather became almost delirious with excitement. He busied himself with all sorts of pointless little actions, overflowing with joy. He went up and down the stairs without knowing why. One morning, a pretty neighbor was astonished to receive a large bouquet; M. Gillenormand had sent it to her. Her husband reacted with jealous anger. M. Gillenormand tried to pull Nicolette onto his knees. He called Marius "M. le Baron." He shouted, "Long live the Republic!"

Every moment, he kept asking the doctor, "Is he out of danger now?" He looked at Marius with a grandmother's eyes. He watched over him while he ate. He no longer knew himself or understood his own state. Marius was the master of the house. In his joy, there was a kind of surrender; he had become the grandson of his grandson.

In the happiness he felt then, he was the most venerable of children. Afraid of tiring or bothering the convalescent, he would step behind him to smile. He was content, joyful, delighted, charming, young. His white hair gave a gentle majesty to the bright cheerfulness of his face. When grace is joined to wrinkles, it is adorable. There is an indescribable dawn in radiant old age.

As for Marius, while he let them dress his wounds and care for him, he had only one fixed thought: Cosette.

After the fever and delirium had passed, he did not speak her name again, and one might have thought he no longer thought of her. He kept silent precisely because his soul was with her.

He did not know what had happened to Cosette. Everything connected with the Rue de la Chanvrerie was like a cloud in his memory. Barely formed shadows drifted through his mind: Éponine, Gavroche, Mabeuf, the Thénardiers, all his friends, darkly mixed with the smoke of the barricade. M. Fauchelevent's strange part in that adventure struck him like a riddle in the middle of a storm. He understood nothing about what had happened in his own life. He did not know how he had been saved or who had saved him, and no one around him knew either. All 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, and future were all just a blur to him. But in that fog there was one fixed point, one clear and definite shape, something solid as granite: a decision, a will. He would find Cosette again. For him, the idea of life could not be separated from the idea of Cosette. In his heart, he had decided that he would not accept one without the other, and he was firmly resolved to demand from anyone who tried to make him go on living—his grandfather, fate, even hell itself—the return of his lost Eden.

He did not hide from himself that there were obstacles.

Let us pause to stress one detail: he was not won over, and he was only slightly softened by all his grandfather's care and tenderness. First of all, he did not know the whole truth. Then, in the still-feverish thoughts of an invalid, he may have distrusted this tenderness because it was so strange and new, and because he suspected it was meant to win him over. He remained cold. The grandfather's poor old smile was completely wasted on him. Marius told himself that everything was fine as long as he said nothing and let matters go on by themselves. But the moment Cosette was mentioned, he believed he would see a very different face, and his grandfather's real attitude would be revealed. Then there would be an unpleasant scene: family quarrels flaring up again, opposing positions laid out face to face, sarcasm and objections of every kind all at once—Fauchelevent, Coupelevent, wealth, poverty, a stone around his neck, the future. There would be fierce resistance. The result: refusal. Marius braced himself for it in advance.

Then, as his strength returned, the old wounds in his memory opened again. He began thinking about the past once more. Colonel Pontmercy again stood between M. Gillenormand and himself. Marius told himself that he could expect no real kindness from a man who had been so unfair and so harsh to his father. As his health improved, a certain hardness toward his grandfather came back as well. The old man felt this with quiet pain. Without letting it show, M. Gillenormand noticed that ever since Marius had been brought back to him and had regained consciousness, he had not once called him father. True, he did not call him "monsieur" either; but he managed to avoid saying either one by the way he phrased his sentences. Clearly, a crisis

was coming.

As so often happens in such situations, Marius tested the ground before openly beginning the fight, as if to prove himself. This is what people call “feeling the ground.” One morning, M. Gillenormand happened to speak contemptuously of the Convention because of a newspaper that had come into his hands, and launched into a Royalist speech against Danton, Saint-Juste, and Robespierre. “The men of ’93 were giants,” Marius said sternly. The old man fell silent and did not say another word for the rest of the day.

Marius, who still carried in his mind the image of the unbending grandfather from his childhood, took this silence for deep, concentrated anger. He saw it as a sign of a fierce coming clash and, in the depths of his mind, increased his preparations for the struggle.

He decided that if he was refused, he would tear off his bandages, wrench his collarbone out of place, expose all the wounds he still had, and refuse all food. His wounds were his weapons of war. He would have Cosette or die.

He waited for the right moment with the sly patience of an invalid.

That moment came.

CHAPTER III—MARIUS MAKES HIS ATTACK

One day, while his daughter was arranging the bottles and cups on the marble top of the commode, M. Gillenormand bent over Marius and said in his gentlest voice, “Listen, my dear Marius, if I were you, I’d eat meat now instead of fish. Fried sole is excellent when you’re just beginning to recover, but a good cutlet is what puts a sick man back on his feet.”

Marius, who had almost completely regained his strength, gathered all that remained to him, pushed himself up into a sitting position, placed his two clenched fists on the bedclothes, looked his grandfather straight in the face, put on a formidable expression, and said:

“That gives me a chance to tell you something.”

“What is it?”

“I want to get married.”

“Agreed,” said his grandfather—and burst out laughing.

“How can it be agreed?”

“Yes, agreed. You shall have your little girl.”

Marius, stunned and overcome by the blinding shock, trembled from head to foot.

M. Gillenormand went on:

“Yes, you shall have her—your pretty little girl. Every day she comes, disguised as an old gentleman, to ask how you are. Ever since you were wounded, she has done nothing but weep and make lint. I made inquiries. She lives at No. 7, Rue de l’Homme Armé. Ah, now we have it! So that is what you want! Very well, you shall have her. You are caught. You had your little plan all arranged. You said to yourself: ‘I’ll tell my grandfather plainly—to that mummy from the Regency and the Directory, that old beau, that Dorante turned Géronte. He had his own follies too, of course he did. He had his love affairs, his grisettes and his Cosettes. He made his noise in the world, he had his wings, he ate the bread of spring. He must remember it.’ Ah, you are taking the cockchafer by the horns. Good! I offer you a cutlet, and you answer: ‘By the way, I want to get married.’ That is quite a leap! Ah, you were expecting an argument! You do not know that I am a cowardly old man. What do you say to that? Are you annoyed? You did not expect to find your grandfather even more foolish than you are. All that fine speech you meant to deliver to me, Mr. Lawyer, is wasted, and that irritates you. Well, too bad—be angry if you like. I will do whatever you want, and that leaves you with nothing to say, you idiot! Listen. I made inquiries; I can be clever too. She is charming. She is modest. The story about the lancer is not true. She has made piles of lint. She is a treasure. She adores you. If you had died, there would have been three of us—her coffin would have gone with mine. Once you began to recover, I had the idea of simply placing her beside your bed. But that only happens in novels, where young

girls are brought to the bedsides of handsome wounded young men who interest them. In real life, it is not done. What would your aunt have said? Three quarters of the time you had no clothes on, my boy. Ask Nicolette, who has not left you for a moment, whether it was possible to bring a woman in here. And besides, what would the doctor have said? A pretty girl does not cure a man of fever. In short, it is all settled. Let us say no more about it. Everything is said, everything is done. Take her. That is how ferocious I am. You see, I realized that you did not love me. So I said to myself: 'Well then, I have my little Cosette right here in my hands. I will give her to him, and then he will have to love me a little—or explain why he does not.' Ah, so you thought the old man would explode, raise his voice, shout no, and shake his cane at all that dawn of love. Not at all. Cosette? Certainly. Love? Certainly. I could ask for nothing better. Please do me the favor of getting married, sir. Be happy, my beloved child."

With that, the old man burst into tears.

He caught Marius's head and pulled it to his chest with both arms, and they both began to weep. This is one form of perfect happiness.

"Father!" cried Marius.

"Ah, so you do love me!" said the old man.

An indescribable moment followed. They were so overcome they could not speak.

At last the old man stammered:

"Well! His mouth is open at last. He has called me 'father.'"

Marius gently drew his head free from his grandfather's arms and said:

"But, father, now that I am completely well, it seems to me I ought to be able to see her."

"Agreed. You shall see her tomorrow."

"Father!"

"What?"

"Why not today?"

"Well then, today. Let it be today. You have called me 'father' three times, and that is worth it. I'll take care of it. She shall be brought here. Yes, I tell you. It has even been put into verse already. It is the ending of the elegy of the 'Jeune Malade' by André Chénier—André Chénier, whose throat was cut by the ras . . . by the giants of '93."

M. Gillenormand thought he caught a slight frown from Marius, who, to tell the truth, was no longer listening to him and was thinking much more about Cosette than about 1793.

The grandfather, trembling because he had so awkwardly brought up André Chénier, hurried on:

"'Cut his throat' is not the right expression. The truth is that the great revolutionary geniuses—who were not malicious, that is beyond dispute, who were heroes, pardi!—found that André Chénier was somewhat in their way, and so they had him guillot . . . that is to say, those great men, on the 7th of Thermidor, asked André Chénier, in the interest of public safety, to be so

kind as to go....”

M. Gillenormand was strangled by his own words and could not go on. He could neither finish what he had started nor take it back. While his daughter adjusted the pillow behind Marius, who was overcome by so many emotions, the old man rushed out of the bedroom as fast as his age allowed, slammed the door behind him, and stood there purple-faced, choking, foaming at the mouth, his eyes bulging. He found himself face to face with the honest Basque, who was blacking boots in the anteroom. Seizing Basque by the collar, he shouted furiously in his face: “By the hundred thousand Javottes of the devil, those scoundrels murdered him!”

“Who, sir?”

“André Chénier!”

“Yes, sir,” said Basque nervously.

CHAPTER IV—MADEMOISELLE GILLENORMAND FINALLY CEASES TO THINK IT A BAD THING THAT M. FAUCHELEVENT CAME IN WITH SOMETHING UNDER HIS ARM

Cosette and Marius saw each other once again.

We will not try to describe what that meeting was like. Some things should not be painted in words; the sun is one of them.

The whole family, including Basque and Nicolette, was gathered in Marius’s room when Cosette entered.

At that exact moment, the grandfather was just about to blow his nose. He stopped, handkerchief to his face, and stared over

it at Cosette.

She appeared in the doorway, and to him she seemed surrounded by a radiance.

“Adorable!” he cried.

Then he blew his nose loudly.

Cosette was dizzy with joy, delight, fear, and bliss. She was as shaken by happiness as anyone could be. Pale and flushed at once, she stammered. She longed to throw herself into Marius’s arms, but she did not dare. She was ashamed to show her love in front of all those people. People are merciless to happy lovers; they stay precisely when the lovers most want to be left alone. Lovers have no need of anyone else.

With Cosette, and just behind her, came a white-haired man whose expression was grave yet smiling, though his smile was faint and heartbreaking. It was “Monsieur Fauchelevent”; it was Jean Valjean.

He was dressed exactly as the porter had described: entirely in black, in perfectly new clothes, with a white cravat.

The porter was a thousand leagues from recognizing, in this proper middle-class gentleman, this likely notary, the terrifying man who had brought in the body and appeared at his door on the night of June 7—ragged, muddy, dreadful, wild-eyed, his face smeared with blood and filth, carrying the unconscious Marius in his arms. Even so, the porter’s instinct had been stirred. When M. Fauchelevent arrived with Cosette, the porter had been unable to resist saying quietly to his wife, “I don’t

know why, but I can't shake the feeling that I've seen that face before."

M. Fauchelevent stood in Marius' room, apart from the others, near the door. Under his arm he carried a package that looked very much like an octavo volume wrapped in paper. The wrapping paper was greenish and seemed mouldy.

"Does the gentleman always carry books like that under his arm?" Mademoiselle Gillenormand, who did not like books, asked Nicolette in a low voice.

"Well," replied M. Gillenormand, who had overheard her, speaking just as softly, "he's a learned man. So what? Is that his fault? Monsieur Boulard, an acquaintance of mine, never went out without a book under his arm either, and he always held some old volume against his heart like that."

Then, with a bow, he said aloud:

"Monsieur Tranchelevent...."

Father Gillenormand did not do this on purpose, but carelessness with proper names was one of his aristocratic habits.

"Monsieur Tranchelevent, I have the honor, on behalf of my grandson, Baron Marius Pontmercy, to ask for Mademoiselle's hand."

Monsieur Tranchelevent bowed.

"That settles it," said the grandfather.

Then, turning to Marius and Cosette with both arms stretched out in blessing, he cried:

“Permission to adore each other!”

They did not need to be told twice. All the worse for that—the chirping began at once. They spoke in low voices: Marius propped on one elbow in his reclining chair, Cosette standing beside him. “Oh, heavens!” Cosette murmured. “I see you again! It is you—it is really you! To think that you went off to fight 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 forgive you, but you must never do it again. A little while ago, when they came to tell us to come to you, I still thought I was going to die, but this time it was from joy. I was so unhappy! I have not even taken time to dress; I must look dreadful. What will your relatives say when they see me in a crushed collar? Do speak! You are letting me say everything. We are still living in the Rue de l’Homme Armé. They say your shoulder was terribly wounded. They told me you could put your fist into it. And then, they say they cut your flesh with scissors. That is horrifying. I have cried until I have no eyes left. It is strange that a person can suffer so much. Your grandfather has such a kind face. Don’t move, don’t prop yourself up on your elbow—you will hurt yourself. Oh, how happy I am! So our unhappiness is over! I am being foolish. I had things to say to you, and now I cannot remember any of them. Do you still love me? We live in the Rue de l’Homme Armé. There is no garden. I spent all my time making lint; look, sir, it is your fault—I have a callus on my fingers.”

“Angel!” said Marius.

Angel– is the only word in the language that never wears out. No other word could survive the merciless way lovers use it.

Then, because there were people watching, they fell silent and said nothing more, contenting themselves with gently touching each other’s hands.

M. Gillenormand turned to the people in the room and cried:

“The rest of you, talk louder. Make some noise, all of you in the background. Come, a little uproar, devil take it, so the children can chatter at their ease.”

Then he went up to Marius and Cosette and said to them very softly:

“Call each other thou–. Don’t be so formal.”

Aunt Gillenormand watched this sudden burst of brightness in her aging household with amazement. There was nothing harsh in it. It was nothing like the scandalized, jealous look of an owl watching two doves. It was the blank gaze of a poor, innocent woman of fifty-seven. It was a life that had failed looking at love in triumph.

“Mademoiselle Gillenormand senior,” her father said to her, “I told you this is what would happen to you.”

He fell silent for a moment, then added:

“Look at other people’s happiness.”

Then he turned to Cosette.

“How pretty she is! How pretty she is! She’s like a Greuze painting. So you’re going to have all that to yourself, you rascal! Ah, you rogue, you’ve done very well for yourself with me. You’re happy. If I were not fifteen years too old, we would fight with swords to decide which of us should have her. Well then! I

am in love with you, mademoiselle. It's perfectly simple. It is your right. You are quite right. Ah, what a sweet, charming little wedding this will be! 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 elegant. It stands 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 trip. Mademoiselle, I entirely agree with you. 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 with her hair down. It is all very well to remain a spinster, but it is a cold life. The Bible says: Multiply. To save the people, Jeanne d'Arc is needed; but to make people, what is needed is Mother Goose. So marry, my beauties. I truly do not see the point of remaining a spinster! I know they have their own chapel in the church, and that they take refuge in the Society of the Virgin; but, sapristi, a handsome husband, a fine fellow, and then, a year later, a big blond baby nursing greedily, with lovely rolls of fat on his thighs, clutching your breast in his little rosy hands and laughing like the dawn—that is better than holding a candle at vespers and chanting Turris Eburnea!"

The grandfather spun around on his eighty-year-old heels and started talking again, words pouring out of him like a spring that had burst loose:

"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?”

“Don’t you have a close friend?”

“Yes, Courfeyrac.”

“What became of him?”

“He is dead.”

“That is good.”

He sat down beside them, had Cosette sit as well, and gathered all four of their hands into his old, wrinkled ones:

“She is exquisite, this darling. This Cosette is a masterpiece! She is both a very little girl and a very great lady. She will be only a Baroness, which is beneath her; she was born to be a Marchioness. What eyelashes she has! Fix this firmly in your heads, my children: you are on the right path. Love each other. Be foolish over each other. Love is the folly of men and the wisdom of God. Adore one another. Only,” he added, suddenly turning gloomy, “what bad luck! It has just occurred to me! More than half of what I own is tied up in an annuity. As long as I live, that will not matter, but after my death, twenty years from now, ah, my poor children, you will not have a sou! Your beautiful white hands, Madame la Baronne, will have the devil’s own honor of pulling him by the tail.”64

At that moment, they heard a grave, calm voice say:

“Mademoiselle Euphrasie Fauchelevent has six hundred thousand francs.”

It was Jean Valjean’s voice.

Until then he had not said a single word. No one had seemed aware that he was there, and he had remained standing straight and motionless behind all these happy people.

“What does Mademoiselle Euphrasie have to do with this?” the startled grandfather asked.

“I am she,” Cosette replied.

“Six hundred thousand francs?” M. Gillenormand repeated.

“Less fourteen or fifteen thousand francs, perhaps,” said Jean Valjean.

And he set on the table the package that Mademoiselle Gillenormand had mistaken for a book.

Jean Valjean opened the package himself. It contained a bundle of banknotes. They sorted through them and counted them: five hundred notes of a thousand francs each, and one hundred sixty-eight notes of five hundred francs each. Altogether, it came to five hundred eighty-four thousand francs.

"This is an excellent book," said M. Gillenormand.

"Five hundred eighty-four thousand francs!" the aunt murmured.

"This settles matters nicely, doesn't it, Mademoiselle Gillenormand the elder?" said the grandfather. "That rascal

Marius has managed to find the nest of a millionaire grisette in his tree of dreams! Just look at the love affairs of young people! Students find girl students with six hundred thousand francs. Cherubino does better than Rothschild."

"Five hundred eighty-four thousand francs!" Mademoiselle Gillenormand repeated softly. "Five hundred eighty-four! You might as well call it six hundred thousand!"

As for Marius and Cosette, they were looking at each other while all this was happening. They barely noticed this detail.

CHAPTER V—PUT YOUR MONEY IN A FOREST RATHER THAN IN A NOTARY'S HANDS

The reader has probably already understood, without any long explanation, that after the Champmathieu affair Jean Valjean managed, during his first escape, which lasted a few days, to come to Paris and withdraw in time from Laffitte the money he had earned at Montreuil-sur-Mer under the name Monsieur Madeleine. Fearing that he might be captured again—which in fact happened—he buried and hid that money in the forest of Montfermeil, in the place called the Blaru-bottom. The sum, six hundred and thirty thousand francs, all in banknotes, was not very bulky and fit into a box. To protect the box from damp, however, he placed it inside a chest filled with chestnut shavings. In that same chest he put his other treasures, the Bishop’s candlesticks. It will be remembered that he had taken the candlesticks with him when he fled from Montreuil-sur-Mer. The man Boulatruelle saw one evening, the first time, was Jean Valjean. Later, whenever Jean Valjean needed money, he went to the Blaru-bottom to get it. That explains the absences we have mentioned. He had hidden a pickaxe somewhere in the heath, in a place known only to him. When he saw that Marius was recovering, and felt that the time was near when that money might be useful, he went to fetch it. It was again Jean Valjean whom Boulatruelle saw in the woods, though this time in the morning instead of the evening. Boulatruelle inherited his pickaxe.

The actual amount was five hundred and eighty-four thousand five hundred francs. Jean Valjean kept five hundred francs for himself. “We shall see later,” he thought.

The difference between that amount and the six hundred and thirty thousand francs withdrawn from Laffitte was what he had spent over ten years, from 1823 to 1833. The five years he spent in the convent had cost only five thousand francs.

Jean Valjean placed the two candlesticks on the mantelpiece, where they shone to Toussaint’s great admiration.

Jean Valjean also knew that he was free of Javert. The account had been told in front of him, and he had confirmed it in the Moniteur—: a police inspector named Javert had been found drowned beneath a washerwomen’s boat between the Pont au Change and the Pont-Neuf. A note left by the man—who had otherwise been beyond reproach and highly respected by his superiors—suggested a bout of mental disturbance and suicide. “In fact,” Jean Valjean thought, “since he let me go after having me in his power, he must already have been mad.”

CHAPTER VI—THE TWO OLD MEN, EACH IN HIS OWN WAY, DO EVERYTHING THEY CAN TO MAKE COSETTE HAPPY

Everything was prepared for the wedding. When the doctor was consulted, he said it could take place in February. It was December then. A few delightful weeks of perfect happiness went by.

The grandfather was as happy as any of them. At times he would stand for a quarter of an hour just looking at Cosette.

“What a wonderful, beautiful girl!” he exclaimed. “And she has such a sweet, kind expression! Without question, she is the most charming girl I have ever seen in my life. Later on, she will have virtues that smell of violets. How graceful she is! With a creature like that, one cannot help but live nobly. Marius, my boy, you are a Baron, you are rich—don’t go into petty law practice, I beg you.”

Cosette and Marius had suddenly passed from the tomb into paradise. The change had not been gradual, and it would have overwhelmed them if its brightness had not dazzled them first.

“Do you understand any of this?” Marius said to Cosette.

“No,” Cosette replied, “but it seems to me that the good Lord is taking care of us.”

Jean Valjean did everything. He removed every obstacle, arranged every detail, and made everything easy. He threw himself into Cosette's happiness with as much eagerness, and apparently as much joy, as Cosette herself.

Because he had once been a mayor, he knew how to handle that delicate issue that only he fully understood: Cosette's legal identity. If her origins were stated plainly, the marriage might be stopped—who could say? He got Cosette out of every difficulty. He invented a family for her made up entirely of dead relatives, which was the safest way to avoid objections. Cosette became the only surviving member of an extinct family. She was presented not as his daughter, but as the daughter of the other Fauchelevent. The two Fauchelevent brothers had both worked as gardeners at the convent of Petit-Picpus. Inquiries were made there, and the best possible reports and the most respectable references were readily supplied. The good nuns, who were neither skilled in nor interested in investigating questions of parentage, and who attached no importance to the matter, had never clearly understood which of the two Fauchelevents was Cosette's father. So they said what was needed, and they said it eagerly. An acte de notoriété was drawn up. In the eyes of the law, Cosette became Mademoiselle Euphrasie Fauchelevent. She was declared an orphan, with both father and mother dead. Jean Valjean arranged matters so that, under the name of Fauchelevent, he was appointed Cosette's guardian, with M. Gillenormand serving as supervising guardian.

As for the five hundred and eighty thousand francs, they were described as a legacy left to Cosette by a dead person who

wished to remain unknown. The original legacy had been five hundred and ninety-four thousand francs, but ten thousand francs had been spent on Mademoiselle Euphrasie's education, and five thousand of that had been paid to the convent. This legacy, placed in the hands of a third party, was to be given to Cosette when she came of age or when she married. Taken altogether, this was very satisfactory, as the reader will understand—especially since the amount involved was half a million. There were a few odd details here and there, it is true, but no one paid attention to them. One of the interested parties was blinded by love, and the others by the six hundred thousand francs.

Cosette learned that the old man she had called father for so long was not really her father. He was only a relative; her true father was another Fauchelevent. At any other time, this would have broken her heart. But in the indescribable moment she was living through then, it cast only the slightest shadow, a passing cloud, and she was so full of happiness that it quickly disappeared. She had Marius. The young man arrived, and the old man faded into the background; such is life.

Besides, Cosette had spent many years growing used to mysteries around her; anyone who has had a childhood wrapped in secrecy is always somewhat prepared to give certain things up.

Even so, Cosette went on calling Jean Valjean Father.

Cosette, happy as an angel, adored Father Gillenormand. To be fair, he showered her with gallant compliments and gifts. While

Jean Valjean was securing for Cosette a proper place in society and an unquestionable position, M. Gillenormand was overseeing the wedding basket. Nothing delighted him more than being lavish. He gave Cosette a Binche guipure dress that had come down to him from his own grandmother.

“Fashions always come back,” he said. “Old things are all the rage, and the young women of my old age dress like the old women of my childhood.”

He rummaged through his dignified Coromandel lacquer chests of drawers, with their bulging fronts, which had not been opened in years. “Let us hear these dowagers confess,” he said. “Let us see what they have in their bellies.” He noisily forced open the round-bellied drawers that had belonged to all his wives, all his mistresses, and all his grandmothers. Pekins, damasks, lampas, painted moires, dresses of shot gros de Tours, Indian kerchiefs embroidered in gold that could be washed, dauphines with no right or wrong side, still in the piece, Genoa and Alençon point lace, sets of antique goldsmith’s work, ivory bonbon boxes decorated with microscopic battles, trinkets and ribbons—he poured everything out for Cosette. Cosette, astonished, desperately in love with Marius, and overflowing with gratitude toward M. Gillenormand, dreamed of a boundless happiness dressed in satin and velvet. Her wedding basket seemed to her to be carried by seraphim. Her soul soared into the blue depths on wings of Mechlin lace.

The lovers' happiness was matched only, as we have already said, by the grandfather's delight. It was as if trumpets were sounding a fanfare all along the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire.

Every morning, the grandfather brought Cosette a new gift of bric-a-brac. All kinds of little ornaments sparkled around her.

One day Marius, who liked to speak seriously even in the middle of his happiness, said, for some reason or other:

"The men of the Revolution are so great that they carry the grandeur of the ages, like Cato and Phocion, and each of them seems to me like a memory from antiquity."

"Antique moire!" cried the old gentleman. "Thank you, Marius. That is exactly the phrase I had been looking for."

And the next day, a magnificent tea-rose-colored dress of antique moire was added to Cosette's wedding gifts.

From all this finery, the grandfather drew a small lesson in wisdom.

"Love is all very well, but it has to come with something more. Happiness should be mixed with what is unnecessary. Happiness alone is only the bare minimum. For me, it must be richly seasoned with the superfluous. A palace and her heart. Her heart and the Louvre. Her heart and the great fountains of Versailles. Give me my shepherdess, and then try to make her a duchess. Bring me Phyllis crowned with cornflowers, and add an income of a hundred thousand francs. Open up a pastoral view for me as far as the eye can see, beneath a marble colonnade. I will gladly accept the pastoral scene, along with

the fairy-like splendor of marble and gold. Plain happiness is like dry bread. You can eat it, but you do not feast on it. I want the superfluous, the unnecessary, the extravagant, excess, all that serves no practical purpose. I remember seeing, in the Cathedral of Strasburg, a clock as tall as a three-story house. It told the hour—kind enough to do that—but it hardly seemed to have been made for so simple a task. After striking noon or midnight—noon, the hour of the sun, or midnight, the hour of love—or any other hour you please, it gave you the moon and the stars, the earth and the sea, birds and fishes, Phœbus and Phœbe, and a whole procession of things emerging from a niche: the twelve apostles, the Emperor Charles the Fifth, Éponine, Sabinus, and a crowd of little gilded figures who even played trumpets besides. And that is not counting the delightful chimes it scattered through the air at every opportunity, for no reason anyone could tell. Can some petty bald clock-face that merely tells the hour compare with that? For my part, I side with the great clock of Strasburg, and I prefer it to the cuckoo clock from the Black Forest."

M. Gillenormand rambled absurdly about the wedding, and all the frills and affectations of the eighteenth century came tumbling together through his rapturous speech.

"You know nothing about the art of celebration. You don't know how to arrange a day of pleasure in this age," he cried. "Your nineteenth century is feeble. It has no extravagance. It ignores the rich and the noble. In everything, it is close-cropped and bare. Your third estate is dull, colorless, scentless, and shapeless. These are the dreams of your bourgeois, who

proudly announce, as they put it, ‘a charming little boudoir newly decorated, in violet, ebony, and calico.’ Stand aside! Stand aside! Monsieur Skinflint is marrying Mademoiselle Tightfist. Splendor and magnificence! A louis d’or has been stuck to a candle. There is your age. I ask only to escape from it, beyond the Sarmatians. Ah! In 1787 I already foresaw that everything was lost, from the day I saw 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! And that has had its consequences. “In this century, men mind business, speculate on the Exchange, make money, and pinch pennies. People polish their surfaces and keep them shining. Everyone is dressed as if just taken out of a bandbox—washed, soaped, scraped, shaved, combed, aired, smoothed, rubbed, brushed, outwardly spotless, polished like pebbles, discreet, tidy—and yet, death of my life, in the depths of their consciences they have dung-heaps and cesspools enough to disgust even a cowherd who wipes his nose on his fingers. I grant this age its motto: ‘Filthy Cleanliness.’ Don’t be offended, Marius; let me speak. As you see, I say nothing against the people. I am always scolding your people, it is true, but at least allow me to give the bourgeoisie a little slap. I belong to it myself. He who loves well chastises well. “So I say plainly that people still marry nowadays, but they no longer know how to marry. Ah, yes, I miss the grace of the old ways. I miss all of it: the elegance, the gallantry, those courteous and delicate manners, that cheerful luxury everyone shared, music as part of the wedding, a symphony upstairs, drums downstairs, the dancing, the happy faces around the

table, the finely turned compliments, the songs, the fireworks, the open laughter, the glorious uproar, the enormous bows of ribbon. I miss the bride's garter. The bride's garter is cousin to the girdle of Venus. What does the Trojan War turn on? Helen's garter, of course! Why did they fight? Why did divine Diomed smash that great ten-pointed bronze helmet over the head of Meriones? Why did Achilles and Hector hack at each other with mighty thrusts of their spears? Because Helen let Paris take her garter. With Cosette's garter, Homer would build the _Iliad_. He would put into his poem a talkative old fellow like me, and call him Nestor. "My friends, in former days, in those charming old times, people married sensibly: first a good contract, then a good feast. As soon as Cujas had gone out, Gamacho came in. And rightly so! The stomach is a pleasant beast; it demands its due, and it wants its share of the wedding too. People supped well, and at table they had a lovely neighbor without a guimpe, so that her throat was only half concealed. Ah, those broad laughing mouths, and how merry we were then! Youth was a bouquet. Every young man ended in a spray of lilac or a tuft of roses, whether he was a shepherd or a soldier; and if by chance he was a captain of dragoons, he still found a way to call himself Florian. People cared greatly about looking fine. They embroidered themselves and brightened themselves. A bourgeois looked like a flower; a marquis looked like a jewel. They had no straps on their boots—they had no boots at all. They were trim, gleaming, curled, glossy, fluttering, delicate, coquettish, and that did not prevent them from wearing swords at their sides. The hummingbird has both beak and claws. That was the age of the _Galland Indies_. One side of that century was

delicate, the other magnificent; and by the green cabbages, people enjoyed themselves. “Today, people are solemn. The bourgeois is miserly, the bourgeoise prudish; your century is unhappy. People would drive away the Graces for showing too much neck. Alas, beauty is hidden as if it were ugliness. Since the Revolution, everything has worn trousers, even the ballet dancers. A mountebank dancer must be serious; your rigadoons are doctrinaire. Everything must be majestic. People would feel deeply wronged if they did not carry their chins buried in their cravats. The ideal of a twenty-year-old rascal when he marries is to look like M. Royer-Collard. And do you know where all that majesty leads? To pettiness. Learn this: joy is not merely joyful; it is grand. “So be in love gaily, for heaven’s sake! When you marry, marry with fever, dizziness, tumult, and the uproar of happiness. Be solemn in church, certainly. But as soon as the mass is over, sarpejou! a dream should whirl around the bride. A wedding ought to be royal and fantastical. It should carry its ceremony from the cathedral of Rheims to the pagoda of Chanteloup. I loathe a shabby wedding. Ventregoulette! For that one day at least, be in Olympus. Be among the gods. Ah, people might be sylphs. Games and Laughter, argiraspides—they are fools. My friends, every brand-new bridegroom ought to be Prince Aldobrandini. Use that one unique moment in life to soar into the empyrean with swans and eagles, even if the next day you must drop back into the bourgeois world of frogs. “Do not economize on a wedding. Do not strip it of its splendor. Do not be stingy on the day when you shine. A wedding is not housekeeping. Oh, if I had my way, it would be all gallantry, with violins sounding under the trees. Here is my program: sky blue

and silver. I would mix rural divinities into the festival; I would summon the Dryads and the Nereids. The nuptials of Amphitrite, a rosy cloud, nymphs with carefully dressed hair and otherwise entirely naked, an Academician offering quatrains to the goddess, a chariot drawn by sea monsters."

"Triton trotted ahead, drawing from his conch such enchanting sounds that he enchanted everyone who heard them!"65

—now that's a festive program, that's a fine one, or else I know nothing about such things, the devil take it!"

While the grandfather, carried away in full lyrical rapture, listened to the sound of his own voice, Cosette and Marius grew dizzy with happiness as they looked freely at each other.

Aunt Gillenormand watched all this with unshakable calm. In the last five or six months, she had gone through a fair number of emotions. Marius had returned. Marius had been brought back bleeding. Marius had been carried back from a barricade. Marius had been dead, then alive. Marius had been reconciled. Marius had become engaged. Marius was marrying a poor girl. Marius was marrying an heiress. The six hundred thousand francs had been her final surprise. After that, her old indifference, like that of a girl making her first communion, came back to her. She went regularly to church, counted her beads, read her prayer book, and murmured Aves in one corner of the house while "I love you" was being whispered in the other. She saw Marius and Cosette only dimly, like two shadows. The shadow was herself.

There is a kind of lifeless ascetic state in which the soul, dulled into numbness, becomes detached from what might be called the business of living. It takes in no impressions, whether human, pleasant, or painful, except in the case of earthquakes and disasters. As Father Gillenormand said to his daughter, this sort of devotion is like having a head cold. You can smell nothing in life—not the bad odors or the good ones.

What finally settled the elderly spinster's hesitation was the six hundred thousand francs. Her father had grown so used to barely considering her at all that he had not even asked her opinion about consenting to Marius's marriage. True to his usual impulsive nature, he had acted at once, like a despot turned servant, with only one thought: to please Marius. As for the aunt, it had not even crossed his mind that she existed or that she might have an opinion of her own; and sheep-like as she was, this offended her. Quietly resentful deep down, though outwardly unmoved, she said to herself, "My father settled the marriage without consulting me; I shall settle the inheritance without consulting him." In fact, she was rich, and her father was not. She had kept her decision on that point to herself. It is likely that if the match had been a poor one, she would have left Marius poor as well. "So much the worse for my nephew! He is marrying a beggar; let him be a beggar too!" But Cosette's half-million pleased the aunt and changed her private feelings about the young couple. Six hundred thousand francs deserve a certain respect, and it was clear that she could hardly do anything but leave her fortune to these young people, since they did not need it.

It was decided that the couple would live with the grandfather. M. Gillenormand insisted on giving them his own room, the finest in the house. “That will make me young again,” he said. “It has always been an old dream of mine to have a wedding in my room.”

He decorated the room with all sorts of elegant little luxuries. He had the ceiling and walls covered with a remarkable fabric that he had kept in storage by the piece. He believed it had come from Utrecht: satin the color of buttercups, patterned with velvet auricula flowers. “It was this very fabric,” he said, “that draped the bed of the Duchesse d’Anville at La Roche-Guyon.” On the mantelpiece he placed a small Saxe porcelain figure carrying a muff against her bare stomach.

M. Gillenormand’s library became the lawyer’s study, which Marius needed; as will be remembered, the council of the order required him to have one.

CHAPTER VII—HOW DREAMS MIXED WITH HAPPINESS

The lovers saw each other every day. Cosette came with M. Fauchelevent. “This turns everything upside down,” said Mademoiselle Gillenormand, “to have the bride come to the house and do the courting like this.” But Marius’s recovery had established the routine, and the armchairs in the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, which were better suited to private meetings than the straw chairs in the Rue de l’Homme Armé, had helped fix it in place. Marius and M. Fauchelevent saw each other, but they did not speak. It was as if they had silently agreed on that arrangement. Every young woman needs a chaperone. Cosette could not come without M. Fauchelevent. In Marius’s eyes, M. Fauchelevent was simply the condition attached to seeing Cosette. He accepted it. By talking about politics in a vague, general way, always from the perspective of improving the lot of humanity, they eventually got beyond saying only “yes” and “no.” Once, when the subject was education—which Marius wanted to be free, compulsory, expanded in every form, and given to everyone like air and sunlight, something the whole population could breathe—they found themselves in complete agreement, and they almost had a real conversation. M. Fauchelevent spoke well, even with a certain elevation of style, yet something indefinable was missing. He had both less and more than a man of the world.

Deep down, in the innermost part of his mind, Marius surrounded this M. Fauchelevent—who seemed to him merely

kind and cold—with a host of silent questions. At times he even began to doubt his own memories. There was a gap in his mind, a dark blank, an abyss carved out by four months of suffering. Many things had been lost in it. He had reached the point of asking himself whether he had really seen M. Fauchelevent, this grave and tranquil man, at the barricade.

But that was not the only daze the apparitions and disappearances of the past had left in his mind. It should not be imagined that he was free from those memories that haunt us and make us look sadly behind us, even when we are happy and content. A mind that never turns back toward vanished horizons holds neither thought nor love. Sometimes Marius would bury his face in his hands, and the dim, turbulent past would move through the twilight of his mind. Once again he saw Mabeuf fall. He heard Gavroche singing in the middle of the grapeshot. He felt Éponine's cold forehead beneath his lips. Enjolras, Courfeyrac, Jean Prouvaire, Combeferre, Bossuet, Grantaire—all his friends—rose before him, then faded into air. Were all those beloved, sorrowful, brave, charming, and tragic figures only dreams? Had they really existed? The uprising had wrapped everything in smoke. Great fevers create great dreams. He questioned himself; he searched his own feelings; all these vanished realities made him dizzy. Where were they all now? Was it really true that they were all dead? A plunge into the shadows had carried them all away except him. It seemed to him that everything had vanished behind a theater curtain. There are curtains like that in life. God moves on to the next act.

And he himself—was he really the same man? He, once poor, was rich. He, once abandoned, had a family. He, once despairing, was going to marry Cosette. It seemed to him that he had passed through a tomb, entering it black and coming out white, while the others had remained inside. At times, all those figures from the past, returned and present, seemed to gather around him in a circle and darken his spirit. Then he would think of Cosette and become calm again. But nothing less than that happiness could have been enough to erase the catastrophe.

M. Fauchelevent himself almost seemed to belong among those vanished figures. Marius could hardly believe that the Fauchelevent of the barricade was the same man as this living, breathing Fauchelevent, sitting so solemnly beside Cosette. The first was probably one of those nightmares caused by his delirium and brought back by it. Still, both men had rigid natures, and Marius could not imagine asking M. Fauchelevent any question. The thought had not even occurred to him. We have already pointed out this revealing detail.

Two men can share a secret and, by an unspoken agreement, never say a word about it. That is less uncommon than people generally think.

Marius tried only once. He brought up the Rue de la Chanvrerie in conversation and turned to M. Fauchelevent to say:

“You know that street, of course?”

“What street?”

“The Rue de la Chanvrerie.”

“I do not know the name of that street,” replied M. Fauchelevent, in the most natural tone in the world.

Because the reply referred to the name of the street rather than the street itself, Marius took it as more decisive than it really was.

“Clearly,” he thought, “I must have imagined it. I was under a hallucination. It was someone who looked like him. M. Fauchelevent was not there.”

CHAPTER VIII—TWO MEN WHO COULD NOT BE FOUND

Great as Marius' happiness was, it could not drive his other worries from his mind.

While the wedding was being arranged, and as he waited for the appointed day, he had careful and painstaking inquiries made into the past.

He owed gratitude in more than one direction: for his father's sake and for his own.

There was Thénardier, and there was the unknown man who had brought him, Marius, back to M. Gillenormand.

Marius tried to find these two men. He did not want to marry, be happy, and then forget them. He feared that if these debts of gratitude were left unpaid, they would cast a shadow over the bright future opening before him.

He could not bear to leave all those old sufferings unsettled behind him. Before stepping joyfully into the future, he wanted to settle his account with the past.

The fact that Thénardier was a villain did not change the fact that he had saved Colonel Pontmercy. Thénardier was a scoundrel in the eyes of the whole world—except Marius.

And Marius, who did not know what had really happened on the battlefield of Waterloo, was unaware of one crucial detail: as far as Thénardier was concerned, his father was in the strange

position of owing him his life without owing him any gratitude.

None of the agents Marius hired managed to find any trace of Thénardier. It seemed that all signs of him had been completely erased. Madame Thénardier had died in prison while awaiting trial. Thénardier and his daughter Azelma, the only two left of that wretched group, had sunk back into the darkness. The abyss of the social unknown had silently closed over them. On the surface, there was not even the slightest ripple, the faintest tremor, or those dim widening circles that show something has fallen in and that a sounding line may be dropped.

With Madame Thénardier dead, Boulatruelle removed from the case, Claquesous vanished, and the principal accused having escaped from prison, the trial connected with the ambush at the Gorbeau house came to nothing.

The whole affair remained fairly obscure. The Assize Court had been forced to content itself with two minor figures: Panchaud, alias Printanier, alias Bigrenaille, and Demi-Liard, alias Deux-Milliards, who, after both sides had been heard, were rather inconsistently sentenced to ten years in the galleys. The escaped accomplices, who were tried in absentia and remained at large, were sentenced to hard labor for life.

Thénardier, the chief and leader, was likewise condemned to death in absentia.

That sentence was the only thing left to mark Thénardier's existence, casting its sinister light on that buried name like a candle beside a bier.

Moreover, by driving Thénardier deeper into hiding through fear of recapture, the sentence only thickened the shadows surrounding him.

As for the other man, the unknown person who had saved Marius, the search at first met with some success, but then stopped short. They did manage to find the carriage that had brought Marius to the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire on the evening of June 6.

The coachman stated that on June 6, acting on the orders of a police agent, he had waited from three in the afternoon until nightfall on the Quai des Champs-Élysées, above the outlet of the Grand Sewer. Around nine that evening, the sewer grating that opens onto the riverbank was lifted. A man came out carrying another man on his shoulders, and the second man appeared to be dead. The agent, who had been watching that spot, arrested the living man and took charge of the dead one. On the agent's orders, the coachman said, he put "all those people" into his carriage. They first drove to the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, where they left the dead man. The dead man was Monsieur Marius, and the coachman said he recognized him perfectly, although "this time" he was alive. After that, they got back into the carriage, and he drove on. A few steps from the gate of the Archives, they told him to stop. There, in the street, they paid him and dismissed him, and the police agent led the other man away. He knew nothing more. The night had been very dark.

Marius, as we have said, remembered nothing. He recalled only that, at the moment he was falling backward into the barricade, a strong hand had grabbed him from behind. After that, everything disappeared.

He had regained consciousness only at M. Gillenormand's house.

He was consumed with questions.

He had no doubt about who he was. But how was it possible that, after falling in the Rue de la Chanvrerie, he had been found by the police agent on the bank of the Seine, near the Pont des Invalides?

Someone had carried him from the Quartier des Halles to the Champs-Élysées. How? Through the sewer. What extraordinary devotion!

Someone? Who?

This was the man Marius was trying to find.

Of this man, his savior, there was nothing—not a trace, not the slightest clue.

Marius, though he had to be extremely cautious in pursuing the matter, carried his inquiries as far as the prefecture of police. There, no more than anywhere else, what he learned shed any light on it.

The prefecture knew even less about the matter than the hackney-coachman did. They had no record of any arrest being made on June 6 at the mouth of the Grand Sewer.

No report from any officer had been received there about the matter, and the prefecture treated it as a made-up story. They assumed the coachman had invented it.

A coachman hoping for a tip is capable of anything, even inventing a story. And yet the fact itself was certain, and Marius could not doubt it unless he doubted his own identity, as we have just said.

Everything about this strange mystery was impossible to explain.

What had become of that man—that mysterious man whom the coachman had seen come out through the grating of the Grand Sewer with the unconscious Marius on his back, and whom the police officer on watch had arrested at the very moment he was rescuing an insurgent? And what had become of the officer himself?

Why had the officer kept silent? Had the man managed to escape? Had he bribed the officer? Why had this man given no sign of life to Marius, who owed him everything? His selflessness was as extraordinary as his devotion. Why had he never appeared again? Perhaps he was above taking any reward, but no one is above gratitude. Was he dead? Who was he? What kind of face did he have? No one could tell him.

The coachman replied, “The night was very dark.” Basque and Nicolette, in great agitation, had looked only at their young master, covered in blood.

The porter, whose candle had lit Marius's tragic arrival, had been the only one to notice the man in question, and this was the description he gave:

"That man was terrifying."

Marius kept the bloodstained clothes he had been wearing when he was brought back to his grandfather, hoping they might help in his search.

When the coat was examined, they found that one tail had been torn in a strange way. A piece was missing.

One evening, Marius was talking in front of Cosette and Jean Valjean about the whole strange adventure, the countless inquiries he had made, and how useless all his efforts had been. The cold expression on "Monsieur Fauchelevent's" face irritated him.

He cried out with a liveliness that carried a trace of anger:

"Yes, that man, whoever he was, was magnificent. Do you know what he did, sir? He stepped in like an archangel. He must have thrown himself into the middle of the battle, carried me away, opened the sewer, dragged me into it, and borne me through it. He must have gone more than a league and a half through those dreadful underground passages, bent over, burdened, in the dark, in the filth—more than a league and a half, sir, with a corpse on his back. And for what? For the sole purpose of saving that corpse. And that corpse was me. He must have said to himself, 'There may still be some faint sign of life there; I will risk my own life for that wretched spark.' And he risked his life

not once, but twenty times. Every step was dangerous. The proof is that when he came out of the sewer, he was arrested. Do you understand, sir, that this man did all that? And he could expect no reward. What was I? An insurgent. What was I? One of the defeated. Oh! if Cosette's six hundred thousand francs were mine..."

"They are yours," Jean Valjean interrupted.

"Well," Marius went on, "I would give all of it to find that man again."

Jean Valjean said nothing.

CHAPTER I—THE 16TH OF FEBRUARY, 1833

The night of February 16 to 17, 1833, was a blessed one. Above its shadows, heaven seemed open. It was the wedding night of Marius and Cosette.

The day had been delightful.

It had not been the grand celebration the grandfather had dreamed of, some fairy spectacle with a swirl of cherubs and Cupids above the bride and groom, a wedding fit to be painted over a doorway; but it had been gentle and joyful.

Marriage in 1833 was not handled the way it is today. France had not yet borrowed from England that supposedly refined custom of whisking away one's wife, fleeing the moment one leaves the church, hiding in embarrassment over one's own happiness, and mixing the habits of a bankrupt with the raptures of the Song of Songs. People had not yet fully appreciated the purity, elegance, and propriety of rattling off to paradise in a post-chaise, shattering the mystery with jolts and clatter, making an inn bed serve as the wedding bed, and leaving behind, in an ordinary room rented by the night, the most sacred memories of life all mixed up with the private meetings of the stagecoach conductor and the inn servant.

In this second half of the nineteenth century, in which we are now living, the mayor with his sash, the priest with his chasuble, the law, and God are no longer enough. They must be supplemented by the Postilion de Lonjumeau: a blue waistcoat

faced with red and set with bell-shaped buttons, a breastplate like a piece of armor, green leather knee-breeches, curses shouted at Norman horses with their tails tied up, fake braid, a shiny hat, long powdered hair, an enormous whip, and tall boots. France has not yet carried elegance so far as to imitate the English nobility by showering the bridal post-chaise with worn slippers and old shoes, trodden down at the heel, in memory of Churchill—later Marlborough, or Malbrouck—who, on his wedding day, was attacked by an aunt's anger and thereby received good luck. Old shoes and slippers are not yet part of our wedding celebrations; but be patient—if good taste keeps spreading, we shall get there.

In 1833, a hundred years ago, marriage was not conducted at a headlong rush.

Strange as it may seem, people at that time still believed that a wedding was a private social celebration, that a patriarchal feast did not diminish the solemnity of the home, that gaiety—even abundant gaiety—did no harm to happiness so long as it remained honest and decent, and, in short, that it was a good and venerable thing for the union of two destinies, from which a family was meant to arise, to begin at home, with the household itself as witness to the wedding chamber.

And people were so lacking in modesty that they married in their own homes.

So the wedding was held at M. Gillenormand's house, following this now outdated custom.

Ordinary and familiar as marriage may be, the publication of the banns, the legal paperwork, the visit to the mayor's office, and the church ceremony all created a few complications. Nothing could be ready before the 16th of February.

We note this detail simply for the sake of accuracy: by chance, the 16th fell on Shrove Tuesday. That caused some hesitation and scruples, especially on Aunt Gillenormand's part.

"Shrove Tuesday!" exclaimed the grandfather. "So much the better. There is a proverb:

"'A marriage on Mardi Gras will have no ungrateful children.'66

Let us go on. The 16th it is! Do you want to postpone it, Marius?"

"No, certainly not!" the lover replied.

"Then let us get married," cried the grandfather.

So the marriage took place on the 16th, despite the public festivities. It rained that day, but there is always somewhere in the sky a little patch of blue reserved for happiness, which lovers can see even when everyone else is carrying an umbrella.

On the evening before, Jean Valjean handed Marius the five hundred and eighty-four thousand francs in M. Gillenormand's presence.

Since the marriage was being made under the regime of community of property, the legal papers had been straightforward.

From that point on, Toussaint was no longer needed by Jean Valjean. Cosette took her into her own service and raised her to the position of lady's maid.

As for Jean Valjean, a beautiful room in the Gillenormand house had been furnished especially for him, and Cosette had said to him so irresistibly, "Father, I beg you," that she had almost persuaded him to promise that he would come and live in it.

A few days before the date set for the wedding, Jean Valjean had an accident: he crushed the thumb of his right hand. It was not serious, and he would not let anyone fuss over him, bandage it, or even look at the injury—not even Cosette. Even so, he had to wrap his hand in a linen bandage and keep his arm in a sling, which made it impossible for him to sign. M. Gillenormand, acting as Cosette's supervising guardian, signed in his place.

We will not take the reader to either the mayor's office or the church. One does not follow a pair of lovers quite that far, and it is customary to turn away from the drama as soon as it pins a wedding bouquet to its coat. We will simply note one incident which passed unnoticed by the wedding party, though it marked their journey from the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire to the church of Saint-Paul.

At that time, the northern end of the Rue Saint-Louis was being repaved. It was closed off starting at the Rue du Parc-Royal. The wedding carriages could not go straight to Saint-Paul. They had to change their route, and the simplest way was to go by the boulevard. One of the guests remarked that it was Shrove

Tuesday and that the streets would be clogged with carriages. “Why?” asked M. Gillenormand. “Because of the maskers.” “Excellent,” said the grandfather. “Let us go that way. These young people are on their way to be married; they are about to enter the serious part of life. This will prepare them by giving them a glimpse of the masquerade.”

So they went by way of the boulevard. In the first wedding carriage were Cosette and Aunt Gillenormand, along with M. Gillenormand and Jean Valjean. Marius, still kept apart from his betrothed by custom, came only in the second. As the wedding procession came out of the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, it was caught in a long line of vehicles stretching without end from the Madeleine to the Bastille, and from the Bastille back to the Madeleine. The boulevard was full of maskers. Though rain fell now and then, Merry-Andrew, Pantaloon, and Clown kept on. In the cheerful spirit of that winter of 1833, Paris had dressed itself up as Venice. Shrove Tuesdays like that are no longer seen. Now that everything is a kind of scattered Carnival, there is no Carnival anymore.

The sidewalks were packed with pedestrians, and the windows were crowded with curious onlookers. The terraces topping the theatre colonnades were lined with spectators. Along with the masked revelers, people watched that procession—belonging to Shrove Tuesday just as much as to Longchamps—of every kind of vehicle: citadines, tapissières, carioles, and cabriolets, all moving in order, strictly fastened together by police regulations and almost confined to tracks. Anyone riding in one of those vehicles was both watching and being watched. Police

sergeants kept these two endless parallel lines moving along the sides of the boulevard in opposite directions, making sure nothing interrupted that double flow, those two streams of carriages, one going downstream and the other upstream, one toward the Chaussée d'Antin, the other toward the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. The carriages of the peers of France and the Ambassadors, decorated with coats of arms, took the middle of the road and came and went freely. Some festive and splendid processions, especially that of the Bœuf Gras, enjoyed the same privilege. In the middle of all this Parisian gaiety, England cracked its whip; Lord Seymour's post-chaise, dogged by a mocking nickname from the crowd, thundered past.

In the double line, while the municipal guards galloped alongside like sheepdogs, respectable family coaches, weighed down with great-aunts and grandmothers, showed fresh little groups of costumed children at their doors: Clowns of seven, Columbines of six, charming little creatures who felt they were an official part of the public celebration, full of the dignity of their masquerade and serious with the gravity of public officials.

From time to time, the procession of vehicles snagged somewhere. One or the other of the two side lines would stop until the tangle was cleared. A single delayed carriage was enough to bring the whole line to a standstill. Then the march would begin again.

The wedding carriages were in the line heading toward the Bastille, along the right side of the Boulevard. At the top of the Pont-aux-Choux, traffic stopped. Almost at the same moment, the other line, which was moving toward the Madeleine,

stopped as well. At that point in the line there was a carriage full of maskers.

These carriages—or, more accurately, these wagonloads of masked revelers—are a familiar sight to Parisians. If they failed to appear on Shrove Tuesday or Mid-Lent, people would take it as a bad sign and say, "Something is going on. The ministry is probably about to change." Picture heaps of Cassandras, Harlequins, and Columbines, bouncing along high above the crowd below; every kind of grotesque figure, from the Turk to the savage; Hercules holding up Marquises; fishwives whose language would have made Rabelais cover his ears, just as the Mænads made Aristophanes lower his eyes; tow wigs, pink tights, foppish hats, a clown's spectacles, Janot's three-cornered hats harassed by a butterfly; shouts hurled at pedestrians; hands on hips, brazen poses, bare shoulders, shamelessness let loose. It was a chaos of indecency, driven by a coachman crowned with flowers. That was the nature of the institution.

Greece needed the chariot of Thespis; France needs the hackney coach of Vadé.

Everything can be parodied, even parody itself. The Saturnalia, that mocking imitation of ancient beauty, ends—through one excess piled on another—in Shrove Tuesday. And the Bacchanal, once crowned with vine leaves and grapes, flooded with sunlight, and showing her marble breast in a divine half-nudity, has now lost her form beneath the soaked rags of the North and has finally come to be called the Jack-pudding.

The tradition of carriage-loads of masked revelers goes back to the earliest days of the monarchy. The accounts of Louis XI assign the palace bailiff "twenty sous, Tournois, for three coaches of masqueraders at the crossroads." In our own time, these noisy crowds usually have themselves driven around in some old ramshackle carriage, piling onto its roof, or they swamp a rented landau with the top folded back in a chaotic mass. Twenty of them cram into a carriage built for six. They cling to the seats, the rear step, the sides of the hood, and the shafts. Some even straddle the carriage lamps. They stand, sit, and lie there, knees tucked up, legs dangling. The women sit on the men's laps. From far off, their wild pyramid rises above the crowd of heads. These carriage-loads make mountains of merriment in the middle of the procession. Collé, Panard, and Piron pour out of them, spiced with slang. The carriage, made gigantic by its load, looks triumphant. Uproar rules in front and tumult behind. People yell, shout, and howl; they burst out and twist with delight. Mirth bellows, sarcasm flashes, joviality waves like a red flag. Two worn-out horses drag along this farce raised to the level of an apotheosis. It is the triumphal chariot of laughter.

But it is a laughter too cynical to be open. In truth, it is a suspicious laughter. It has a purpose. It is meant to prove Carnival to the Parisians.

These fishwife carriages, in which one senses some shadowy presence one cannot quite name, give the philosopher something to think about. There is government in them. There one can put a finger on a mysterious kinship between public

men and public women.

It is certainly sad that a heap of vice can add up to entertainment; that by piling disgrace on top of shame, people can be lured in; that spying and propping up prostitution can amuse the mob when it appears before them; that the crowd loves to watch that monstrous living heap of glittering rags—half filth, half brightness—roll past on four wheels, shouting and laughing; that they clap for this spectacle made out of every kind of shame; that there would be no festival for the people if the police did not parade these twenty-headed hydras of joy through the streets among them. But what can be done? These ribboned and flower-decked carts of mud are both mocked and forgiven by the public's laughter. Everyone's laughter becomes an accomplice to general degradation. Certain corrupt festivals break down a people and turn them into a mob. And mobs, like tyrants, need clowns. The King has Roquelaure; the mob has the Merry-Andrew. Paris is a great, mad city whenever it is a great, sublime one. There, Carnival is part of politics. Paris—let us admit it—readily lets infamy provide its comedy. She asks only one thing of her masters, when she has masters: "Paint me the mud." Rome felt the same way. She loved Nero. Nero was a gigantic lighterman.

By chance, as we have just said, one of these shapeless groups of masked men and women, hauled along in a huge calash, stopped on the left side of the boulevard, while the wedding procession stopped on the right. The load of masked revelers noticed the wedding carriage carrying the bridal party across from them on the other side of the boulevard.

“Hullo!” said one of the masked revelers. “Here’s a wedding.”

“A fake wedding,” another shot back. “We’re the real thing.”

But they were too far away to call out to the wedding party, and they also feared a rebuke from the police, so the two masked revelers looked elsewhere.

Another minute later, the carriage full of masked revelers had their hands full. The crowd had started shouting—the usual way a crowd shows its affection for masquerades. The two maskers who had just been speaking had to turn and face the mob with their companions, and they found that even the full range of fish-market missiles was not too much to answer the people’s thunderous verbal abuse. A savage exchange of insults broke out between the maskers and the crowd.

Meanwhile, two other maskers in the same carriage had also noticed the wedding: a Spaniard with an enormous nose, an elderly look, and huge black mustaches, and a gaunt fishwife who was actually quite a young girl, her face hidden by a loup–,67. While their companions and the passers-by traded insults, these two carried on a quiet conversation.

Their aside was drowned out by the uproar and disappeared into it. Bursts of rain had soaked the front of the carriage, which was wide open. February winds are not warm. As the fishwife, dressed in a low-necked gown, answered the Spaniard, she shivered, laughed, and coughed.

This was their conversation:

“Say.”

“What is it, daddy?”

“Do you see that old fellow?”

“What old fellow?”

“Over there, in the first wedding carriage, on our side.”

“The one with his arm in a black sling?”

“Yes.”

“Well?”

“I’m sure I know him.”

“Ah!”

“They can cut my throat if they like, and I’m ready to swear I’ve never said either you, thou, or I in my life, if I don’t know that Parisian.” [_pantinois_.]

“Paris in Pantin today.”

“Can you see the bride if you bend down?”

“No.”

“And the bridegroom?”

“There’s no bridegroom in that carriage.”

“Bah!”

“Unless it’s the old man.”

“Try to catch sight of the bride by bending very low.”

“I can’t.”

“Never mind. I know that old fellow with something wrong with his hand, and I’m certain of it.”

"And what good is it to know him?"

"Who knows? Sometimes it helps!"

"I don't give a damn about old men, I really don't!"

"I know him."

"Know him if you like."

"How the devil did he end up in the wedding party?"

"We're in it too."

"Where did this wedding come from?"

"How should I know?"

"Listen."

"Well, what is it?"

"There's one thing you should do."

"What's that?"

"Get down from our cart and follow that wedding procession."

"What for?"

"To find out where it's going and what it's all about. Hurry up and jump down. Off you go, my girl, your legs are young."

"I can't leave the cart."

"Why not?"

"I'm hired."

"Ah, damn it!"

"I owe my fishwife's day to the prefecture."

"That's true."

"If I leave the cart, the first inspector who spots me will arrest me. You know that well enough."

"Yes, I do."

"The government has bought me for today."

"Still, that old man bothers me."

"Do old men bother you? You're no young girl yourself."

"He's in the first carriage."

"So?"

"In the bride's cart."

"And what of it?"

"Then he's the father."

"What does that have to do with me?"

"I'm telling you, he's the father."

"As if he were the only father in the world."

"Listen."

"What?"

"I can't go out unless I'm masked. Here I'm hidden; no one knows I'm here. But tomorrow there won't be any more maskers. It's Ash Wednesday. I could get nabbed. I have to sneak back into my hole. But you're free."

"Not exactly."

“More than I do, anyway.”

“Well, what does that matter?”

“You have to try to find out where that wedding party went.”

“Where it went?”

“Yes.”

“I know.”

“Then where is it going?”

“To the Cadran-Bleu.”

“First of all, it isn’t going in that direction.”

“Well then! To la Rapée.”

“Or somewhere else.”

“It’s free to go where it likes. Wedding parties can do as they please.”

“That’s not the point. I’m telling you that you must try to find out for me what that wedding is, who that old fellow is connected to, and where the bride and groom live.”

“Oh, that’s rich! That would be a strange job. As if it were so easy to track down a wedding party that went through the street on Shrove Tuesday, a week later. It’s like looking for a pin in a haystack! It can’t be done!”

“That doesn’t matter. You must try. Do you understand me, Azelma?”

The two lines started moving again on either side of the boulevard, heading in opposite directions, and the carriage of the maskers lost sight of the bride’s “trap.”

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

To see one's dream come true—who is granted that? There must be some kind of choosing for it in heaven. We are all candidates without knowing it, and the angels cast the votes. Cosette and Marius had been chosen.

Cosette was radiant and moving, both at the mayor's office and in church. Toussaint, with Nicolette helping her, had dressed her.

Over a white taffeta petticoat, Cosette wore her Binche guipure gown, an English point veil, a necklace of fine pearls, and a wreath of orange blossoms. Everything was white, and from the heart of that whiteness she seemed to shine. It was innocence in full bloom, transformed by light. One might have thought her a virgin on the verge of becoming a goddess.

Marius' handsome hair shone and was scented; here and there beneath the thick curls, faint pale lines—the scars of the barricade—could be seen.

The grandfather, proud and holding his head high, looked more than ever like a man from the age of Barras, in both his dress and his manners, as he escorted Cosette. He took Jean Valjean's place, since Valjean, with his arm still in a sling, could not offer his hand to the bride.

Jean Valjean, dressed in black, followed them, smiling.

“Monsieur Fauchelevent,” the grandfather said to him, “this is a splendid day. I declare that afflictions and sorrows are over. From now on, there must be no sadness anywhere. By heaven, I decree joy! Evil has no right to exist. The very existence of unhappy people is, truly, an insult to the blue sky. Evil does not come from man, who is good at heart. All human misery has its capital and central government in hell, otherwise known as the Devil’s Tuileries. Well now, listen to me talking like a demagogue! As for me, I no longer have any political opinions. Let everyone be rich—that is to say, cheerful—and that is enough for me.”

At the end of all the ceremonies—after saying yes before the mayor and before the priest, after signing the registers at the town hall and in the sacristy, after exchanging rings, after kneeling side by side beneath the white moire canopy in the incense-filled air—they arrived at the church doors, hand in hand, admired and envied by everyone. Marius was dressed in black, and she in white. Ahead of them went the suisse, with a colonel’s epaulets, striking the pavement with his halberd, while astonished spectators stood in two lines on either side. The great church doors stood wide open, and they were ready to get back into their carriage. Everything was over, yet Cosette still could not believe it was real. She looked at Marius, then at the crowd, then at the sky. It was as if she feared she might wake from a dream. That amazed, slightly anxious expression made her beauty even more irresistibly charming. They got into the same carriage to return home, with Marius beside Cosette and M. Gillenormand and Jean Valjean seated opposite them. Aunt Gillenormand had moved one step farther away and rode

in the second carriage.

“My children,” said the grandfather, “here you are: Monsieur le Baron and Madame la Baronne, with an income of thirty thousand livres.”

And Cosette, snuggling close to Marius, brushed his ear with an angel-soft whisper: “So it’s true. My name is Marius. I am Madame Thou.”

These two were radiant. They had reached that final, never-to-return moment where all youth and all joy meet in a blaze of light. They were living out Jean Prouvaire’s verses; together, they made forty years. It was marriage raised to its purest form; these two children were like two lilies. They did not really look at each other or study each other. Cosette saw Marius surrounded by glory; Marius saw Cosette upon an altar. And on that altar, and in that glory, with those two visions blending, there was, somewhere in the distance—behind a cloud for Cosette, in a flash for Marius—the ideal and the real together: the meeting of the kiss and the dream, the marriage bed. All the suffering they had gone through came back to them now as rapture. It seemed to them that their sorrows, their sleepless nights, their tears, their anguish, their terrors, and their despair had all been transformed into caresses and rays of light, making the lovely hour before them lovelier still; and that their griefs had been like attendants preparing joy for its appearance. How sweet it is to have suffered! Their unhappiness formed a halo around their happiness. The long agony of their love was ending in an ascent.

It was the same enchantment in both souls, shaded by sensuality in Marius and by modesty in Cosette. In low voices they said to each other, “We will go back and look at our little garden in the Rue Plumet.” The folds of Cosette’s gown lay across Marius.

Such a day is an indescribable blend of dream and reality. One both possesses and imagines. There is still time ahead for wonder and anticipation. The feeling, on that day, of standing at noon while dreaming of midnight cannot be put into words. The happiness of these two hearts spilled over into the crowd and filled the passers-by with cheerfulness.

People stopped in the Rue Saint-Antoine, in front of Saint-Paul, to look through the carriage windows at the orange blossoms trembling on Cosette’s head.

Then they returned home to the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire. Marius, glowing with triumph and happiness, climbed the staircase beside Cosette—the same staircase up which he had once been carried, half dead. The poor people who had gathered at the door, and who shared in their generosity, blessed them. Flowers were everywhere. The house was as fragrant as the church had been: after incense, roses. It seemed to them that voices were singing out in the infinite. They felt God in their hearts. Destiny stretched above them like a ceiling of stars, and over their heads they saw the light of a rising sun. Suddenly the clock struck. Marius glanced at Cosette's lovely bare arm and at the rosy hints dimly visible through the lace of her bodice, and Cosette, catching his glance, blushed to the roots of her hair.

A good many old friends of the Gillenormand family had been invited, and they crowded around Cosette. Each tried to outdo the others in greeting her as Madame la Baronne.

The officer, Théodule Gillenormand, now a captain, had come from Chartres, where his regiment was stationed, to attend the wedding of his cousin Pontmercy. Cosette did not recognize him.

As for him, being used to women thinking him handsome, he remembered Cosette no more than he remembered any other woman.

"How right I was not to believe that story about the lancer!" Father Gillenormand said to himself.

Cosette had never been more affectionate toward Jean Valjean. In this she was in harmony with Father Gillenormand: while he turned joy into sayings and maxims, she gave off kindness like a fragrance. Happiness wants the whole world to be happy.

When she spoke to Jean Valjean, her voice took on the tones she had used when she was a little girl. She showered him with smiles.

A banquet had been laid out in the dining room.

Light as bright as day is the natural finishing touch to great joy. Happy people do not welcome mist or darkness. They refuse gloom. Night, yes; shadows, no. If there is no sun, then one must be created.

The dining room was filled with bright, cheerful things. In the center, above the white, gleaming table, hung a Venetian chandelier with flat glass plates and all kinds of colored birds—blue, violet, red, and green—perched among the candles. Around it were girandoles; on the walls, sconces with three and five branches. Mirrors, silver, glass, plate, porcelain, faience, pottery, and finely worked gold and silver all glittered merrily. The spaces between the candelabra were filled with bouquets, so that wherever there was no light, there was a flower.

In the antechamber, three violins and a flute were softly playing Haydn quartets.

Jean Valjean had taken a seat in the drawing room, behind the door, whose folded-back panel almost hid him. A few moments

before they went in to dinner, Cosette came over, as if on a sudden impulse, and made him a deep curtsy, spreading out her bridal dress with both hands. With a tender, mischievous look, she asked:

“Father, are you pleased?”

“Yes,” said Jean Valjean, “I am happy!”

“Then laugh.”

Jean Valjean began to laugh.

A few moments later, Basque announced that dinner was ready.

The guests, led by M. Gillenormand with Cosette on his arm, entered the dining room and took their proper places around the table.

Two large armchairs stood to the right and left of the bride, one for M. Gillenormand and the other for Jean Valjean. M. Gillenormand sat down. The other armchair stayed empty.

They looked around for M. Fauchelevent.

He was gone.

M. Gillenormand questioned Basque.

“Do you know where M. Fauchelevent is?”

“Sir,” Basque replied, “yes, exactly. M. Fauchelevent told me to tell you, sir, that he was unwell. His injured hand was troubling him somewhat, and he could not dine with Monsieur le Baron and Madame la Baronne. He asks to be excused and says he will come tomorrow. He has just left.”

That empty armchair cast a brief chill over the warmth of the wedding feast. But if M. Fauchelevent was absent, M. Gillenormand was there, and the grandfather shone brightly enough for both of them. He declared that M. Fauchelevent had been right to retire early if he was unwell, but that it was only a minor complaint. That explanation was enough. Besides, what does one dim corner matter in such a flood of joy? Cosette and Marius were passing through one of those blessed, self-absorbed moments when a person seems capable of nothing but receiving happiness. Then an idea came to M. Gillenormand. “Pardieu, this armchair is empty. Come here, Marius. Your aunt will allow it, though she has a claim on you. This armchair is for you. That is proper and delightful. Fortunatus beside Fortunata.” The whole table applauded. Marius took Jean Valjean’s place beside Cosette, and events unfolded in such a way that Cosette, who had at first been saddened by Jean Valjean’s absence, ended by being pleased with it. From the moment Marius sat down in his place as his substitute, Cosette would not have regretted the absence of

God himself. She rested her sweet little foot, in its white satin shoe, on Marius' foot.

Once the armchair was occupied, M. Fauchelevent vanished from everyone's mind, and nothing seemed missing.

And five minutes later, the whole table, from one end to the other, was laughing with the full liveliness of complete forgetfulness.

At dessert, M. Gillenormand rose to his feet with a glass of champagne in his hand—only half full, so that the trembling of his eighty years would not make it spill over—and proposed a toast to the newly married couple.

"You won't get away with only two sermons," he cried. "This morning you heard one from the curé; tonight you'll hear one from your grandfather. Listen to me. I'll give you a little advice: love each other. I don't waste time circling around the point; I go straight to it. Be happy. In all creation, only the turtledoves are wise. Philosophers say, 'Moderate your joys.' I say, 'Let your joys run free.' Be as wildly in love with each other as demons. Be mad about it. Philosophers talk nonsense. I'd like to cram their philosophy back down their throats. Can there be too many perfumes, too many roses opening, too many nightingales singing, too many green leaves, too much dawn in life? Can people love each other too much? Can they delight each other too much? Take care, Estelle—you are too pretty! Take care, Nemorin—you are too handsome! What absurdity! Can people enchant each other too much, spoil each other too much, charm each other too much? Can anyone be too alive, too happy?

‘Moderate your joys’—really! Down with the philosophers! Wisdom lies in rejoicing. Let us be merry, let us celebrate. Are we happy because we are good, or 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 questions. The important thing is to have the Sancy and happiness. Let us be happy without hairsplitting. Let us obey the sun without question. And what is the sun? It is love. Whoever says love says woman. Ah! there is true power—women. Ask that demagogue Marius whether he is not the slave of that little tyrant Cosette. And willingly too, the coward! Woman! No Robespierre keeps his place, but woman reigns forever. I am no longer a Royalist except where that royalty is concerned. What is Adam? The kingdom of Eve. No ’89 for Eve. There has been the royal scepter topped with a fleur-de-lys, the imperial scepter topped with a globe, Charlemagne’s iron scepter, Louis the Great’s golden scepter—the Revolution twisted them between thumb and finger like bits of straw. It is over. They are broken. They lie on the ground. There is no scepter left. But start a revolution against that little embroidered handkerchief that smells of patchouli—I’d like to see you do it. Try. Why is it so strong? Because it is a trinket. Ah, so you are the nineteenth century? Well, what of it? We were just as foolish as you. Don’t imagine you have changed the universe much because your trip-gallant is called cholera-morbus and your _pourr_ée_ is called the cachuca. The truth is, women must always be loved. There is no escaping that. These dear creatures are our angels. Yes—love, woman, the kiss: they form a circle from which I defy

you to escape; and for my part, I would be only too happy to step back into it. Which of you has seen the planet Venus, the coquette of the abyss, the Célimène of the ocean, rise in the infinite and calm everything below? The ocean is a rough Alcestis. Yet however much it grumbles, when Venus appears it has to smile. That brute submits. We are all made that way. Rage, storm, thunderclaps, foam up to the ceiling—and then a woman appears, a planet rises, and down you go on your face! Six months ago Marius was fighting; today he is married. Good. Yes, Marius, yes, Cosette, you are right. Live boldly for each other. Make us burst with envy because we cannot do the same. Idealize each other. Gather in your beaks every little straw of happiness on earth and build yourselves a nest for life. By heaven, to love and be loved—what a splendid miracle when one is young! Don't imagine you invented it. I too have had my dream. I too have brooded and sighed. I too have had a soul full of moonlight. Love is a child six thousand years old. Love has earned the right to a long white beard. Methuselah is a street urchin beside Cupid. For sixty centuries men and women have escaped their troubles by loving each other. The devil, being cunning, took to hating man; man, being even more cunning, took to loving woman. In that way he does more good than the devil does him harm. That trick was discovered in the earthly paradise. The invention is ancient, my friends, and yet always new. Make the most of it. Be Daphnis and Chloe while you wait to become Philemon and Baucis. See to it that when you are together, nothing is missing; let Cosette be the sun for Marius, and Marius the universe for Cosette. Cosette, let your husband's smile be your good weather. Marius, let your wife's

tears be your rain. And may it never rain in your household. You have stolen the winning number in the lottery. You have won the grand prize. Guard it well. Lock it up. Do not waste it. Adore each other and snap your fingers at everything else. Believe me. It is plain good sense, and good sense does not lie. Be a religion to each other. Every man has his own way of worshipping God. Saperlotte! the best way to worship God is to love one's wife. I love thee!—that is my catechism. Whoever loves is orthodox. Henri IV.'s oath places holiness somewhere between feasting and drunkenness. Ventre-saint-gris! I do not belong to the religion of that oath. It leaves woman out, and that astonishes me in Henri IV. My friends, long live women! They say I am old. It is astonishing how strongly I still feel the urge to be young. I would like to go listen to bagpipes in the woods. Children who manage to be beautiful and happy—that intoxicates me. I would dearly like to marry, if anyone would have me. It is impossible to believe that God made us for anything but this: to adore, to coo, to preen, to be dove-like, to be graceful, to murmur our love from morning to night, to see one's own reflection in one's little wife, to feel proud, triumphant, splendid—that is the purpose of life. So do not be offended by what we used to think in our day, when we were young. Ah, vertu-bamboche! what charming women there were then, what pretty little faces, what lovely girls! I did my share of damage among them. So love each other. If people did not love each other, I truly do not see what use there would be in springtime; and for my part, I would ask the good God to shut away all the beautiful things he shows 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 cheerful, lively, and delightful. The grandfather's overflowing good humor set the tone for the whole celebration, and everyone took their cue from the warmth of that nearly hundred-year-old host. They danced a little and laughed a great deal; it was a gracious, happy wedding. Good Old Days himself might have been invited. In any case, he was there in the person of Father Gillenormand.

There was a burst of commotion, and then silence.

The newly married couple disappeared.

A little after midnight, the Gillenormand house became a temple.

Here we pause. On the threshold of a wedding night stands a smiling angel, with a finger to his lips.

The soul falls into contemplation before that sanctuary where love is celebrated.

There ought to be flashes of light across such houses. The joy inside them should break through the stone walls and cast a faint glow into the darkness. It is impossible that this sacred, fateful celebration should not send some heavenly radiance out into the infinite. Love is the sublime crucible where man and woman are fused together. From it comes the single being, the threefold being, the final being—the human trinity. The birth of two souls into one ought to stir even the darkness. The lover is the priest; the enraptured virgin is afraid. Something of that joy rises to God. Where true marriage exists—that is, where there is love—the ideal enters. A marriage bed makes a corner of dawn in the shadows. If human eyes could look into the formidable

and enchanting visions of the higher life, we would probably see the shapes of night, the winged unknown beings, the blue passersby of the invisible world, bending over the shining house. We would see a crowd of dark heads gathered there, content, pouring down blessings, pointing out to one another the virgin bride, gently troubled, sweetly frightened, while the reflection of human happiness rests on their divine faces. If, at that supreme moment, the married pair, dazzled by delight and thinking themselves alone, were to listen, they would hear a confused rustling of wings in their room. Perfect happiness implies an understanding with the angels. That little dark chamber has all heaven for its ceiling. When two mouths, made sacred by love, come together to create, it is impossible that the vast mystery of the stars should not tremble above that ineffable kiss.

These are the only true joys. Outside them, there is no joy. Love alone is ecstasy. Everything else weeps.

To love, or to have loved—that is enough. Ask for nothing more. No other pearl lies hidden in the dark folds of life. To love is fulfillment.

CHAPTER III—THE INSEPARABLE

What had become of Jean Valjean?

Right after laughing at Cosette's charming order, Jean Valjean got up while no one was noticing him and slipped unnoticed into the antechamber. It was the very room he had entered eight months earlier, covered in mud, blood, and powder, when he brought the grandson back to the grandfather. The old wood paneling was draped with greenery and flowers. The musicians sat on the sofa where Marius had been laid down. Basque, dressed in a black coat, knee breeches, white stockings, and white gloves, was arranging roses around the dishes that were to be served. Jean Valjean pointed to his arm in its sling, told Basque to explain his absence, and left.

The long dining-room windows opened onto the street. Jean Valjean stood for several minutes, straight and still in the darkness beneath those glowing windows. He listened. The blurred sounds of the feast reached him. He heard the grandfather's loud, authoritative voice, the violins, the clatter of plates, and bursts of laughter. Through all that cheerful noise, he could make out Cosette's sweet, happy voice.

He left the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire and returned to the Rue de l'Homme Armé.

To get back there, he took the Rue Saint-Louis, the Rue Culture-Sainte-Catherine, and the Blancs-Manteaux. It was a little longer, but for the past three months it was the route he

had grown used to taking every day from the Rue de l'Homme Armé to the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, so he could avoid the traffic and mud in the Rue Vieille-du-Temple.

Because Cosette had passed that way, he could not bring himself to take any other route.

Jean Valjean went into his rooms. He lit his candle and climbed the stairs. The apartment was empty. Even Toussaint was gone. His footsteps sounded louder than usual in the rooms. Every cupboard stood open. He went into Cosette's bedroom. There were no sheets on the bed. The pillow, still in its ticking and without a case or lace, lay on the folded blankets at the foot of the mattress. The mattress cover showed bare, and no one would ever sleep there again. All the little feminine things Cosette had loved were gone. Nothing remained but the heavy furniture and the four walls. Toussaint's bed had been stripped in the same way. Only one bed was still made, as if waiting for someone, and that was Jean Valjean's.

Jean Valjean looked at the walls, shut some of the cupboard doors, and walked back and forth from one room to another.

Then he returned to his own room and set his candle on a table.

He had taken his arm out of the sling, and he used his right hand as if it did not hurt.

He went over to his bed, and his eyes fell—by chance, or on purpose?—on the little portmanteau, the _inseparable_ that Cosette had been jealous of, which never left his side. When he arrived in the Rue de l'Homme Armé on the 4th of June, he had placed

it on a round table near the head of his bed. He went to the table with a sudden quickness, took a key from his pocket, and opened the valise.

He slowly took out the clothes Cosette had worn when she left Montfermeil ten years earlier: first the little dress, then the black fichu, then the sturdy, rough child's shoes, which Cosette could almost still have worn because her feet were so small, then the very thick fustian bodice, then the knitted petticoat, then the apron with pockets, and finally the woollen stockings. The stockings still kept the delicate shape of a little girl's leg, and they were no longer than Jean Valjean's hand. Everything was black. He himself had brought these clothes to Montfermeil for her. As he took them from the valise, he placed them on the bed. He sank into thought. Memories came back to him. It had been winter, a bitterly cold December month. She had been shivering there, half naked, in rags, with her poor little feet red inside her wooden shoes. He, Jean Valjean, had made her leave those rags behind and dress herself in these mourning clothes. Her mother must have been glad in her grave to see her daughter mourning for her, and above all to see that she was properly dressed and warm. He thought of the forest of Montfermeil. Cosette and he had crossed it together. He remembered the weather, the bare trees, the woods empty of birds, the sunless sky. None of that mattered; it had been beautiful. He arranged the little clothes on the bed, the fichu beside the petticoat, the stockings next to the shoes, and looked at them one by one. She had been no taller than that. She had held her big doll in her arms. She had put her louis d'or into the pocket of that apron. She had laughed. They had

walked hand in hand. She had no one in the world but him.

Then his venerable white head dropped forward onto the bed. That stoic old heart gave way. His face was buried, so to speak, in Cosette's clothes, and if anyone had been passing on the stairs at that moment, they would have heard terrible sobbing.

CHAPTER IV—THE IMMORTAL LIVER 68

The old, terrible struggle, whose many stages we have already seen, began again.

Jacob wrestled with the angel for only one night. Alas, how many times have we seen Jean Valjean, in the darkness, seized by his conscience and fighting desperately against it!

What an unimaginable struggle! Sometimes his footing gave way; sometimes the ground itself collapsed beneath him. How many times had that conscience, fiercely devoted to what was right, seized him and thrown him down? How many times had truth pressed its relentless knee against his chest? How many times, struck to the ground by the light, had he begged for mercy? How many times had that merciless spark, lit within him and cast upon him by the Bishop, forced its blinding glare on him when he wanted to remain blind? How many times had he gotten back up in the fight, clung to the rock, propped himself against self-deception, dragged through the dust—at one moment seeming to master his conscience, at the next defeated by it again? How many times, after some evasion, after the plausible but treacherous reasoning of selfishness, had he heard his angry conscience cry in his ear, “You have stumbled, wretch!” How many times had his rebellious thoughts choked in his throat under the clear weight of duty! It was resistance to God. Deathly sweats. Secret wounds that only he could feel bleeding. Raw abrasions across his miserable life. How many times had he risen bleeding, bruised, shattered, yet

enlightened—with despair in his heart and serenity in his soul! Defeated, he had still felt himself the victor. And after wrenching, breaking, and tearing his conscience as if with red-hot pincers, it had stood over him—terrible, radiant, and calm—and said, “Now go in peace.”

But after coming through such a sorrowful struggle, what a bleak peace it was, alas.

Still, that night Jean Valjean felt that he was going through his final battle.

A heartbreaking question rose before him.

Destiny does not always move in a straight line. It does not open before the chosen man like a clear avenue. It has blind courtyards, blocked alleys, dark turns, and troubling crossroads where many paths invite a choice. At that moment, Jean Valjean had stopped at the most dangerous of those crossroads.

He had reached the ultimate meeting point of good and evil. That dark crossing lay before his eyes. Once again, as had already happened to him in other painful trials, two roads opened before him: one tempting, the other frightening.

Which one was he to take?

He was being urged toward the road that frightened him by that mysterious pointing finger we all sense whenever we stare into the darkness.

Once again, Jean Valjean had to choose between the terrible harbor and the smiling trap.

So is it true? The soul may heal, but fate does not. A dreadful thought: a destiny that cannot be cured.

This was the question before him:

How was Jean Valjean to act toward the happiness of Cosette and Marius? He was the one who had wanted that happiness and made it possible. He had, in a sense, buried it deep inside himself, and now, when he thought of it, he could feel the grim satisfaction an armorer might feel on seeing his maker's mark on a knife as it was pulled, still smoking, from his own chest.

Cosette had Marius, and Marius had Cosette. They had everything, even wealth. And he was the one who had made it so.

But what was Jean Valjean to do with that happiness, now that it existed, now that it was real? Should he force his way into it? Should he treat it as if some part of it still belonged to him? Certainly Cosette belonged to someone else now; but should Jean Valjean hold on to whatever remained of her that he could still keep? Should he go on being the sort of father he had been until now, half in shadow but still honored? Should he, without a word, carry his past into their future? Should he appear there as if he had the right, and take a seat, veiled, by that bright hearth? Should he take those innocent hands in his tragic ones, smiling? Should he stretch out, on the peaceful hearthrug of the Gillenormand drawing room, those feet that dragged behind them the shameful shadow of the law? Should he share in the good fortune of Cosette and Marius? Should he make the darkness on his own brow and the cloud over theirs heavier

still? Should he bring his own ruin in as a third partner in their happiness? Should he go on saying nothing? In short, should he remain the sinister mute of destiny beside these two happy beings?

A person must be used to fate, and to meeting it face to face, before daring to look up when certain questions appear in all their terrible nakedness. Behind that harsh question mark stands either good or evil. “What are you going to do?” the sphinx asks.

Jean Valjean had that hard-won habit of facing such trials. He looked the sphinx straight in the eye.

He looked at this merciless problem from every angle.

Cosette, that lovely life, was the raft in this shipwreck. What was he to do? Hold on to it, or let go?

If he held on, he would come out of the disaster. He would rise again into the sunlight. He would let the bitter water drip from his clothes and hair. He would be saved. He would live.

And if he let go?

Then there was only the abyss.

So he wrestled sadly with his thoughts. Or, more accurately, he fought. Inside himself he struggled wildly, now against his own will, now against his own conviction.

It was fortunate for Jean Valjean that he had been able to weep. Perhaps that gave him some relief. But the beginning was brutal. A storm broke loose inside him, fiercer than the one that

had once driven him to Arras. The past rose up before the present. He compared them and sobbed. Once the silence of tears had been broken, the despairing man twisted in agony.

He felt that he had been brought up short.

Alas, in this fight to the death between our selfishness and our duty, when we fall back step by step before our unchanging ideal—confused, furious, enraged at having to give way, contesting every inch of ground, hoping for some possible escape, searching for a way out—how sudden and terrible is the resistance of the wall at our back!

To feel that sacred shadow blocking the way!

What a torment that invisible, relentless force is!

And then, one is never finished with conscience. Choose, Brutus; choose, Cato. It has no bottom, because it is God. Into that well one throws the labor of a whole life. One throws in one's fortune, one's wealth, one's success, one's liberty or one's fatherland, one's comfort, one's rest, one's joy. More, more, more. Empty the vase. Tip out the urn. In the end, one must throw in one's heart.

Somewhere in the mist of the ancient hells, there is a vat like that.

Is a person not forgivable if, at last, he refuses? Can the inexhaustible really claim that right? Are chains that never end not beyond human strength? Who would blame Sisyphus or Jean Valjean for saying, "It is enough!"

Matter can only obey up to the point where friction stops it; is there no such limit to the soul's obedience? If perpetual motion is impossible, can endless self-sacrifice really be demanded?

The first step is nothing; the last is the hard one. What was the Champmathieu affair compared with Cosette's marriage and all that came with it? What is a return to the galleys compared with stepping into the void?

Oh, first step downward, how dark you are! Oh, second step, how black you are!

How could he keep from turning his head away this time?

Martyrdom is a kind of sublimation, a burning, corrosive sublimation. It is a torture that also sanctifies. A person may accept it for the first hour. He may sit on the throne of burning iron, place the crown of hot iron on his head, accept the red-hot globe, and take up the red-hot sceptre. But the cloak of flame still has to be put on. And does there not come a moment when wretched flesh rebels, when a man gives up and abdicates suffering?

At last, Jean Valjean entered the peace that comes with exhaustion.

He weighed everything, reflected, and considered the alternatives on that mysterious balance of light and darkness.

Should he force the burden of his years in the galleys onto those two radiant children, or should he complete his own hopeless descent alone? On one side was Cosette's sacrifice; on the other, his own.

What answer would he reach? What decision did he make?

What resolution did he choose? What final answer did he give, deep within himself, to the incorruptible question fate put to him? Which door did he decide to open? Which side of his life did he choose to shut away and condemn? Of all the bottomless precipices around him, which one did he choose? What extreme did he accept? To which abyss did he bow his head?

His dizzying reverie lasted all night.

He stayed there until dawn, in the same position, doubled over the bed, flattened beneath the weight of fate, crushed perhaps—alas!—his fists clenched, his arms stretched out to either side like a man taken down from the cross and thrown face-first onto the ground. He remained there for twelve hours, through the twelve long hours of a winter night, icy cold, never once lifting his head or saying a word. He was as still as a corpse, while his thoughts crawled along the earth and then rose into the air, now like the hydra, now like the eagle. Anyone who had seen him lying there so motionless would have thought him dead; then suddenly he shuddered violently, and his mouth, pressed against Cosette's clothes, kissed them. Then it was clear that he was alive.

But who could have seen him? Jean Valjean was alone. No one was there.

No one, except the One who dwells in the shadows.

BOOK SEVENTH—THE LAST DROP FROM THE CUP

[Illustration: Last Drop from the Cup]

CHAPTER I—THE SEVENTH CIRCLE AND THE EIGHTH HEAVEN

The days after a wedding are quiet ones. People respect the reflections of the happy couple, and, to some extent, their late rising as well. The rush of visits and congratulations does not begin until later. On the morning of February 17, it was a little after noon when Basque, with a napkin and feather duster under his arm, busy putting the antechamber back in order, heard a light knock at the door. No one had rung, which was tactful on such a day. Basque opened it and found M. Fauchelevent. He showed him into the drawing-room, which was still cluttered and in disarray, with the look of a battlefield after the festivities of the night before.

“Well, sir,” said Basque, “we all got up late.”

“Is your master awake?” asked Jean Valjean.

“How is Monsieur’s arm?” Basque replied.

“Better. Is your master awake?”

“Which one? The old one or the new one?”

“Monsieur Pontmercy.”

“Monsieur le Baron,” said Basque, straightening up.

A man is a Baron above all in the eyes of his servants. The title gives him importance with them; as a philosopher might say, some of its splendor rubs off on them, and they are flattered by

that. Marius, it should be noted, though he had proved himself a committed republican, was now a Baron in spite of himself. A small revolution had taken place in the family over this title. Now it was M. Gillenormand who held to it, while Marius tried to distance himself from it. But Colonel Pontmercy had written, “My son will bear my title.” Marius obeyed. And Cosette, in whom womanhood was just beginning to awaken, was delighted to be a Baroness.

“Monsieur le Baron?” Basque repeated. “I’ll go see. I’ll tell him that M. Fauchelevent is here.”

“No. Don’t tell him it is I. Tell him that someone wishes to speak to him privately, and give no name.”

“Ah!” said Basque.

“I want to surprise him.”

“Ah!” said Basque again, his second “ah!” serving 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 if, if one listened closely, one might still catch the faint echo of the wedding. All over the polished floor lay flowers that had fallen from garlands and headdresses. The candles had burned down to stubs, adding drips of wax to the crystal drops of the chandeliers like little stalactites. Not a single piece of furniture was in its proper place. In the corners, three or four armchairs had been pulled together in circles, as though they

were still carrying on a conversation. The whole scene was cheerful. A certain grace lingers around a feast that has ended. It was something happy. On those disordered chairs, among those fading flowers, beneath those extinguished lights, people had been thinking of joy. The sun had taken the place of the chandeliers and came streaming gaily into the drawing-room.

Several minutes passed. Jean Valjean stood motionless where Basque had left him. He was very pale. His eyes were hollow, so sunken from sleeplessness that they almost disappeared in their sockets. His black coat hung in the tired folds of a garment that had been worn all night. The elbows were whitened with the lint left behind when cloth rubs against linen.

Jean Valjean stared at the window's outline, cast by the sun onto the polished floor at his feet.

A sound came from the door, and he looked up.

Marius came in with his head held high, a smile on his lips, and an indescribable light on his face. His brow seemed open and bright, and his eyes shone with triumph. He had not slept either.

"It's you, father!" he cried when he saw Jean Valjean. "That fool of a Basque was acting so mysteriously! But you've come too early. It's only half past twelve. Cosette is asleep."

That word, "Father," spoken by Marius to M. Fauchelevent, meant complete happiness. As the reader knows, there had always been a high wall between them, along with coldness and restraint—ice that had to be broken or melted. Marius had now reached that rapturous state in which the wall came down, the

ice disappeared, and M. Fauchelevent had become, to him as to Cosette, a father.

He went on, his words pouring out, as they do in those almost divine bursts of joy.

“I’m so glad to see you! If only you knew how much we missed you yesterday! Good morning, father. How is your hand? Better, isn’t it?”

And, content with the favorable answer he had supplied for himself, he went on:

“We’ve both been talking about you. Cosette loves you so much! You mustn’t forget that you have a room here. We want nothing more to do with the Rue de l’Homme Armé. We’re done with it completely. How could you go and live on a street like that? It’s unhealthy, unpleasant, ugly, blocked off at one end, cold, and impossible to get into. You are to come and settle here. Today. Or else you’ll have Cosette to answer to. She intends to lead us all by the nose, I warn you. You have your own room here. It’s near ours and opens onto the garden. The problem with the clock has been taken care of, the bed is made, everything is ready; you only have to move in. Beside your bed, Cosette has placed a huge old armchair covered in Utrecht velvet, and she said to it, ‘Stretch out your arms to him.’ Every spring, a nightingale comes to the cluster of acacias opposite your windows. In two months, it will be there again. You’ll have its nest on your left and ours on your right. At night it will sing, and by day Cosette will chatter. Your room faces due south. Cosette will arrange your books for you—your Voyages of

Captain Cook and the others, Vancouver's, and all your things. I believe there's a little valise you're fond of; I've chosen a place of honor for that. You've won over my grandfather; he likes you. We'll all live together. Do you play whist? You'll delight my grandfather beyond measure if you do. You shall be the one to take Cosette walking on the days when I'm at court. You'll give her your arm, just as you used to in the Luxembourg. We are completely determined to be happy. And you are to be part of it, part of our happiness, do you hear, father? Come, will you have breakfast with us today?"

"Sir," said Jean Valjean, "I have something to tell you. I am an ex-convict."

Just as the ear can be struck by sounds too high to register, the mind too can be hit by something beyond what it can take in. The words, "I am an ex-convict," coming from M. Fauchelevent's mouth and reaching Marius's ears, went beyond what he could grasp. It seemed to him that something had just been said, but he had no idea what. He stood there with his mouth hanging open.

Then he saw that the man speaking to him looked terrifying. So lost was he in his own stunned bewilderment that, until that moment, he had not noticed the other man's dreadful pallor.

Jean Valjean untied the black cravat supporting his right arm, unwound the linen around his hand, uncovered his thumb, and showed it to Marius.

"There is nothing wrong with my hand," he said.

Marius looked at the thumb.

“There has never been anything wrong with it,” Jean Valjean went on.

In fact, there was no sign of any injury.

Jean Valjean continued:

“It was right that I should stay away from your wedding. I stayed away as much as I could. So I invented this injury so that I would not have to commit forgery, so that I would not put a flaw in the marriage documents, so that I could avoid signing them.”

Marius stammered.

“What does this mean?”

“It means,” Jean Valjean replied, “that I have been in the galleys.”

“You are driving me mad!” Marius cried in terror.

“Monsieur Pontmercy,” said Jean Valjean, “I spent nineteen years in the galleys. For theft. Then I was sentenced to life for theft, as a second offense. At this moment, I have broken my ban.”

Marius recoiled from the truth in vain. He denied it, resisted it, refused the evidence, but in the end he had to yield. He began to understand, and, as so often happens in such moments, he understood too much. A deep inner shudder of dreadful clarity ran through him. An idea crossed his mind that made him tremble. He caught sight of a miserable future for himself.

“Tell me everything, tell me everything!” he cried. “You are Cosette’s father!”

And he stepped back a couple of paces with a movement of indescribable horror.

Jean Valjean lifted his head with such majesty that he seemed to rise all the way to the ceiling.

“You must believe me in this, sir; although our word to others may not be accepted in law . . .”

Here he paused, then added, with a kind of sovereign, sepulchral authority, speaking slowly and stressing each syllable:

“. . . You will believe me. I am not Cosette’s father—before God, no. Monsieur le Baron Pontmercy, I am a peasant from Faverolles. I made my living pruning trees. My name is not Fauchelevent, but Jean Valjean. I am not related to Cosette. Set your mind at ease.”

Marius stammered:

“Who will prove that to me?”

“I will. Because I am telling you.”

Marius looked at the man. He was sorrowful, yet calm. No lie could come from such stillness. What is cold is sincere. You could feel the truth in that grave-like chill.

“I believe you,” said Marius.

Jean Valjean bowed his head, as if noting this, and went on:

“What am I to Cosette? A passerby. Ten years ago, I did not know she existed. I love her, that is true. One comes to love a child one has known from a very young age, especially when one is old. When you are old, you feel like a grandfather to all little children. You may suppose, I think, that I have something like a heart. She was an orphan, with neither father nor mother. She needed me. That is why I began to love her. Children are so helpless that the first person who comes along, even a man like me, can become their protector. I fulfilled that duty toward Cosette. I do not think such a small thing can be called a good deed; but if it is one, then say that I did it. Enter that as a mitigating circumstance. Today, Cosette passes out of my life. Our two roads separate. From now on, I can do nothing more for her. She is Madame Pontmercy. Her providence has changed. And Cosette gains by the change. Everything is as it should be. As for the six hundred thousand francs, you do not mention them to me, but I will answer your thought before you speak it: they are a deposit. How did that deposit come into my hands? What does it matter? I am returning the deposit. Nothing more can be asked of me. I complete the restitution by declaring my true name. That concerns me. I have a reason for wanting you to know who I am.”

And Jean Valjean looked Marius straight in the face.

Everything Marius felt was chaotic and confused. Certain blasts of fate stir up such waves in the soul.

We have all gone through moments of distress when everything inside us seems scattered. We blurt out the first things that come to mind, and they are not always the things that ought to

be said. Some sudden revelations are more than one can bear; they intoxicate like deadly wine. Marius was so stunned by this new situation that he spoke to the man almost as if he were angry at him for making the confession.

“But why,” he cried, “are you telling me all this? Who is making you do it? You could have kept your secret. No one has denounced you, no one is tracking you, no one is pursuing you. You must have some reason for making such a revelation for no apparent cause. Go on. There is something more. Why are you making this confession? What is your motive?”

“My motive?” Jean Valjean replied in so low and lifeless a voice that he seemed to be speaking to himself rather than to Marius. “What motive could this convict have for saying, ‘I am a convict’? Well, yes, the motive is a strange one. It is honesty. The trouble is that there is a thread in my heart that holds me fast. When one is old, that sort of thread is especially strong. Everything else in life collapses around you, but you still resist. If I had been able to tear out that thread, to break it, loosen the knot, or cut it, and go far away, I would have been safe. All I had to do was leave; there are diligences in the Rue Bouloy; you are happy; I am going away. I tried to break that thread. I pulled at it, but it would not break; I tore my heart with it. Then I said to myself, ‘I cannot live anywhere but here.’ I must stay. Well, yes, you are right, I am a fool. Why not simply remain here? You offer me a room in this house. Madame Pontmercy is sincerely attached to me; she said to the armchair, ‘Stretch out your arms to him.’ Your grandfather wants nothing better than to have me here; I suit him. We would live together and eat at the same

table. I would give Cosette my arm . . . Madame Pontmercy, forgive me, it is a habit. We would have one roof, one table, one fire, the same corner by the chimney in winter, the same walk in summer. That is joy. That is happiness. That is everything. We would live as one family. One family!"

At that word, Jean Valjean went wild. He folded his arms, stared at the floor at his feet as if he could dig an abyss there, and his voice suddenly rose like thunder:

"As one family? No. I belong to no family. I do not belong to yours. I do not belong to any family among men. In a house where people are at home with one another, I am unnecessary. Families exist, but there is nothing like that for me. I am an unfortunate man; I am left outside. Did I ever have a father and mother? I almost doubt it. The day I gave that child in marriage, everything ended. I saw her happy. I saw that she was with the man she loves, that there was here a kind old man, a household of two angels, and every joy in this house. And because it was right, I said to myself, 'Do not enter.' I could have lied, yes. I could have deceived you all and remained Monsieur Fauchelevent. As long as it was for her sake, I could lie; but now it would be for my own, and I must not. It would have been enough to keep silent, and everything would have continued. You ask what forced me to speak? A very strange thing: my conscience. Keeping silent would have been very easy. I spent the whole night trying to persuade myself to do it. You questioned me, and what I have just told you is so extraordinary that you had every right to do so. Well, yes, I spent the night arguing with myself, and I gave myself very good reasons. I did

everything I could. But there were two things I could not do: I could not break the thread that holds me here, fixed and bound by my heart, and I could not silence the voice that speaks softly to me when I am alone. That is why I came here this morning to tell you everything. Everything, or almost everything. There is no need to tell you what concerns only me; I keep that to myself. You know the essential facts. So I have taken my mystery and brought it to you. I have torn open my secret before your eyes. It was not an easy decision. I struggled all night. Ah! Do you think I did not tell myself that this was no Champmathieu affair, that by hiding my name I was harming no one, that the name Fauchelevent had been given to me by Fauchelevent himself, out of gratitude for a service I had done him, and that I could certainly keep it? Do you think I did not tell myself that I would be happy in the room you offer me, that I would be in no one's way, that I would have my own little corner, and that while you had Cosette, I would at least have the comfort of knowing I was in the same house with her? Each of us would have had his share of happiness. If I remained Monsieur Fauchelevent, everything would be settled. Yes—everything except my soul. There would have been joy on the surface of my life, but the bottom of my soul would have remained black. It is not enough to be happy; one must also be at peace. So I would have remained Monsieur Fauchelevent. I would have hidden my true face. In the midst of your openness, I would have carried a riddle. In the middle of your full daylight, I would have brought shadows. Without warning you, I would simply have brought the galleys into your home. I would have sat at your table knowing that if you knew who I was, you would

drive me away from it. I would have let myself be served by servants who, if they had known, would have said, ‘How horrible!’ I would have touched you with my elbow—an elbow you have every right to recoil from. I would have stolen your handshakes. In your house there would have been a division in respect between honorable white hair and stained white hair. In your most intimate hours, when every heart believed itself open to the very depths before the others, when the four of us were together—your grandfather, you two, and I—a stranger would have been there. I would have lived beside you, concerned only with keeping the cover over my dreadful abyss from shifting. So I, a dead man, would have forced myself upon you, the living. I would have bound her to me forever. You and Cosette and I would all three have had our heads under the green cap! Does that not make you shudder? I am only the most crushed of men; I would have become the most monstrous of men. And I would have committed that crime every day. Every day I would have worn that face of night. Every day! Every day I would have passed some of my stain on to you—every day!—to you, my dearly loved ones, my children, you innocent beings! Is silence nothing? Is keeping silent a simple thing? No, it is not simple. There is a silence that lies. And my lie, my fraud, my disgrace, my cowardice, my treachery, my crime—I would have swallowed it drop by drop, spat it out, then swallowed it again. I would have finished at midnight only to begin again at noon. My ‘good morning’ would have lied, and my ‘good night’ would have lied. I would have slept on it. I would have eaten it with my bread. I would have looked Cosette in the face, and answered the smile of an angel with the smile of a damned soul. I would

have been a vile villain. Why should I do that? In order to be happy. In order to be happy. Do I have the right to be happy? I stand outside life, sir."

Jean Valjean stopped. Marius listened. A chain of thoughts and torments like this cannot be broken off. Jean Valjean lowered his voice again, but it was no longer merely dull; it had turned sinister.

"You ask why I speak? You say no one has denounced me, no one is pursuing me, no one is hunting me down. Yes—I have been denounced. Yes—I am being hunted. By whom? By myself. I am the one who blocks my own way. I am the one who drags myself back, drives myself on, stops myself, condemns myself, and executes myself. And when a man has hold of himself, he is held fast."

Then, grabbing a handful of his own coat at the back of the neck and holding it out toward Marius, he said:

"Do you see that fist?" he went on. "Don't you think it grips that collar tightly enough never to let go? Well, conscience is a grip like that. If a man wants to be happy, sir, he must never understand duty. Because the moment he truly understands it, it becomes merciless. You might think it punishes you for understanding it; but no, it rewards you, by putting you in a hell where you feel God beside you. The moment a man has torn open his own entrails, he is at peace with himself."

Then he added, in a voice full of pain:

“Monsieur Pontmercy, this is not common sense, but I am an honest man. By lowering myself in your eyes, I raise myself in my own. This has happened to me once before, though it hurt less then; it was almost nothing. Yes, an honest man. I would not be one if, through my fault, you had gone on respecting me. Now that you despise me, I am one. I live under this fatal condition: because I can never have anything but stolen respect, that respect humiliates me and crushes me inside, and if I am to respect myself, I must be despised. Then I can stand upright again. I am a galley-slave who obeys his conscience. I know very well that sounds highly improbable. But what would you have me do? It is the truth. I have made commitments to myself, and I keep them. There are encounters that bind us, chances that draw us into duties. You see, Monsieur Pontmercy, many things have happened to me in the course of my life.”

Jean Valjean paused again, swallowing with effort, as if his words had left a bitter taste in his mouth, and then he went on:

“When a person has something so terrible hanging over them, they have no right to make others share it without knowing. They have no right to let others slip over the edge of their own abyss without even seeing it. They have no right to let their red blouse brush against them. They have no right to secretly burden other people’s happiness with their own misery. It is dreadful to go near healthy people and touch them in the dark with your own ulcer. Even though Fauchelevent lent me his name, I have no right to use it. He could offer it, but I could not accept it. A name is a self. You see, sir, I have done some thinking. I have read a little, though I am only a peasant, and you

can see that I speak properly. I understand these things. I have educated myself. Yes, to take a name and hide oneself beneath it is dishonest. The letters of the alphabet can be stolen, just 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 again to look straight ahead, always to glance sideways, to be disgraced in one's very self—no! no! no! no! no! Better to suffer, to bleed, to weep, to tear the skin from your flesh with your nails, to spend nights twisting in agony, to consume yourself body and soul. That is why I have just told you all this. Deliberately, as you say."

He drew a painful breath and threw out this final word:

"Long ago, I stole a loaf of bread so I could live; today, to go on living, I will not steal a name."

"To live!" Marius broke in. "You do not need that name to live?"

"Ah! I understand now," said Jean Valjean, nodding his head several times.

Silence followed. Neither spoke. Each was lost in a gulf of thought. Marius sat near a table, resting the corner of his mouth against one finger bent backward. Jean Valjean paced back and forth. He stopped in front of a mirror and stood still. Then, as if answering some inward line of thought, he said while looking at the mirror he did not really see:

"Whereas now, I am relieved."

He started pacing again and walked to the other end of the drawing room. As he turned back, he noticed that Marius was

watching him walk. Then he said, in a tone impossible to describe:

“I drag one leg a little. Now you understand why.”

Then he turned fully to face Marius:

“Now, sir, imagine this: I say nothing. I remain Monsieur Fauchelevent. I take my place in your house. I become one of the family. I stay in my room. I come down to breakfast in slippers. In the evening, the three of us go to the theater. I accompany Madame Pontmercy to the Tuileries and the Place Royale. We are always together. You think me your equal. Then one day, there you are and there I am, talking and laughing, when suddenly you hear a voice cry out this name: ‘Jean Valjean!’ And then that terrible hand—the police—shoots out of the darkness and suddenly tears off my mask!”

He paused again. Marius had jumped to his feet with a shudder. Jean Valjean went on:

“What do you say to that?”

Marius answered with silence.

Jean Valjean continued:

“You see that I am right not to keep silent. Be happy. Be in heaven. Be an angel beside an angel. Live in the sunlight and be content there. Do not trouble yourself over the means a poor damned wretch uses to lay bare his heart and force his duty out into the open. You have before you, sir, a miserable man.”

Marius slowly crossed the room, and when he came close to Jean Valjean, he held out his hand.

But Marius had to step forward and take the hand that was not offered. Jean Valjean let him do it, and to Marius it felt as though he were pressing a hand of marble.

“My grandfather has influential friends,” said Marius. “I will obtain your pardon.”

“It would be useless,” Jean Valjean replied. “People believe I am dead, and that is enough. The dead are not watched. They are supposed to rot in peace. Death is the same as pardon.”

And pulling free the hand Marius was holding, he added with a kind of unyielding dignity:

“Besides, the friend I turn to is simply doing my duty; and I ask only one forgiveness, that of my own conscience.”

At that moment, a door at the far end of the drawing room opened softly halfway, and Cosette’s head appeared in the gap. They could see only her sweet face; her hair was charmingly tousled, and her eyelids were still heavy with sleep. She moved like a bird poking its head out of its nest, looked first at her husband and then at Jean Valjean, and called to them with a smile, so that it seemed as though they were seeing a smile in the heart of a rose:

“I’ll bet you’re talking politics. How silly that is, instead of being with me!”

Jean Valjean trembled.

“Cosette! . . .” Marius stammered.

Then he stopped. They looked like two criminals.

Cosette, glowing with happiness, kept looking at them both. There was something in her eyes like flashes of paradise.

“I caught you in the act,” said Cosette. “Just now I heard my father Fauchelevent through the door saying, ‘Conscience . . . doing my duty . . .’ That’s politics, it certainly is. I won’t allow it. People should not talk politics the very next day. It isn’t right.”

“You’re mistaken, Cosette,” said Marius. “We’re talking business. We’re discussing the best way to invest your six hundred thousand francs . . .”

“Not at all,” Cosette broke in. “I’m coming in. Does anyone want me here?”

And, walking firmly through the door, she entered the drawing room. She wore a flowing white dressing gown, full of countless folds, with wide sleeves that began at the neck and fell all the way to her feet. In the golden heavens of certain old Gothic paintings, there are garments like these, lovely loose robes fit to dress angels.

She looked herself over from head to foot in a long mirror, then cried out in a burst of indescribable delight:

“Once upon a time there was a King and a Queen. Oh, how happy I am!”

Then she curtsied to Marius and to Jean Valjean.

“There,” she said, “I’m going to settle down near you in an armchair. Breakfast is in half an hour. You may say whatever you like. I know men have to talk, and I’ll be very good.”

Marius took her arm and said to her affectionately:

“We’re talking business.”

“By the way,” said Cosette, “I opened my window, and a flock of pierrots has come into the garden—birds, not masked revelers. Today is Ash Wednesday, but not for the birds.”

“I’m telling you, we’re talking business. Go, my little Cosette, and leave us alone for a moment. We’re discussing figures. It would bore you.”

“You have a lovely cravat on this morning, Marius. You’re very elegant, monsieur. No, it won’t bore me.”

“I assure you, it will.”

“No. Since it’s you, it won’t. I won’t understand what you’re saying, but I’ll listen. When you hear the voices of the people you love, you don’t need to understand their words. All I want is for us to be here together. I’m staying with you—there!”

“You are my beloved Cosette! It’s impossible.”

“Impossible!”

“Yes.”

“Very well,” 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 is smoking, that Nicolette has sent for the chimney sweep, that Toussaint and Nicolette have already quarreled, and that Nicolette is making fun of Toussaint's stammer. Well, now you shall know nothing. Ah, it's impossible? You'll see, gentlemen, that I too can say: It is impossible. Then who will be the loser? I beg you, my dear little Marius, let me stay here with the two of you."

"I swear to you, we absolutely must be alone."

"Well then, am I nobody?"

Jean Valjean had not said a single word. Cosette turned to him:

"First of all, father, I want you to come and kiss me. What do you mean by saying nothing instead of taking my side? Who gave me a father like this? You can see that my family life is very unhappy. My husband beats me. Come, kiss me at once."

Jean Valjean came forward.

Cosette turned to Marius.

"And as for you, I'm going to make a face at you."

Then she held out her forehead to Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean took a step toward her.

Cosette drew back.

"Father, you're pale. Does your arm hurt?"

"I am well," said Jean Valjean.

"Did you sleep badly?"

“No.”

“Are you sad?”

“No.”

“Kiss me if you’re well, if you slept well, if you’re happy, and I won’t scold you.”

And again she offered him her forehead.

Jean Valjean placed a kiss on that forehead, lit by a heavenly glow.

“Smile.”

Jean Valjean obeyed. It was the smile of a ghost.

“Now defend me against my husband.”

“Cosette! . . .” cried Marius.

“Be angry, father. Tell him I must stay. You can certainly speak in front of me. So you think I’m very foolish. What you’re saying is astonishing! Business, putting money in a bank—what a great matter, truly. Men make mysteries out of nothing. I look very pretty this morning. Look at me, Marius.”

And with an adorable shrug and an exquisitely charming pout, she glanced at Marius.

“I love you!” said Marius.

“I adore you!” said Cosette.

And they were irresistibly drawn into each other’s arms.

“Now,” said Cosette, straightening a fold of her dressing gown with a triumphant little grimace, “I shall stay.”

“No, not that,” said Marius in a pleading tone. “We have to finish something.”

“Still no?”

Marius took on a serious tone:

“I assure you, Cosette, it’s impossible.”

“Ah! So you’re using your man’s voice now, sir. Very well, I’m going. You, father, have not stood up for me. Monsieur my father, monsieur my husband, you are tyrants. I shall go and tell grandpapa. If you think I am going to come back and say empty polite things to you, you are mistaken. I am proud. I shall wait for you now. You will see—it is you who will be bored without me. I am going. Very well.”

And she left the room.

Two seconds later, the door opened again. Her fresh, rosy face appeared once more between the two panels, and she called out to them:

“I am very angry indeed.”

The door closed again, and the shadows fell once more.

It was as if a ray of sunlight had suddenly crossed the night without even knowing it.

Marius made certain that the door was firmly closed.

“Poor Cosette!” he murmured. “When she finds out . . .”

At that word, Jean Valjean trembled all over. He fixed a bewildered gaze on Marius.

“Cosette! Oh yes, that is true—you are going to tell Cosette about this. That is right. Wait, I had not thought of that. A man has strength for one thing, but not for another. Sir, I beg you, I implore you now, sir, give me your most sacred word of honor that you will not tell her. Is it not enough that you should know? I was able to say it myself without being forced. I could have told it to the universe, to the whole world—it was all the same to me. But she—she does not know what it is. It would terrify her. What, a convict! We would have to explain it to her, to say: ‘He is a man who has been in the galleys.’ She saw the chain-gang pass one day. Oh! My God!” . . . He sank into an armchair and hid his face in his hands.

His grief made no sound, but the trembling of his shoulders showed clearly that he was weeping. Silent tears, terrible tears.

There is something choking in a sob. A kind of convulsion seized him. He threw himself back against the chair as if trying to catch his breath, let his arms fall, and allowed Marius to see his face flooded with tears. Marius heard him murmur, so softly that his voice seemed to come from unfathomable depths:

“Oh! If only I could die!”

“Don’t worry,” said Marius. “I will keep your secret to myself.”

Perhaps he was less moved than he should have been. But for the past hour he had been forcing himself to accept something as unexpected as it was terrible. As the convict gradually

replaced M. Fauchelevent before his eyes, as that grim reality slowly took hold of him, and as the situation itself pushed him to see the distance that had just opened between that man and himself, Marius added:

“I cannot let this pass without saying a word about the money you returned so faithfully and honestly. That was an act of integrity. It is only right that you should receive some reward. Name the amount yourself, and it will be paid to you. Do not be afraid to make it very large.”

“Thank you, sir,” Jean Valjean replied gently.

He fell silent for a moment, absently running the tip of his forefinger across his thumbnail. Then he spoke louder:

“It is almost all over now. But one last thing remains for me . . .”

“What is it?”

Jean Valjean wrestled with what seemed to be one final hesitation, and, voiceless and breathless, he stammered rather than spoke:

“Now that you know, do you think, sir—you who are the master here—that I should not see Cosette anymore?”

“I think that would be best,” Marius replied coldly.

“Then I will never see her again,” Jean Valjean murmured. And he walked toward the door.

He put his hand on the knob. The latch gave way, and the door opened. Jean Valjean opened it just wide enough to pass through, stood still for a second, then closed it again and turned

back to Marius.

He was no longer pale; he was ashen. The tears were gone from his eyes, replaced by a kind of tragic fire. His voice had recovered a strange calm.

“Wait, sir,” he said. “If you permit it, I would like to come and see her. I truly want that very much. If I had not wanted to see Cosette, I would not have made this confession to you; I would simply have gone away. But because I wanted to stay where Cosette is, and to go on seeing her, I had to tell you the truth honestly. You understand my reasoning, do you not? It is very simple. You see, she has been with me for more than nine years. First we lived in that hut on the boulevard, then in the convent, then near the Luxembourg. That was where you first saw her. You remember her blue plush hat. Then we moved to the Quartier des Invalides, to the Rue Plumet, where there was a railing around a garden. I lived in a little back courtyard, where I could hear her playing the piano. That was my life. We were never apart. It lasted nine years and several months. I was like her father, and she was my child. I do not know whether you can fully understand, Monsieur Pontmercy, but to leave now, never see her again, never speak to her again, to have nothing left at all—that would be hard. If you do not object, I would like to come and see Cosette from time to time. I will not come often. I will not stay long. You may give orders for me to be shown into the little waiting room on the ground floor. I could easily come in by the back door, but that might cause surprise, perhaps, and I think it would be better for me to enter by the usual door. Truly, sir, I would like to see a little more of Cosette.

As rarely as you wish. Put yourself in my place; I have nothing left but that. And besides, we must be careful. If I stop coming altogether, it may create a bad impression; people would think it strange. What I can do, by the way, is come in the afternoon, when evening is beginning to fall."

"You shall come every evening," said Marius, "and Cosette will be waiting for you."

"You are very kind, sir," said Jean Valjean.

Marius bowed to Jean Valjean; happiness walked despair to the door, and the two men parted.

CHAPTER II—THE MYSTERIES A REVELATION CAN HOLD

Marius was deeply shaken.

The uneasy distance he had always felt toward the man he had seen beside Cosette was now explained. There had always been something mysterious about him, and Marius's instinct had warned him of it.

The answer to the mystery was the most dreadful disgrace of all: the galleys. This Monsieur Fauchelevent was the convict Jean Valjean.

To suddenly uncover such a secret in the middle of your happiness is like finding a scorpion in a nest of turtledoves.

Was the happiness of Marius and Cosette now doomed to live beside this? Was it now an established fact? Did accepting that man become part of the marriage that had just taken place? Was there nothing to be done?

Had Marius married the convict as well?

You may be crowned with light and joy, you may be living through life's great radiant hour, the happiness of love; but a shock like this would make even an archangel in ecstasy, even a demigod in glory, tremble.

As often happens when a person's whole view suddenly changes, Marius asked himself whether he had anything to blame himself for. Had he failed to see what he should have

seen? Had he been careless? Had he, without meaning to, let his judgment grow dull? Perhaps a little. Had he entered this love affair, which ended in his marriage to Cosette, without taking enough care to understand the circumstances around it? He admitted it. Life corrects us little by little in just this way, through a series of honest admissions to ourselves. He acknowledged the fanciful, dreamy side of his nature, a kind of inward haze found in many temperaments. In moments of intense passion or grief, it expands as the soul's temperature changes and spreads through the whole person, until he becomes nothing but a conscience wrapped in mist. We have already pointed out this element in Marius's character more than once.

He remembered that, in the dizzy rush of his love in the Rue Plumet, during those six or seven ecstatic weeks, he had never once spoken to Cosette about the drama in the Gorbeau hovel, where the victim had kept up such a strange silence through the struggle and the escape that followed. How had he failed to tell Cosette about it? It had happened so nearby, and it had been so terrible. How had he never even mentioned the Thénardiers, especially on the day he met Éponine? Now he could hardly explain the silence he had kept then. And yet he could account for it. He remembered how numb he had been, how intoxicated he was with Cosette, how love had swallowed up everything, how they had carried each other away into an ideal world. Perhaps, too, mixed into that violent and enchanting state of soul, there had been a faint, dull instinct pushing him to hide that dreadful adventure and erase it from his memory. He feared any contact with it. He wanted no part in it. He had kept

his own role in it secret, and he could neither tell the story nor bear witness to it without becoming an accuser.

Besides, those few weeks had passed like a flash of lightning; there had been time for nothing but love.

In short, after weighing everything, turning it over in his mind, and examining it from every side, he saw that whatever the consequences might have been if he had told Cosette about the Gorbeau ambush—even if he had learned that Jean Valjean was a convict—would it really have changed him, Marius? Would it have changed her, Cosette? Would he have drawn back? Would he have loved her any less? Would he have refused to marry her? No. So there was nothing to regret, nothing for which he needed to blame himself. Everything was as it should be. There is a god for those intoxicated men called lovers. Blind though he was, Marius had followed the path he would have chosen even with his eyes open. Love had blindfolded him—but to lead him where? To paradise.

But from then on, this paradise came with a hellish undertone.

Marius' old feeling of distance from this man, this Fauchelevent who had become Jean Valjean, was now mixed with horror.

It should be said that this horror also held some pity, and even a measure of surprise.

This thief—this man guilty of a second crime—had returned the deposit. And what a deposit it was: six hundred thousand francs.

He alone knew the secret of that deposit. He could have kept all of it, but he returned every last franc.

What is more, he had revealed his own situation. Nothing compelled him to do it. If anyone knew who he was, it was because he himself had said so. In that confession there was more than a willingness to accept humiliation; there was a willingness to face danger. For a condemned man, a mask is not just a mask—it is protection. A false name means safety, and he had cast that false name aside. He, the former galley slave, could have hidden forever within an honorable family, but he had resisted that temptation. Why? Because of a scruple of conscience. He explained it himself, with the unmistakable ring of truth. In short, whatever this Jean Valjean might be, he was clearly a conscience coming awake. Some mysterious rehabilitation had begun in him, and by all appearances, scruples had governed him for a long time already. Such impulses toward justice and goodness do not belong to ordinary natures. An awakening conscience is a sign of greatness of soul.

Jean Valjean was sincere. That sincerity—visible, tangible, undeniable, and made even clearer by the pain it caused him—made further questioning unnecessary and gave weight to everything the man had said.

For Marius, this was a strange reversal. What did M. Fauchelevent inspire? Distrust. What did Jean Valjean inspire? Confidence.

In the mysterious reckoning Marius made of Jean Valjean, he acknowledged the active side and the passive side, and tried to bring them into balance.

But all this was happening as if in the middle of a storm. As Marius tried to form a clear idea of the man, and followed Jean Valjean, so to speak, into the depths of his own thoughts, he kept losing sight of him and then finding him again in a fatal mist.

The deposit honestly returned, the honesty of the confession—these were good signs. The cloud seemed to lighten for a moment, and then it darkened again.

Confused as Marius' memories were, a shadow of them came back to him.

After all, what had happened in the Jondrette attic? Why had that man run away when the police arrived instead of making a complaint?

Here Marius found the answer: because the man was a fugitive from justice who had violated the terms of his banishment.

There was another question: why had that man come to the barricade?

Marius now saw clearly again a memory that had risen in his mind like sympathetic ink brought out by heat. This man had been at the barricade. He had not fought there. So what had he come for? As soon as the question arose, a ghostly answer appeared before him: "Javert."

Marius now remembered perfectly that grim scene of Jean Valjean dragging the bound Javert out of the barricade, and he could still hear, beyond the corner of the little Rue Mondétour, that terrible pistol shot. There was obviously hatred between the police spy and the former galley-slave. Each stood in the other's way. Jean Valjean had gone to the barricade to take revenge. He had arrived late. He probably knew that Javert was being held prisoner there. The Corsican vendetta had spread into certain lower depths of society and had become the law there. It was so simple that it did not shock souls only half turned toward good. Such hearts are made in a way that lets a criminal on the road to repentance be scrupulous about theft and utterly without scruple about revenge. Jean Valjean had killed Javert. At least, that seemed obvious.

This was the final question, certainly, but there was no answer to it. Marius felt it gripping him like pincers: how had Jean Valjean's life remained entangled with Cosette's for so long?

What sad trick of Providence had brought that child into contact with that man? Are there chains, forged above, that bind two lives together? Does God take pleasure in pairing an angel with a demon? Can crime and innocence become companions in the dark prison of human misery? In the stain of condemned lives that we call human destiny, can two faces move side by side—one open and innocent, the other terrible; one washed in the divine whiteness of dawn, the other forever marked by the flash of eternal lightning? Who could have arranged such an inexplicable union? By what mystery, by what miracle, had a shared life been created between that heavenly little creature

and that old criminal?

Who could have tied the lamb to the wolf—and, even more impossible to understand, tied the wolf to the lamb? For the wolf loved the lamb. The fierce creature adored the weak one. For nine years, the angel had leaned on the monster for support. Cosette's childhood and girlhood, her coming into the light, her pure growth toward life and brightness, had been protected by that dreadful devotion. From there, questions seemed to multiply into endless riddles. Abysses opened beneath abysses, and Marius could no longer look into Jean Valjean without feeling dizzy. What was this man, this human abyss?

The old symbols of Genesis are eternal. In human society as it now exists—and until a broader day transforms it—there will always be two men: one above, the other below; one shaped by good, Abel; the other shaped by evil, Cain. But what was this gentle Cain? What was this brute, devoutly absorbed in the worship of a virgin—watching over her, raising her, protecting her, honoring her, and surrounding her, though he himself was impure, with purity?

What was this cesspool that had revered innocence so deeply that it had not left a single stain upon it? What was this Jean Valjean, educating Cosette? What was this figure from the shadows whose only purpose was to keep the rising star safe from every darkness and every cloud?

That was Jean Valjean's secret. It was also God's secret.

Faced with this double secret, Marius drew back. In a way, one secret reassured him about the other. In this matter, God

seemed as present as Jean Valjean. God has his instruments. He uses whatever tool he chooses. He does not answer to men. Do we know how God goes about his work? Jean Valjean had devoted himself to Cosette. To some extent, he had shaped that soul. That could not be denied. Well, then what? The workman was dreadful, but the work was admirable. God creates his miracles as he sees fit. He had formed that charming Cosette, and he had used Jean Valjean to do it. He had chosen this strange collaborator for himself. What right have we to question him? Is this the first time that a dung heap has helped spring bring forth a rose?

Marius gave himself these answers and decided they were sound. He had not dared press Jean Valjean on all the points we have just mentioned, though he would not admit to himself that fear was the reason. He adored Cosette. He had Cosette. Cosette was radiantly pure. That was enough for him. What more did he need to know? Cosette was light. Does light need to be illuminated? He had everything. What more could he want? If one has all, is that not enough? Jean Valjean's personal history was no concern of his.

And as he leaned over the fatal shadow hanging over that man, he clung desperately to the solemn statement of that unhappy wretch: "I am nothing to Cosette. Ten years ago I did not know that she existed."

Jean Valjean was only a passerby. He had said so himself. Very well—he had passed on. Whatever he had been, his part was over.

From that moment on, it remained for Marius to play Providence in Cosette's life. Cosette had looked for the blue of heaven in someone like herself—in her lover, her husband, her heavenly male counterpart. As Cosette rose, winged and transformed, she left behind on earth her ugly, empty chrysalis: Jean Valjean.

Whatever line of thought Marius followed, he always came back to a certain horror of Jean Valjean. Perhaps it was even a kind of sacred horror, for, as we have just noted, he sensed a _quid divinum_ in that man. But however he tried to excuse him, he always ended up at the same conclusion: the man was a convict. In other words, he was a being with no place at all on the social ladder, lower than its very bottom rung. Below the lowest of men comes the convict. A convict is, so to speak, no longer counted among the living. The law has stripped him of every part of his humanity that it has the power to take away.

On questions of punishment, Marius still believed in the harshest system, even though he was a democrat and accepted all the law's ideas about those it punishes. He had not yet completed his moral progress, we must admit. He had not yet learned to distinguish between what is written by man and what is written by God, between law and justice. He had not yet examined or weighed the right man claims to decide matters that are irrevocable and beyond repair. The word _vindicte_ did not trouble him. It seemed perfectly natural to him that certain violations of written law should be followed by endless suffering, and he accepted social damnation as part of civilization. That was still where he stood, though he was certain to move beyond it later, because his nature was good and, at its

core, full of unrealized progress.

At this stage in his thinking, Jean Valjean seemed hideous and repellent to him. He was a condemned man; he was a convict. To Marius, that word sounded like the trumpet of Judgment Day, and after thinking about Jean Valjean for a long time, his final reaction had been to turn his head away. _Vade retro_.

Marius, we must acknowledge and even emphasize, questioned Jean Valjean so intensely that Jean Valjean finally said, "You are making me confess." And yet Marius still did not ask him two or three decisive questions.

It was not because those questions had not occurred to him, but because he was afraid of them. The Jondrette attic? The barricade? Javert? Who could say where such revelations might end? Jean Valjean did not seem like a man who would stop once he began, and who knows whether Marius, after pressing him forward, might not then have wished to stop him himself?

Hasn't this happened to all of us at certain decisive moments: we ask a question, then almost cover our ears so we won't have to hear the answer? People do this most of all when they love. It is unwise to press dark situations to their furthest limit, especially when the inseparable part of our life is fatally bound up with them. What terrible truth might have come out of Jean Valjean's desperate explanations? And who knows whether that dreadful light might not have reached Cosette as well? Who knows whether some infernal glow might not have remained on the brow of that angel? The spray from a lightning flash belongs to the thunder too. There are fatal points where, by the dark law

of reflected color, even innocence is marked with crime. The purest faces may forever keep the stain of a horrible connection. Rightly or wrongly, Marius was afraid. He already knew too much. He wanted to numb his senses rather than see more clearly.

In his distress, he carried Cosette away in his arms and closed his eyes to Jean Valjean.

That man was night itself—living, terrible night. How could he dare try to reach its depths? It is a dreadful thing to question the shadows. Who knows what answer they may give? It might darken the dawn forever.

In this state of mind, the thought that this man might from now on have any contact at all with Cosette was unbearable to Marius.

He now almost blamed himself for not asking those terrible questions he had shrunk from, questions that might have led to a final, unforgiving decision. He felt that he had been too kind, too gentle, too weak, if one must use the word. That weakness had led him to a reckless concession. He had allowed himself to be moved. He had been wrong. He should simply have refused Jean Valjean outright. Jean Valjean was like fire, and he should have treated him that way and rid his house of the man.

He was vexed with himself, angry at that whirlwind of emotion that had deafened him, blinded him, and swept him away. He was dissatisfied with himself.

What was he supposed to do now? Jean Valjean's visits filled him with deep disgust. Why should that man be in his house? What did he want? At that point, he grew alarmed. He did not want to dig any deeper or look too closely within himself. He had made a promise and had let himself be drawn into it. Jean Valjean was holding him to that promise. A man must keep his word, even to a convict—perhaps especially to a convict. Even so, his first duty was to Cosette. In the end, he let himself be swept along by the revulsion that ruled him.

Marius turned this whole tangle of thoughts over in his mind, moving from one idea to another and feeling the force of all of them. Out of this came a deep inner turmoil.

It was not easy for him to hide this distress from Cosette, but love is a kind of gift, and Marius managed it.

Still, without seeming to have any particular reason, he questioned Cosette, who was as innocent as a dove and suspected nothing. He spoke with her about her childhood and her youth, and he became more and more convinced that the convict had been everything good, fatherly, and honorable that a man could be to Cosette. Everything Marius had glimpsed and guessed was true. That dark, sinister nettle had loved and protected that lily.

BOOK EIGHTH—TWILIGHT FADING AWAY

[Illustration: The Fading Twilight]

CHAPTER I—THE LOWER ROOM

The next day, at nightfall, Jean Valjean knocked at the carriage gate of the Gillenormand house. Basque received him. Basque was in the courtyard at the appointed hour, as if he had been given instructions. Sometimes someone says to a servant, “Watch for Mr. So-and-So when he arrives.”

Basque spoke to Jean Valjean before he had even come up to him:

“Monsieur le Baron has asked me to find out whether monsieur wishes to go upstairs or stay below.”

“I will stay below,” Jean Valjean replied.

Basque, perfectly respectful, opened the door of the waiting room and said:

“I will go and inform Madame.”

The room Jean Valjean entered was a damp, vaulted room on the ground floor. It sometimes served as a cellar. It opened onto the street, had a floor of red tiles, and was poorly lit by a barred window.

This was not one of those rooms regularly attacked by dusters, brushes, and brooms. The dust lay there undisturbed. No one waged war on the spiders. On one windowpane, a large black web stretched wide, decorated with dead flies like a wheel. The room was small and low-ceilinged, and in one corner stood a

pile of empty bottles.

The wall, coated in a yellow ochre wash, was peeling off in large flakes. At one end stood a black-painted mantelpiece with a narrow shelf. A fire was burning there, which showed that Jean Valjean's reply, "I will remain below," had been anticipated.

Two armchairs stood at the two corners of the fireplace. Between them, an old bedside rug, with more backing than wool left in it, had been spread out as a carpet.

The room was lit by the fire on the hearth and by the fading daylight coming through the window.

Jean Valjean was exhausted. For days he had neither eaten nor slept. He dropped into one of the armchairs.

Basque came back, set a lit candle on the mantelpiece, and withdrew. Jean Valjean, his head bowed and his chin resting on his chest, noticed neither Basque nor the candle.

Suddenly he straightened with a start. Cosette was standing beside him.

He had not seen her come in, but he had felt her presence.

He turned and looked at her. She was wonderfully beautiful. But what he studied with that deep gaze was not her beauty, but her soul.

"Well," cried Cosette, "father, I knew you were unusual, but I never would have expected this. What an idea! Marius told me that you want me to receive you here."

“Yes, that is what I want.”

“I expected that answer. Good. I warn you, I am going to make a scene. Let us start at the beginning. Kiss me, father.”

And she held out her cheek to him.

Jean Valjean stood perfectly still.

“You’re not moving. I notice that. It looks like guilt. But never mind, I forgive you. Jesus Christ said to offer the other cheek. Here it is.”

And she turned her other cheek toward him.

Jean Valjean did not move. It was as if his feet were nailed to the pavement.

“This is getting serious,” said Cosette. “What have I done to you? I truly don’t understand. You owe me an apology. You are going to dine with us.”

“I have already dined.”

“That’s not true. I’ll have M. Gillenormand scold you. Grandfathers are there to scold fathers. Come. Come upstairs with me to the drawing room. At once.”

“Impossible.”

At that, Cosette gave way a little. She stopped giving orders and began asking questions.

“But why? And why choose the ugliest room in the house to see me? It’s dreadful in here.”

“You know . . .”

Jean Valjean stopped himself.

“You know, madame, that I am odd. I have my whims.”

Cosette clapped her little hands together.

“Madame! . . . You know! . . . more new surprises! What does this mean?”

Jean Valjean gave her that heartbreaking smile he sometimes used:

“You wanted to be Madame. Now you are.”

“Not to you, father.”

“Do not call me father.”

“What?”

“Call me ‘Monsieur Jean.’ Or just ‘Jean,’ if you like.”

“You’re not my father anymore? I’m not Cosette anymore? ‘Monsieur Jean’? What does this mean? Why, this is a revolution, isn’t it? What has happened? Come, look at me. And you won’t live with us! And you won’t take my room! What have I done to you? Has something happened?”

“Nothing.”

“Then why?”

“Everything is as usual.”

“Why are you changing your name?”

“You changed yours too, surely.”

He smiled again with that same smile and added:

“Since you are Madame Pontmercy, I can certainly be Monsieur Jean.”

“I don’t understand any of this. It’s all absurd. I’ll ask my husband’s permission for you to be ‘Monsieur Jean.’ I hope he refuses. You’re hurting me very much. People may have their odd whims, but they do not make their little Cosette unhappy. That is wrong. You have no right to be unkind, you who are so good.”

He did not reply.

She quickly took his hands and, with an irresistible impulse, lifted them to her face and pressed them against her neck beneath her chin, a gesture of deep tenderness.

“Oh!” she said to him. “Be good!”

And she went on:

“This is what I call being good: being kind, coming to live here—there are birds here just as there were in the Rue Plumet—living with us, leaving that wretched Rue de l’Homme Armé, not setting us riddles to solve, being like everyone else, dining with us, breakfasting with us, being my father.”

He gently freed his hands.

“You do not need a father anymore; you have a husband.”

Cosette grew angry.

“I don’t need a father anymore! Really, what can anyone say to something like that? It makes no sense!”

“If Toussaint were here,” Jean Valjean went on, like someone driven to appeal to any authority he could find and clutching at every support, “she would be the first to agree that I have always had my own ways. There is nothing new in this. I have always loved my dark corner.”

“But it is cold here. One cannot see clearly. It is dreadful, truly dreadful, to want to be Monsieur Jean! And I will not have you call me ‘you.’”

“Just now, as I was coming here,” Jean Valjean replied, “I saw a piece of furniture in the Rue Saint-Louis. It was at a cabinet-maker’s shop. If I were a pretty woman, I would buy myself that piece of furniture. A very neat dressing table in the current style. What you call rosewood, I think. It is inlaid. The mirror is quite large. There are drawers. It is pretty.”

“Oh, you dreadful bear!” Cosette replied.

With perfect grace, baring her teeth and pulling back her lips, she hissed at Jean Valjean. She looked like one of the Graces imitating a cat.

“I’m furious,” she went on. “Since yesterday, all of you have been driving me mad. I’m terribly upset. I don’t understand any of this. You don’t defend me against Marius, and Marius won’t defend me against you. I’m completely alone. I arrange a room beautifully. If I could have put the good Lord in it, I would have. And now my room goes unused. My lodger is ruining me. I order

a lovely little dinner from Nicolette. 'We want nothing to do with your dinner, Madame.' And my father Fauchelevent wants me to call him 'Monsieur Jean' and receive him in a dreadful old ugly cellar, where the walls have beards, the crystal is a row of empty bottles, and the curtains are spiderwebs! You are strange, I admit it; that is your way. But people who have just been married ought to be granted a truce. You should not have started being strange again at once. So you are going to be perfectly happy in your horrible Rue de l'Homme Armé. I was miserable there, truly miserable. What have you against me? You are causing me a great deal of pain. Fie!"

Then, suddenly turning serious, she looked steadily at Jean Valjean and added:

"Are you angry with me because I'm happy?"

Innocence sometimes reaches deep without meaning to. This question, simple as it was for Cosette, struck Jean Valjean with great force. Cosette had meant only to scratch, but she wounded him deeply.

Jean Valjean went pale.

He was silent for a moment. Then, in an indescribable tone, as if speaking to himself, he murmured:

"Her happiness was the purpose of my life. Now God may dismiss me. Cosette, you are happy; my day is done."

"Ah, you said 'thou' to me!" Cosette cried.

And she threw her arms around his neck.

Jean Valjean, overcome and bewildered, clasped her wildly to his chest. It almost seemed to him that he had her back again.

“Thank you, father!” said Cosette.

This burst of affection was on the verge of becoming too painful for Jean Valjean. He gently lifted Cosette’s arms away and took up his hat.

“Well?” said Cosette.

“I’ll leave you now, Madame. They’re waiting for you.”

And from the doorway, he added:

“I called you thou–. Tell your husband that it will not happen again. Forgive me.”

Jean Valjean left the room, leaving Cosette stunned by this mysterious farewell.

CHAPTER II—ANOTHER STEP BACK

The next day, at the same hour, Jean Valjean came.

Cosette asked him no questions. She was no longer surprised. She no longer exclaimed that she was cold, and she no longer spoke of the drawing room. She avoided calling him either "father" or "Monsieur Jean." She let him address her as _you_. She let him call her Madame. But her happiness had faded a little. She would have been sad, if sadness had been possible for her.

She had probably had one of those conversations with Marius in which the man a woman loves says whatever he likes, explains nothing, and still leaves the woman he loves satisfied. Lovers' curiosity rarely reaches much beyond their own love.

The downstairs room had been tidied up a little. Basque had removed the bottles, and Nicolette had gotten rid of the spiders.

Every day after that, Jean Valjean came at the same hour. He came daily because he did not have the strength to take Marius's words in any way but literally. Marius arranged to be away whenever Jean Valjean came. The household gradually got used to M. Fauchelevent's strange habits. Toussaint helped by repeating, "Monsieur has always been like that." The grandfather settled the matter with this judgment: "He's an eccentric." That ended it. Besides, at ninety-six, no real bond is possible anymore; people merely exist side by side. A newcomer is an inconvenience. There is no room left; every

habit is already fixed. M. Fauchelevent, M. Tranchelevent—Father Gillenormand did not care what the name was—wanted nothing more than to be rid of "that gentleman." He added, "Nothing is more common than eccentrics. They do all sorts of odd things. They have no reason for them. The Marquis de Canaples was even worse. He bought a palace so he could live in the attic. These are the fanciful poses people put on."

No one saw the sinister thing underneath. And besides, who could have imagined it? Marshes like this exist in India. The water looks strange and hard to explain. It ripples though there is no wind, and stirs where it ought to be still. You look at the surface of these unexplained boilings and see nothing of the hydra creeping along the bottom.

Many people carry a hidden monster like this within them, a dragon that gnaws at them, a despair that lives through their nights. Such a man looks like any other. He comes and goes. No one knows that inside him he bears a terrible parasitic pain with a thousand teeth, living off him as he slowly dies from it. No one knows that this man is an abyss. He is still, but deep. From time to time, some disturbance appears on his surface, though the observer cannot understand it. A mysterious crease forms, then disappears, then returns. A bubble rises and bursts. It is the breathing of the unknown beast.

Certain odd habits—arriving just as other people are leaving, staying in the background when others are putting themselves on display, always keeping what might be called a wall-colored cloak, seeking solitary walks, preferring deserted streets,

avoiding any part in conversation, avoiding crowds and festivals, seeming comfortable while living poorly, keeping one's key in one's pocket and one's candle at the porter's lodge no matter how rich one may be, entering by the side door, climbing the private staircase—all these small peculiarities, these passing folds on the surface, often come from something formidable underneath.

Many weeks passed like this. A new life gradually took hold of Cosette: the relationships created by marriage, visits, the running of the household, pleasures, important concerns. Cosette's pleasures were not expensive. They came down to one thing: being with Marius. The great business of her life was to go out with him and stay with him. For them, it was a joy that never grew old to walk arm in arm in the sunlight, in the open street, without hiding, before the whole world, and yet entirely alone together.

Cosette had one annoyance. Toussaint and Nicolette could not get along; two elderly maids simply could not be joined together, and Nicolette left. The grandfather was well. Marius handled a case now and then. Aunt Gillenormand quietly lived the separate little life that suited her, alongside the new household. Jean Valjean came every day.

The familiar "thou" disappeared. "You," "Madame," and "Monsieur Jean" made him seem like a different person to Cosette. The effort he himself had made to loosen her bond to him was working. She grew gayer and less affectionate. Still, she loved him sincerely, and he knew it.

One day she suddenly said to him, "You used to be my father, and now you are not my father. You used to be my uncle, and now you are not my uncle. You used to be Monsieur Fauchelevent, and now you are Jean. So who are you, then? I do not like any of this. If I did not know how good you are, I would be afraid of you."

He still lived in the Rue de l'Homme Armé, because he could not bring himself to move away from the neighborhood where Cosette lived.

At first, he stayed with Cosette only a few minutes, and then left.

Little by little, he got into the habit of making his visits longer. It was as though he were taking advantage of the days growing longer: he arrived earlier and left later.

One day Cosette happened to call him "father." A flash of joy lit up Jean Valjean's sad old face. He caught at the word at once. "Say Jean." "Oh, really," she replied, bursting into laughter, "Monsieur Jean." "That is right," he said. Then he turned away so that she would not see him wipe his eyes.

CHAPTER III—THEY REMEMBER THE GARDEN IN THE RUE PLUMET

That was the last time. After that final flash of light, complete darkness followed. No more intimacy. No more good-morning kiss. Never again that deeply sweet word: "My father!" At his own request, and with his own cooperation, he was pushed out of his happinesses one by one. And this was his sorrow: after losing Cosette all at once in a single day, he then had to lose her all over again, piece by piece.

In time, the eye gets used to the dim light of a cellar. In the same way, it was enough for him to catch a glimpse of Cosette each day. His whole life was gathered into that single hour.

He would sit close beside her, look at her in silence, or talk with her about the past—her childhood, the convent, and the little friends she had known in those long-ago days.

One afternoon, in those first days of April, when the air was already warm and fresh and the sun was in its full, cheerful glory, the gardens outside Marius and Cosette’s windows seemed to stir awake. The hawthorn was just about to bud. A jeweled trimming of gillyflowers spread across the old walls. Snapdragons opened in the cracks between the stones. In the grass, daisies and buttercups were just beginning to appear, and the year’s first white butterflies had arrived. The wind, that minstrel of the eternal wedding, was testing in the trees the opening notes of that great symphony of dawn which the old

poets called spring. Marius said to Cosette, “We said we would go back and look at our garden in the Rue Plumet. Let us go there. We must not be ungrateful.” And off they went, like two swallows flying toward spring. That garden in the Rue Plumet affected them like daybreak. They already had something behind them in life that resembled the springtime of their love. Since the house in the Rue Plumet was still under lease, it still belonged to Cosette. So they went to that house and that garden. There they found themselves again; there they lost 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 sat down in silence and waited an hour. Cosette did not come back. He left with his head bowed.

Cosette was so carried away by her walk to “their garden,” and so happy to have “lived a whole day in her past,” that she spoke of nothing else the next day. She did not even notice that she had not seen Jean Valjean.

“How did you go there?” Jean Valjean asked her.

“On foot.”

“And how did you come back?”

“In a hackney carriage.”

For some time, Jean Valjean had noticed how frugally the young couple lived. It troubled him. Marius was extremely strict about money, and Jean Valjean understood that in the fullest sense of the word. At last, he ventured to ask:

“Why don’t you have a carriage of your own? A nice little coupé would cost only five hundred francs a month. You’re rich.”

“I don’t know,” Cosette replied.

“It’s the same with Toussaint,” Jean Valjean went on. “She’s gone, and you haven’t replaced her. Why not?”

“Nicolette is enough.”

“But you ought to have a maid.”

“Don’t I have Marius?”

“You ought to have a house of your own, your own servants, a carriage, a box at the theatre. Nothing is too fine for you. Why not enjoy your wealth? Money adds to happiness.”

Cosette did not answer.

Jean Valjean’s visits did not grow shorter. Quite the opposite. When it is the heart that is slipping away, one does not stop halfway down the slope.

Whenever Jean Valjean wanted to stay longer and make them forget the time, he began praising Marius. He called him handsome, noble, brave, witty, eloquent, and good. Cosette would outdo him. Then Jean Valjean would begin again. They never grew tired of it. The name Marius was inexhaustible; those six letters held whole volumes. In this way, Jean Valjean managed to remain a long time.

It was so sweet to see Cosette, to forget everything beside her. It eased his pain. More than once, Basque came in twice to announce: “M. Gillenormand sends me to remind Madame la

Baronne that dinner is served."

On those days, Jean Valjean returned home deep in thought.

Was there any truth, then, in that image of the chrysalis that had come to Marius's mind? Was Jean Valjean really a chrysalis that would remain and keep coming to visit his butterfly?

One day he stayed even longer than usual. The next day he noticed that there was no fire in the hearth. "Ah!" he thought. "No fire." Then he explained it to himself. "It's perfectly simple. It's April. The cold weather is over."

"Good heavens, how cold it is in here!" Cosette exclaimed as she came in.

"Why, no," said Jean Valjean.

"Was it you who told Basque not to light a fire, then?"

"Yes, since it is now the month of May."

"But we keep a fire until June. We need one all year in this cellar."

"I thought a fire wasn't necessary."

"That is exactly the sort of idea you would have!" Cosette shot back.

The next day there was a fire. But the two armchairs had been placed at the other end of the room, near the door. "What does this mean?" Jean Valjean thought.

He went over to the armchairs and put them back in their usual place by the hearth.

Still, the fire, lit once again, gave him some encouragement. He kept the conversation going longer than usual. As he got up to leave, Cosette said to him:

“My husband said something odd to me yesterday.”

“What was it?”

“He said to me, ‘Cosette, we have an income of thirty thousand livres. Twenty-seven that belong to you, and three that my grandfather gives me.’ I answered, ‘That makes thirty.’ Then he said, ‘Would you have the courage to live on the three thousand?’ I said, ‘Yes, on nothing at all, as long as it was with you.’ Then I asked, ‘Why are you saying that to me?’ He answered, ‘I wanted to know.’”

Jean Valjean could not find a single word to say. Cosette probably expected him to explain, but he sat there in dark silence. He returned to the Rue de l’Homme Armé so lost in thought that he went to the wrong door and, instead of entering his own house, walked into the one next to it. He had gone up nearly two flights before he realized his mistake and came back down.

His mind teemed with guesses. It was clear that Marius had doubts about where the six hundred thousand francs had come from. He feared the money came from some tainted source; who knew? Perhaps he had even discovered that it came from Jean Valjean himself. He seemed to hesitate before this suspicious fortune and to shrink from claiming it as his own, preferring for himself and Cosette to remain poor rather than become rich on money that was not clean.

What was more, Jean Valjean was beginning, dimly, to suspect that he was being shown the door.

The next day, he felt something like a shock when he entered the room on the ground floor. The armchairs were gone. There was not a single chair left of any kind.

“Ah, what’s this!” Cosette cried as she came in. “No chairs! Where are the armchairs?”

“They’re gone,” Jean Valjean replied.

“This is too much!”

Jean Valjean stammered:

“I was the one who told Basque to take them away.”

“And why?”

“I only have a few minutes to stay today.”

“Staying only a short time is no reason to stand.”

“I thought Basque might need the chairs for the drawing room.”

“Why?”

“You must be expecting company this evening.”

“We’re not expecting anyone.”

Jean Valjean had nothing more to say.

Cosette shrugged.

“Having the chairs taken away! The other day you had the fire put out. How strange you are!”

“Goodbye,” Jean Valjean murmured.

He did not say, “Goodbye, Cosette.” But he did not have the strength to say, “Goodbye, Madame,” either.

He went away completely crushed.

This time, he understood.

The next day, he did not come. Cosette noticed it only that evening.

“Why,” she said, “Monsieur Jean hasn’t been here today.”

She felt a slight pang in her heart, but she barely noticed it, because a kiss from Marius immediately distracted her.

The next day, he did not come.

Cosette paid no attention to it. She spent the evening as usual, slept well, and only thought of it when she woke up. She was so happy. She quickly sent Nicolette to M. Jean’s house to ask whether he was ill and why he had not come the evening before. Nicolette returned with M. Jean’s answer: he was not ill. He was busy. He would come soon, as soon as he could. Besides, he was just about to take a short trip. Madame must

remember that he was in the habit of traveling from time to time. They were not to worry about him. They were not to think about him.

When Nicolette arrived at M. Jean's house, she repeated her mistress's exact words. Madame had sent her to ask why M. Jean had not come the evening before. "It has been two days since I was there," said Jean Valjean gently.

But Nicolette did not notice the remark, and so she did not repeat it to Cosette.

CHAPTER IV—ATTRACTION AND EXTINCTION

During the last months of spring and the first months of summer in 1833, the few people out in the Marais—the small shopkeepers, the idlers standing in doorways—noticed an old man, neatly dressed in black, who came out every day at the same hour, toward nightfall, from the Rue de l'Homme Armé on the Rue Sainte-Croix-de-la-Bretonnerie side. He passed in front of the Blancs Manteaux, made his way to the Rue Culture-Sainte-Catherine, and, on reaching the Rue de l'Écharpe, turned left and entered the Rue Saint-Louis.

He walked there slowly, leaning his head forward, seeing nothing and hearing nothing, his eyes fixed on a single point that seemed to him like a star that never moved: the corner of the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire. The closer he came to the street corner, the brighter his eyes grew. A kind of joy lit his pupils like an inner dawn. He looked spellbound and deeply moved. His lips stirred faintly, as if he were speaking to someone he could not see. He smiled vaguely and went on as slowly as he could. It was as though he longed to reach his destination and yet dreaded the moment when he would be near it. When only a few houses stood between him and the street that seemed to draw him on, his pace slowed even more, so much that at times it seemed he was no longer moving at all. The wavering of his head and the fixed stare of his eyes made one think of a compass needle searching for the pole. However long he delayed, he had to arrive at last. He reached the Rue des

Filles-du-Calvaire. Then he stopped. He trembled. With a kind of sad shyness, he leaned his head around the corner of the last house and looked down the street. In that tragic gaze there was something like the blinding light of the impossible, the reflection of a paradise closed to him. Then a tear, which had slowly gathered at the edge of his eyelid and grown heavy enough to fall, ran down his cheek and sometimes paused at his mouth. The old man tasted its bitterness. He remained there for several minutes, as if turned to stone. Then he went back the way he had come, with the same step, and as he withdrew, the light faded from his eyes.

Little by little, the old man stopped going all the way to the corner of the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire. He would stop halfway along the Rue Saint-Louis, sometimes a little farther away, sometimes a little closer.

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 slowly shook his head from side to side, as if denying himself something, and turned back.

Before long, he no longer went as far as the Rue Saint-Louis. He would reach the Rue Pavée, shake his head, and turn back. Then he went no farther than the Rue des Trois-Pavillons. After that, he did not pass the Blancs-Manteaux. It was as if he were a pendulum running down, its swings growing shorter and shorter before stopping altogether.

Every day he left his house at the same hour and set out on the same walk, but he no longer finished it. Little by little, perhaps without even realizing it, he kept making it shorter. His whole face seemed to say only one thing: What is the use? His eyes were dull now; their light was gone. Even his tears had run dry. They no longer gathered at the corners of his eyelids; that thoughtful gaze was dry. The old man still thrust his head forward, and at times his chin trembled. The folds of his thin neck were painful to see. Sometimes, in bad weather, he carried an umbrella under his arm, but he never opened it.

The kind women of the neighborhood said, “He is harmless.” The children followed him and laughed.

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

It is a terrible thing to be happy. How satisfied one feels. How complete it seems in itself. How easily, once one possesses that false goal of life—happiness—one forgets the true goal: duty.

Still, it would be wrong for the reader to blame Marius.

As we have explained, before his marriage Marius had asked M. Fauchelevent no questions, and afterward he was afraid to ask Jean Valjean any. He regretted the promise he had let himself be drawn into making. He often told himself that he had done wrong to grant that concession to despair. So he limited himself to slowly distancing Jean Valjean from his house and, as much as possible, erasing him from Cosette's mind. In a sense, he always placed himself between Cosette and Jean Valjean, certain that in this way she would neither notice nor think about the latter. It was more than erasure; it was an eclipse.

Marius did what he believed was necessary and right. He felt he had strong reasons—some the reader has already seen, and others that will appear later—for separating himself from Jean Valjean, not cruelly, but firmly.

By chance, in a case he had argued, he met a former employee of the Laffitte establishment. From that man he learned certain mysterious facts, though he had not gone looking for them. He had not been able to investigate further, it is true, because he

had promised to keep the secret and because Jean Valjean's situation was so dangerous. At that moment, he believed he had a serious duty to carry out: to return the six hundred thousand francs to someone he was trying to find with the utmost discretion. Meanwhile, he refrained from touching the money.

As for Cosette, she had not been told any of these secrets; and it would be unfair to blame her as well.

There was a powerful bond between Marius and Cosette that led her, instinctively and almost automatically, to do what Marius wanted. She sensed his attitude toward "Monsieur Jean" and followed it. Her husband did not need to say anything. She gave way to the quiet but unmistakable pressure of his unspoken wishes and obeyed without question. In this case, her obedience took the form of not remembering what Marius chose to forget. She did not even have to make an effort. Without understanding why, and without giving him any reason to accuse her, her soul had become so completely joined to her husband's that whatever lay in shadow in Marius' mind grew dim in hers as well.

Still, we should not go too far. When it came to Jean Valjean, this forgetting and erasure were only on the surface. She was more careless than truly forgetful. Deep down, she was sincerely attached to the man she had so long called her father; but she loved her husband even more. That was what had slightly upset the balance of her heart, which now leaned to one side alone.

Sometimes Cosette spoke of Jean Valjean and wondered about him. Then Marius would reassure her. “I think he’s away. Didn’t he say he was leaving on a journey?” — “That’s true,” Cosette thought. “He used to disappear like this. But never for so long.” Two or three times she sent Nicolette to the Rue de l’Homme Armé to ask whether Monsieur Jean had returned from his trip. Jean Valjean had them answer no.

Cosette asked no more, because she had only one need on earth: Marius.

We should also say that Cosette and Marius, for their part, had been away as well. They had gone to Vernon. Marius had taken Cosette to his father’s grave.

Little by little, Marius drew Cosette away from Jean Valjean. Cosette let it happen.

Besides, what people call—often too harshly, in some cases—the ingratitude of children is not always as blameworthy as it is said to be. It is the ingratitude of nature. Nature, as we have said elsewhere, looks ahead. Nature divides living beings into two groups: those who are arriving and those who are departing. Those who are departing face the shadows; those who are arriving face the light. From this comes a gulf—fatal on the side of the old, involuntary on the side of the young. This break, unnoticed at first, slowly widens, like the way branches grow apart. The branches do not detach from the trunk, but they grow away from it. It is not their fault. Youth goes where there is joy, celebration, bright light, and love. Old age moves toward the end. They do not lose sight of one another, but they

are no longer closely joined. Young people feel the cooling of life; old people feel the cooling of the tomb. Let us not blame these poor children.

CHAPTER II—THE LAST FLICKERS OF A LAMP WITH NO OIL

One day Jean Valjean came down his staircase, walked three steps into the street, and sat on a post—the same stone post where Gavroche had found him deep in thought on the night between the 5th and 6th of June. He stayed there for a few moments, then went back upstairs. It was the last swing of the pendulum. The next day he did not leave his room. The day after that, he did not leave his bed.

His portress, who made his meager meals—a few cabbages or potatoes with bacon—looked at the brown earthenware plate and cried out:

“But you ate nothing yesterday, you poor dear man!”

“Of course I did,” Jean Valjean replied.

“The plate is still completely full.”

“Look at the water jug. It’s empty.”

“That proves you drank. It does not prove you ate.”

“Well,” said Jean Valjean, “what if all I wanted was water?”

“That is called thirst, and when a person does not eat as well, it is called fever.”

“I’ll eat tomorrow.”

“Or on Trinity Day. Why not today? What kind of thing is that to say: ‘I’ll eat tomorrow’? Just look at you, leaving my platter untouched! My fingerling potatoes were so good!”

Jean Valjean took the old woman’s hand.

“I promise I’ll eat them,” he said in his gentle voice.

“I am not pleased with you,” the portress replied.

Jean Valjean saw no one but this good woman. In Paris there are streets where no one ever passes, and houses where no one ever comes. He lived in one of those streets, in one of those houses.

Back when he still went out, he had bought a small copper crucifix from a coppersmith for a few sous and hung it on a nail opposite his bed. That kind of gallows is always worth looking at.

A week went by, and Jean Valjean had not taken a single step around his room. He stayed in bed the whole time. The portress said to her husband, “The good man upstairs does not get up anymore. He no longer eats. He will not last much longer. That man has his sorrows, he certainly does. You will never persuade me that his daughter has not made a bad marriage.”

The porter replied in the commanding tone of a husband:

“If he’s rich, let him get a doctor. If he isn’t rich, let him do without one. If he has no doctor, he’ll die.”

“And if he does have one?”

“He’ll die,” said the porter.

The portress began scraping the grass off what she called her pavement with an old knife, and as she ripped out the blades, she grumbled:

“It’s a shame. Such a tidy old man! He’s as white as a chicken.”

She spotted the neighborhood doctor as he passed the end of the street and took it upon herself to ask him to come upstairs.

“It’s on the second floor,” she said. “Just go in. Since the poor man no longer gets out of bed, the door is always unlocked.”

The doctor saw Jean Valjean and spoke with him.

When he came back down, the portress questioned him:

“Well, doctor?”

“Your sick man is very seriously ill.”

“What’s wrong with him?”

“Everything and nothing. He seems to be a man who has lost someone dear to him. People die of that.”

“What did he say to you?”

“He told me he was in good health.”

“Will you come again, doctor?”

“Yes,” the doctor replied. “But someone else must come too.”

CHAPTER III—A PEN IS HEAVY FOR THE MAN WHO LIFTED FAUCHELEVENT'S CART

One evening Jean Valjean found it hard to raise himself onto one elbow. He felt for his pulse at his wrist and could not find it. His breathing was short and sometimes faltered. He realized that he was weaker than he had ever been before. Then, no doubt driven by some final urgent thought, he made an effort, pulled himself into a sitting position, and got dressed. He put on his old workingman's clothes. Since he no longer went out, he had gone back to wearing them and preferred them. He had to stop many times while dressing; simply pushing his arms into his waistcoat made sweat run down his forehead.

Since he had been alone, he had moved his bed into the antechamber so that he would have to live as little as possible in that deserted room.

He opened the valise and took out Cosette's outfit.

He spread it out on his bed.

The Bishop's candlesticks stood on the mantelpiece where they always were. He took two wax candles from a drawer and set them in the candlesticks. Then, though it was still full daylight—it was summer—he lit them. Candles are lit in broad daylight the same way in rooms where a corpse lies.

Every step he took from one piece of furniture to another wore him out, and he had to sit down. This was not ordinary

tiredness, which spends strength only for it to return. It was the last of the movement left in him. It was life itself draining away, drop by drop, through terrible effort, never to come back.

The chair he sank into stood in front of that mirror—so disastrous for him, so providential for Marius—in which he had read Cosette's writing backward on the blotting book. He caught sight of himself in it and did not recognize his own face. He was eighty years old; before Marius' marriage, no one would have taken him for more than fifty. That single year had counted for thirty. What lay on his brow was no longer the wrinkling of age, but the mysterious stamp of death. One could almost feel the hollow it had carved there with its pitiless nail. His cheeks hung loose. The skin of his face had the color of something that seemed already touched by earth. The corners of his mouth drooped like the mask the ancients carved on tombs. He stared into space with a look of reproach; one might have thought him one of those great tragic beings who have reason to complain of someone.

He was in that state—the final stage of despair—where sorrow no longer flows. It has hardened, so to speak. Something like a clot of despair lies on the soul.

Night fell. With great effort, he dragged a table and the old armchair to the hearth, and on the table he placed a pen, ink, and paper.

After that, he fainted. When he came to, he was thirsty. Unable to lift the jug, he painfully tipped it toward his mouth and swallowed a drink.

Because neither the pen nor the ink had been used in so long, the pen's tip had curled and the ink had dried up. He had to get up and add a few drops of water to the ink. Even that took effort; he had to stop and sit down two or three times. In the end, he had to write with the back of the pen. From time to time, he wiped his brow.

Then he turned toward the bed and, still seated because he could not stand, looked at the little black gown and all those beloved things.

He remained lost in these thoughts for hours that felt like minutes.

Suddenly he shuddered. He felt as though a child were taking hold of him. Resting his elbows on the table lit by the Bishop's candles, he picked up the pen. His hand trembled. Slowly, he wrote these few lines:

"Cosette, I bless thee. I am going to explain. Thy husband was right to make me understand that I ought to go away, but there is a small mistake in what he believed, though he was right. He is excellent. Love him dearly even after I am dead. Monsieur Pontmercy, love my darling child dearly. Cosette, this paper will be found; this is what I want to say to thee. Thou wilt see the figures, if I still have the strength to remember them. Listen carefully: this money truly belongs to thee. Here is the whole matter: white jet comes from Norway, black jet comes from England, and black glass jewelry comes from Germany. Jet is the lightest, the most precious, and the most costly. Imitations can be made in France just as well as in Germany. What is

needed is a small anvil, two inches square, and a lamp burning spirits of wine to soften the wax. The wax used to be made with resin and lampblack, and it cost four livres a pound. I invented a way to make it with gum shellac and turpentine. It costs no more than thirty sous, and it is much better. Buckles are made with violet glass, which is fixed by means of this wax to a small frame of black iron. The glass must be violet for iron jewelry and black for gold jewelry. Spain buys a great deal of it. It is the country of jet . . ."

There he stopped. The pen slipped from his fingers. One of those sobs that sometimes rose from the deepest part of him seized him. The poor man buried his head in both hands and sat in thought.

"Oh!" he cried to himself [a desperate cry heard by God alone], "it's all over. I'll never see her again. She was like a smile that passed over me. I'm about to sink into darkness without even one more glimpse of her. Oh, for one minute, one instant, to hear her voice, to touch her dress, to look at her—at her, that angel!—and then die! Dying is nothing; what is terrible is dying without seeing her again. She would smile at me, she would say a word to me—would that harm anyone? No, it is all over, forever. Here I am, all alone. My God! My God! I shall never see her again!" At that moment, someone knocked at the door.

CHAPTER IV—A BOTTLE OF INK THAT ONLY MADE THINGS WHITER

That same day—or rather, that same evening—as Marius rose from the table and was about to go to his study to review a legal case, Basque handed him a letter and said, “The person who wrote this is in the antechamber.”

Cosette had taken her grandfather’s arm, and the two were walking in the garden.

A letter, like a person, can have an unappealing appearance. Rough paper, clumsily folded—some letters are unpleasant at first sight.

The letter Basque had brought was one of those.

Marius took it. It smelled of tobacco. Nothing brings back memory like a scent. Marius recognized that tobacco at once. He looked at the address: “To Monsieur, Monsieur le Baron Pommerci. At his house.” The smell had already stirred his memory; now he recognized the handwriting too. Astonishment can strike like lightning.

Marius felt as though one of those lightning flashes had lit him up.

His sense of smell—that mysterious helper of memory—had just brought an entire world back to life inside him. This was certainly the same paper, the same way of folding it, the same

dull-colored ink. It was certainly the familiar handwriting, and above all, the same tobacco.

The Jondrette attic sprang up in his mind.

By one of those strange turns of chance, one of the two traces he had searched for so carefully—the one he had recently tried so hard to recover, and had thought lost forever—had come to him on its own.

He broke the seal at once and read:

“Monsieur le Baron,—If the Supreme Being had granted me the necessary talents, I might have become Baron Thénard, a member of the Institute [Academy of Sciences], but that is not my lot. I only bear the same name as he does, and I would be happy if that connection might commend me to your generous kindness. Any favor you do me will be returned in kind. I possess a secret about a certain individual. That individual concerns you. I place this secret at your disposal, hoping for the honor of being useful to you. I can provide a simple way to remove from your honorable family the person who has no right to be there, since Madame la Baronne is of noble birth. The sanctuary of virtue can no longer live side by side with crime without surrendering itself.”

“I await Monsieur le Baron’s orders in the antechamber.”

“Respectfully.”

The letter was signed: “Thénard.”

The signature was not false. It was only slightly shortened.

Besides, the rambling style and the spelling made the truth unmistakable. The proof of identity was complete.

Marius was deeply moved. After his first shock of surprise, he felt a surge of happiness. If he could now only find the other man he had been searching for—the man who had saved him, Marius—he would have nothing left to wish for.

He opened the drawer of his desk, took out several banknotes, put them in his pocket, closed the desk again, and rang the bell. Basque opened the door halfway.

“Show the man in,” said Marius.

Basque announced:

“Monsieur Thénard.”

A man came in.

Marius had another surprise. The man who entered was a complete stranger to him.

The man was old. He had a large nose, and his chin was wrapped in a cravat. He wore green spectacles, with a double screen of green taffeta over his eyes, and his hair was plastered flat across his forehead, level with his eyebrows, like the wigs worn by English coachmen in “high life.” His hair was gray. He was dressed entirely in black, in clothes that were badly worn but clean. A cluster of seals hanging from his fob suggested that he carried a watch. He held an old hat in his hand. He walked bent over, and the curve of his spine made his bow seem even deeper.

The first thing the observer noticed was that this man's coat, though carefully buttoned, was too large for him and clearly had not been made for him.

A brief digression is necessary here.

At that time in Paris, in a shabby old lodging house on the Rue Beautreillis near the Arsenal, there lived a clever Jew whose trade was turning villains into honest men. Not for very long, of course, since that might have caused trouble for the villain. The transformation was immediate and lasted a day or two, at a rate of thirty sous a day, by means of a costume that imitated respectable society as closely as possible. This costumer was known as "the Changer." The pickpockets of Paris had given him that name and knew him by no other. He kept a fairly complete wardrobe. The worn-out clothes with which he disguised people looked almost believable. He had his specialties and categories. On each nail in his shop hung a social rank, faded and frayed: here a magistrate's suit, there a Curé's outfit, beyond that a banker's clothes, in one corner the costume of a retired military man, elsewhere the garments of a man of letters, and farther on the dress of a statesman.

This man supplied the costumes for the vast drama of deceit played out in Paris. His den was the green room from which theft stepped onto the stage and to which villainy returned. A ragged rogue would come to this dressing room, lay down his thirty sous, and choose the outfit that matched the role he wanted to play. When he came back down the stairs, he had become somebody. The next day, the clothes were returned without fail, and the Changer, who trusted thieves with

everything, was never robbed. There was one drawback to these clothes: they did not fit. They had not been made for the people who wore them. They were too tight for one man, too loose for another, and suited no one exactly. Any pickpocket who was above or below the ordinary human build felt uncomfortable in the Changer's outfits. You could not be too fat or too thin. The Changer had planned only for average men. He had taken the measure of the whole species from the first rascal he happened to get hold of, a man who was neither stout nor thin, neither tall nor short. So the adjustments were sometimes difficult, and the Changer's customers managed as best they could. Worse luck for the exceptions. The statesman's suit, for example, black from head to foot and therefore respectable, would have been too large for Pitt and too small for Castelcicala. In the Changer's catalogue, the statesman's costume was listed as follows; we copy it here:

"A coat of black cloth, trousers of black wool, a silk waistcoat, boots and linen." In the margin was written: _ex-ambassador_, along with a note that we also copy: "In a separate box, a neatly frizzed wig, green glasses, seals, and two small quills an inch long, wrapped in cotton." All of this belonged to the statesman, the ex-ambassador. The whole outfit was, if we may put it that way, worn out. The seams had gone white, and a loose buttonhole gaped at one elbow. One of the coat buttons on the chest was also missing. But that was only a detail. Since a statesman's hand should always be tucked inside his coat and resting on his heart, it served to hide the missing button.

If Marius had known the hidden institutions of Paris, he would at once have recognized on the visitor's back, whom Basque had just shown in, the statesman's suit borrowed from the Changer's old-clothes shop.

Marius was disappointed to find a different man from the one he had expected, and that disappointment immediately worked against the newcomer.

He looked him over from head to foot while the man made exaggerated bows, then asked curtly:

"What do you want?"

The man answered with a pleasant grin, something like the flattering smile of a crocodile:

"It seems impossible that I have not already had the honor of seeing Monsieur le Baron in society. In fact, I believe I did meet monsieur in person several years ago, at the home of Madame la Princesse Bagration and in the drawing rooms of his Lordship the Vicomte Dambray, peer of France."

A classic trick in dishonesty is to pretend to recognize someone you do not know.

Marius listened closely to the way the man spoke. He studied his accent and his gestures, but his disappointment only deepened. The man's pronunciation was nasal and nothing like the dry, shrill voice Marius had expected.

He was completely defeated.

“I know neither Madame Bagration nor M. Dambray,” he said. “I have never set foot in either of their houses in my life.”

The answer was not gracious. The man, however, was determined to remain gracious at any cost, and pressed on.

“Then it must have been at Chateaubriand’s that I saw 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’ expression grew harsher and harsher:

“I have never had the honor of being received by M. de Chateaubriand. Let us make this brief. What do you want?”

At that harsh tone, the man bowed even lower.

“Monsieur le Baron, please listen to me. In America, in a region near Panama, there is a village called la Joya. That village consists of a single house: a large, square, three-story building made of sun-dried brick. Each side of the square is five hundred feet long. Each story is set back twelve feet from the one below it, so that a terrace runs all the way around the building. In the center is an inner courtyard where food supplies and munitions are stored. There are no windows, only loopholes; no doors, only ladders. Ladders lead from the ground to the first terrace, from the first to the second, and from the second to the third. Other ladders go down into the inner courtyard. There are no doors to the rooms, only trapdoors; no staircases to the rooms, only ladders. In the evening, the trapdoors are shut, the ladders are pulled up, and carbines and blunderbusses are aimed

through the loopholes. There is no way in. By day it is a house; by night it is a fortress. Eight hundred people live there—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 marvelous: gold is found there."

"What are you getting at?" Marius interrupted, moving from disappointment to impatience.

"This, Monsieur le Baron. I am an old, worn-out diplomat. Ancient civilization has left me to fend for myself. I want to try savages."

"Well?"

"Monsieur le Baron, selfishness is the law of the world. The peasant woman who works for daily wages turns around when the stagecoach goes by; the peasant woman who owns her field and works it does not. The poor man's dog barks at the rich man, and the rich man's dog barks at the poor man. Every man for himself. Self-interest—that is what drives men. Gold—that is the magnet."

"So what? Go on."

"I would like to go and settle at la Joya. There are three of us. I have my wife and my young lady; a very beautiful girl. The journey is long and expensive. I need a little money."

"What has that to do with me?" Marius demanded.

The stranger craned his neck out of his cravat, in a gesture like a vulture's, and answered with an even broader smile.

“Has Monsieur le Baron not read my letter?”

There was some truth in that. The fact was, Marius had let the contents of the letter slip from his mind. He had looked at the handwriting more than he had actually read the letter. He could barely remember it. But just now he had been given a fresh lead. He had noticed that detail: “my spouse and my young lady.”

He fixed the stranger with a sharp, searching look. An examining magistrate could not have done it better. He was almost lying in wait for him.

He limited himself to replying:

“State the matter clearly.”

The stranger slipped both hands into his watch pockets and drew himself up, though without really straightening his back. At the same time, he studied Marius in return through the green lenses of his spectacles.

“Very well, Monsieur le Baron. I will be clear. I have a secret to sell you.”

“A secret?”

“A secret.”

“One that concerns me?”

“In a way.”

“What is this secret?”

As he listened, Marius studied the man more and more closely.

“I will begin free of charge,” said the stranger. “You will see that I am worth hearing.”

“Speak.”

“Monsieur le Baron, you have a thief and a murderer in your house.”

Marius shuddered.

“In my house? No,” he said.

The stranger, calm as ever, brushed his hat with his elbow and went on:

“A murderer and a thief. Note this, Monsieur le Baron: I am not speaking of old crimes, things long past, which the law may overlook with time and God may forgive through repentance. I am speaking of recent acts, of real facts that justice still does not know at this moment. Let me continue. This man has worked his way into your confidence, and almost into your family, under a false name. I am about to tell you his real name. And I will tell it to you for nothing.”

“I am listening.”

“His name is Jean Valjean.”

“I know that.”

“I am also going to tell you, again for nothing, who he is.”

“Go on.”

“He is a former convict.”

“I know that.”

“You know it because I had the honor of telling you.”

“No. I knew it already.”

Marius’ cold tone, that repeated answer—“I know it”—and his curt manner, which did nothing to encourage conversation, stirred a smoldering anger in the stranger. The man shot Marius a furious sideways glance, then instantly put it out. Brief as it was, it was the kind of look a man recognizes once he has seen it before, and Marius did not miss it. Some flashes can come only from certain souls; the eye, that vent for thought, burns with them. Glasses hide nothing; you might as well try to cover hell with a pane of glass.

The stranger went on with a smile:

“I will not presume to contradict Monsieur le Baron. Still, you must see that I am well informed. Now, what I have to tell you is known to me alone. It concerns Madame la Baronne’s fortune. It is an extraordinary secret. It is for sale—and I am offering it to you first. Cheap. Twenty thousand francs.”

“I know that secret as well as the others,” said Marius.

The man saw that he needed to lower his price a little.

“Monsieur le Baron, say ten thousand francs, and I will speak.”

“I repeat, there is nothing you can tell me. I know what you want to say.”

Another flash lit up the man’s eye. He cried:

“But I still have to eat today. It is an extraordinary secret, I tell you. Monsieur le Baron, I will speak. I am speaking. Give me twenty francs.”

Marius looked at him steadily:

“I know your extraordinary secret, just as I knew Jean Valjean’s name, just as I know yours.”

“My name?”

“Yes.”

“That is not difficult, Monsieur le Baron. I had the honor of writing to you and telling you. Thénard.”

“—Dier.”

“What?”

“Thénardier.”

“Who is that?”

In danger, the porcupine raises its quills, the beetle plays dead, the old guard forms a square; this man burst out laughing.

Then he flicked a speck of dust from his coat sleeve with his finger.

Marius went on:

“You are also Jondrette the laborer, Fabantou the actor, Genflot the poet, Don Alvarès the Spaniard, and Mistress Balizard.”

“Mistress who?”

“And you kept a tavern at Montfermeil.”

“A tavern! Never.”

“And I tell you that your name is Thénardier.”

“I deny it.”

“And that you are a scoundrel. Here.”

Marius pulled a banknote from his pocket and threw it in his face.

“Thank you! Forgive me! Five hundred francs! Monsieur le Baron!”

The man, overwhelmed, bowed, snatched up the note, and looked it over.

“Five hundred francs!” he said again, stunned. Then he muttered under his breath: “An honest rustler.”69

Then, abruptly:

“Well, so be it!” he cried. “Let us make ourselves comfortable.”

And with the quickness of a monkey, he tossed back his hair, ripped off his spectacles, and by a trick of the hand pulled from his nose the two quills mentioned earlier, which the reader has also seen on another page of this book. He took off his face as easily as a man takes off his hat.

His eye lit up. His uneven forehead, hollow in some places and bulging in others, deeply and hideously lined at the top, was exposed. His nose had become sharp as a beak. The fierce, shrewd profile of a bird of prey appeared again.

“Monsieur le Baron is never mistaken,” he said in a clear voice, with all the nasal twang gone. “I am Thénardier.”

And he straightened his crooked back.

Thénardier—for it really was he—was deeply startled. He would have been shaken, if he had been capable of such a feeling. He had come to astonish someone, and instead he was the one astonished. The humiliation had been worth five hundred francs to him, and all things considered, he accepted it; but he was still bewildered.

This was the first time he had seen Baron Pontmercy, and despite his disguise, the Baron recognized him at once, and recognized him completely. More than that, the Baron seemed to know all about Thénardier and a great deal about Jean Valjean as well. Who was this almost beardless young man, so cold and yet so generous, who knew people and knew all their names, who opened his purse to them, who scolded scoundrels like a judge and paid them like a fool?

The reader will remember that Thénardier, although he had once been Marius’s neighbor, had never actually seen him, which is not unusual in Paris. Long before, he had vaguely heard his daughters speak of a very poor young man named Marius who lived in the house. He had written to him, without knowing who he was, the letter the reader already knows about.

He could not imagine any connection between that Marius and Monsieur le Baron Pontmercy.

As for the name Pontmercy, it will be remembered that on the battlefield of Waterloo he had heard only the last two syllables, and he had always felt the proper contempt for them that one naturally has for a mere expression of thanks.

Still, through his daughter Azelma, who had begun tracking the married couple on the 16th of February, and through his own investigations, he had managed to learn a great deal. Out of the darkness he lived in, he had succeeded in seizing more than one mysterious clue. By hard work—or at least by clever guesswork—he had figured out who the man was whom he had met one day in the Grand Sewer. Once he had identified the man, getting the name had been easy. He knew that Madame la Baronne Pontmercy was Cosette. But on that point he intended to be discreet.

Who was Cosette? He did not know exactly. He did suspect something illegitimate; Fantine's story had always seemed doubtful to him. But what was the point of bringing that up? Was it just to get paid for keeping quiet? He had, or believed he had, better goods than that to sell. And by all appearances, if he went to Baron Pontmercy with this revelation—without any proof—"Your wife is a bastard," the only result would be that the husband's boot would land in the informer's groin.

From Thénardier's point of view, his conversation with Marius had not really started yet. He should have pulled back, changed his approach, given up his position, shifted tactics. But nothing important had been lost so far, and he had five hundred francs in his pocket. Besides, he still had something decisive to say, and even against this well-informed, well-prepared Baron

Pontmercy, he felt confident. For men like Thénardier, every conversation is a battle. And in the one he was about to enter, what was his position? He did not know who he was speaking to, but he did know what he was speaking about. He quickly took stock of his resources, and after saying, “I am Thénardier,” he waited.

Marius fell into thought. So at last he had Thénardier in his hands. The man he had so long wanted to find was now standing before him. He could finally honor Colonel Pontmercy’s request.

He felt humiliated that this hero had owed anything to such a villain, and that the claim his father had drawn on him, Marius, from the depths of the grave had remained unpaid until that day. In the tangled state of his feelings toward Thénardier, he also felt there was a kind of justice in avenging the Colonel for the disgrace of having been saved by such a scoundrel. In any case, he was satisfied. At last he was about to free the Colonel’s spirit from this unworthy creditor, and it seemed to him that he was rescuing his father’s memory from a debtor’s prison. Alongside that duty was another: to discover, if possible, where Cosette’s fortune had come from. The chance seemed to be here. Perhaps Thénardier knew something. It might be useful to see what was really at the bottom of this man.

He began with this.

Thénardier had slipped the “honest rustler” into his watch pocket and was looking at Marius with a gentleness that was almost affectionate.

Marius broke the silence.

“Thénardier, I have told you your name. Now would you like me to tell you your secret—the one you came here to reveal to me? I have information of my own as well. You will see that I know more about it than you do. Jean Valjean, as you have said, is a murderer and a thief. A thief, because he robbed a wealthy manufacturer and caused his ruin. A murderer, because he murdered the police agent Javert.”

“I don’t understand, sir,” Thénardier blurted out.

“I’ll explain clearly. In one district of Pas-de-Calais, there was, in 1822, a man who had once been in trouble with the law and who, under the name of M. Madeleine, had restored his reputation and rebuilt his life. He had become a truly good man in every sense of the word. Through a trade—the manufacture of black glass goods—he made an entire city prosperous. He also made his own fortune, but that was secondary and, in a way, almost accidental. He was a benefactor to the poor. He founded hospitals, opened schools, visited the sick, provided dowries for young women, supported widows, and took in orphans; he was like the guardian angel of the whole region. He refused the cross, yet he was made Mayor. A released convict knew the secret of a punishment this man had suffered long before. He denounced him, had him arrested, and then took advantage of that arrest to come to Paris and induce the banker Laffitte—I had this from the cashier himself—to hand over, by means of a forged signature, more than half a million that belonged to M. Madeleine. The convict who robbed M. Madeleine was Jean Valjean. As for the other matter, you have

nothing to tell me about that either. Jean Valjean killed the officer Javert; he shot him with a pistol. I myself, the man speaking to you, was there."

Thénardier threw Marius the commanding look of a defeated man who suddenly feels victory returning to his grasp, as though in a single instant he had recovered all the ground he had lost. But the smile came back at once. When an inferior triumphs in front of a superior, he must make it look ingratiating.

Thénardier merely said to Marius:

"Baron, we are on the wrong track."

And to underline the remark, he gave his bunch of seals a meaningful twirl.

"What!" Marius burst out. "You deny that? These are facts."

"They are fantasies. The trust Monsieur le Baron places in me makes it my duty to say so. Truth and justice above everything. I do not like to see people accused unfairly. Monsieur le Baron, Jean Valjean did not rob M. Madeleine, and Jean Valjean did not kill Javert."

"This is too much! What do you mean by this?"

"For two reasons."

"What are they? Speak."

"Here is the first: he did not rob M. Madeleine, because Jean Valjean and M. Madeleine were the same man."

"What story are you telling me?"

“And here is the second: he did not murder Javert, because the man who killed Javert was Javert himself.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“That Javert killed himself.”

“Prove it! Prove it!” cried Marius, beside himself.

Thénardier went on, measuring out his words in the style of an old Alexandrine line:

“Police inspector Ja-vert was found drowned un-der a boat at the Pont-au-Change.”

“But prove it!”

Thénardier pulled a large gray paper envelope from his pocket. It seemed to hold several sheets folded to different sizes.

“I have my documents,” he said calmly.

And he added:

“Monsieur le Baron, for your sake I wanted 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 killer but himself. If I speak, it is because I have proof. Not handwritten proof—writing is suspect, and handwriting can be accommodating—but printed proof.”

As he spoke, Thénardier took two newspapers out of the envelope, yellowed, faded, and deeply stained with tobacco. One of them, split at every fold and crumbling to pieces, looked much older than the other.

“Two facts, two proofs,” said Thénardier. And he handed the two unfolded newspapers to Marius.

The reader already knows these two papers. One, the older one, an issue of the _Drapeau Blanc_ dated July 25, 1823, whose text appears in the first volume, established that M. Madeleine and Jean Valjean were the same person.

The other, an issue of the _Moniteur_ dated June 15, 1832, reported Javert’s suicide. It added that, according to Javert’s spoken report to the prefect, after being taken prisoner at the barricade in the Rue de la Chanvrerie, he had owed his life to the generosity of an insurgent who held him at gunpoint and fired into the air instead of blowing out his brains.

Marius read on. He now had evidence: a specific date, undeniable proof. These two newspapers had not been printed just to support Thénardier’s claims. The note in the _Moniteur_ was an official communication from the Prefecture of Police. Marius could no longer doubt.

The cashier-clerk’s information had been wrong, and Marius himself had been misled.

Jean Valjean, suddenly revealed in all his greatness, came out of the shadows. Marius could not hold back a cry of joy.

“Then this poor wretch is a remarkable man! That whole fortune truly belonged to him! He is Madeleine, the benefactor of an entire region! He is Jean Valjean, the man who saved Javert! He is a hero! He is a saint!”

“He’s no saint, and he’s no hero,” said Thénardier. “He’s a murderer and a thief.”

Then he added, in the tone of a man beginning to feel he had the upper hand:

“Let’s stay calm.”

Murderer, thief—those words, which Marius had thought were gone for good and which had now returned, struck him like a blast of icy water.

“Again!” he said.

“Always,” Thénardier burst out. “Jean Valjean did not rob Madeleine, but he is a thief. He did not kill Javert, but he is a murderer.”

“Are you going to bring up,” Marius shot back, “that pitiful theft committed forty years ago, and atoned for—as your own newspapers prove—by a whole life of repentance, self-denial, and virtue?”

“I say murder and theft, Monsieur le Baron, and I repeat that I am speaking of real facts. What I have to reveal to you is completely unknown. It has never been made public. And perhaps in it you will find the source of the fortune Jean Valjean so cleverly placed in Madame la Baronne’s hands. I say cleverly, because with a gift of that kind, it would not be such a clumsy thing to gain entry into an honorable household, then share in its comforts, while at the same time hiding one’s crime and enjoying one’s stolen wealth, burying one’s name, and making a family for oneself.”

“I could stop you right there,” said Marius, “but go on.”

“Monsieur le Baron, I’ll tell you everything and leave the payment to your generosity. This secret is worth a great deal of gold. You may ask me, ‘Why not go to Jean Valjean?’ For a very simple reason: I know he has given up everything, and done so for your benefit. I find the arrangement quite clever, but he no longer has a sou. He would only show me his empty hands. And since I need money for my trip to la Joya, I would rather come to you, who have everything, than to him, who has nothing. I’m a little tired; allow me to take a chair.”

Marius sat down and signaled for him to do the same.

Thénardier settled into a padded chair, picked up his two newspapers, slipped them back into their envelope, and muttered, tapping the _Drapeau Blanc_ with his fingernail, “It took me quite a bit of trouble to get this one.”

Then he crossed his legs and leaned back in the chair, a pose typical of people who are completely confident in what they are saying. Then he began his story in a grave tone, stressing each word:

“Monsieur le Baron, on the 6th of June, 1832, about a year ago, on the day of the uprising, a man was in the Grand Sewer of Paris, at the point where the sewer empties into the Seine, between the Pont des Invalides and the Pont de Jéna.”

Marius suddenly pulled his chair closer to Thénardier’s. Thénardier noticed the movement and went on with the measured calm of an orator who knows he has his listener in his

grasp and can feel his opponent trembling under his words:

“This man had been forced into hiding, for reasons that had nothing to do with politics, and he had made the sewer his home. He had a key to it. As I said, this happened on June 6, at about eight in the evening. The man heard a noise in the sewer. Startled, he hid and waited. It was the sound of footsteps. Someone was walking through the darkness and coming toward him. Strange as it may seem, there was another man in the sewer besides himself. The grating at the sewer’s outlet was not far away, and a little light filtering through it let him make out the newcomer. He could also see that the man was carrying something on his back. He was bent over as he walked. The man moving in that stooped way was an ex-convict, and what he had slung over his shoulders was a corpse. If murder was ever caught in the act, this was it. And as for robbery, that goes without saying; no one kills a man for nothing. This convict was on his way to throw the body into the river. One point should be noted: before reaching the exit grating, this convict, after coming a long way through the sewer, had to pass through a dreadful quagmire. It would seem he could have left the body there, but then the sewer workers would have found the murdered man the very next day while working in the mire, and that did not fit the killer’s plans. So he chose instead to cross that quagmire with his burden. The effort must have been terrible, because it is hard to imagine a greater risk to one’s life. I do not understand how he managed to come out of it alive.”

Marius drew his chair even closer. Thénardier took advantage of this to breathe deeply. Then he went on:

“Monsieur le Baron, a sewer is not the Champ de Mars. Down there, you have nothing—not even space. If two men are in it, they have to run into each other. That is what happened. The man who lived there and the man passing through had no choice but to greet each other, much to both their regret. The passer-by said to the other: ‘You can see what I’m carrying on my back. I need to get out. You have the key—give it to me.’ That convict was a man of tremendous strength. Refusing him was impossible. Still, the man with the key tried to stall, simply to gain time. He looked at the dead man, but all he could tell was that he was young, well dressed, seemed rich, and was horribly disfigured with blood. While he talked, he managed to tear off a piece from the back of the murdered man’s coat without the killer noticing. A piece of evidence, you understand—a way to pick up the trail again and prove the criminal’s guilt. He put that evidence in his pocket. Then he opened the grating, let the man out with his burden on his back, closed the grating again, and ran off. He wanted no part in the rest of the affair, and above all he did not want to be there when the murderer threw the murdered man into the river. Now you understand. The man carrying the corpse was Jean Valjean; the one who had the key is speaking to you now; and the piece of the coat . . .”

Thénardier finished the sentence by pulling from his pocket a torn strip of black cloth, covered with dark stains, and holding it up at eye level, pinched between his thumbs and forefingers.

Marius sprang to his feet, pale and barely able to breathe, his eyes fixed on the scrap of black cloth. Without saying a word, and without looking away from it, he backed toward the wall and

felt along it with his right hand for a key in the lock of a cupboard near the chimney.

He found the key, opened the cupboard, and thrust his arm inside without looking, while his terrified gaze remained fixed on the rag Thénardier was still holding out.

But Thénardier went on:

“Monsieur le Baron, I have the strongest reason to believe that the murdered young man was a wealthy stranger whom Jean Valjean had lured into a trap, and that he was carrying an enormous sum of money.”

“I was the young man, and here is the coat!” Marius cried, throwing an old black coat, stained all over with blood, onto the floor.

Then he snatched the fragment from Thénardier’s hands, bent over the coat, and placed the torn piece against the ragged hem. It matched perfectly. The strip completed the coat.

Thénardier stood frozen.

This was what he thought: “I’m completely stunned.”

Marius got to his feet, trembling, desperate, and radiant.

He fumbled in his pocket, then strode furiously toward Thénardier, holding out—almost shoving in his face—a fistful of five-hundred- and thousand-franc banknotes.

“You filthy scoundrel! You liar, slanderer, villain! You came here to accuse that man, and all you have done is clear him. You meant to destroy him, and instead you have only glorified him.

You are the thief! You are the murderer! I saw you, Thénardier Jondrette, in that den on the Rue de l'Hôpital. I know enough about you to send you to the galleys, and worse, if I choose. Here are a thousand francs, you brute!"

And he threw a thousand-franc note at Thénardier.

"Ah, Jondrette Thénardier, vile rogue! Let this teach you a lesson, you peddler of old secrets, trader in mysteries, scavenger of the shadows, wretch! Take these five hundred francs and get out of here! Waterloo is protecting you."

"Waterloo!" Thénardier growled, slipping the five hundred francs into his pocket along with the thousand.

"Yes, murderer! There you saved the life of a Colonel..."

"A General," said Thénardier, lifting his head.

"A Colonel!" Marius repeated angrily. "I wouldn't give a halfpenny for a general. And you come here to do such vile things! I tell you, you have committed every crime. Go! Disappear! Just be satisfied—that is all I ask. Ah, monster! Here are three thousand francs more. Take them. Tomorrow you will leave for America with your daughter, because your wife is dead, you disgusting liar. I will see to your departure, you scoundrel, and at that moment I will count out twenty thousand francs for you. Go get yourself hanged somewhere else!"

"Monsieur le Baron!" Thénardier replied, bowing almost to the floor. "My eternal gratitude." Then he left the room, stunned and delighted, understanding nothing. It was as if he had been sweetly crushed under sacks of gold, with a thunderclap of

banknotes bursting over his head.

He had been struck by lightning, but he was pleased about it; indeed, he would have been furious to have a lightning rod protecting him from lightning like that.

Let us be done with this man at once.

Two days after the events we are now recounting, he left for America under a false name, thanks to Marius's care, taking his daughter Azelma with him and carrying a draft on New York for twenty thousand francs.

The moral misery of Thénardier, that bourgeois who had missed his true calling, could not be cured. In America, he was exactly what he had been in Europe. Sometimes contact with an evil man is enough to corrupt a good deed and make evil grow out of it. With Marius's money, Thénardier became a slave trader.

As soon as Thénardier had left the house, Marius rushed into the garden, where Cosette was still walking.

"Cosette! Cosette!" he cried. "Come! Quickly, come! We must go. Basque, a carriage! Cosette, come. Ah, my God! He was the one who saved my life! We must not lose a minute! Put on your shawl."

Cosette thought he had gone mad, and she obeyed.

He could hardly breathe. He pressed a hand to his heart to steady its pounding. He strode back and forth in great steps, then embraced Cosette:

"Ah, Cosette! I am a miserable wretch!" he said.

Marius was overwhelmed. In Jean Valjean, he began to see some indescribably noble and sorrowful figure. A virtue unlike anything he had ever known, supreme and gentle, humble in its vastness, revealed itself to him. The convict was transformed into Christ.

Marius was dazzled by this miracle. He did not know exactly what he was seeing, but he knew it was magnificent.

A moment later, a hired carriage stood at the door.

Marius helped Cosette in and sprang in after her.

“Driver,” he said, “Rue de l’Homme Armé, Number 7.”

The carriage rolled away.

“Ah, what happiness!” Cosette cried. “Rue de l’Homme Armé—I didn’t dare mention that to you. We’re going to see M. Jean.”

“Your father! Cosette, your father more than ever. Cosette, I can see it now. You told me you never received the letter I sent by Gavroche. It must have fallen into his hands. Cosette, he went to the barricade to save me. And because he cannot help being an angel, he saved others too; he saved Javert. He pulled me out of that abyss so he could give me back to you. He carried me on his back through that dreadful sewer. Ah, I’m monstrously ungrateful. Cosette, after being your providence, he became mine as well. Just imagine it: there was a horrible bog there, enough to drown a man a hundred times over, to bury him in filth. Cosette, he got me through it. I was unconscious; I saw nothing, heard nothing, knew nothing of what happened to me. We’re going to bring him back and take him with us, whether he

wants to come or not. He must never leave us again. If only he is at home! If only we can find him, I'll spend the rest of my life honoring him. Yes, that is how it should be, don't you see, Cosette? Gavroche must have delivered my letter to him. Everything is explained. You understand."

Cosette did not understand a single word.

"You're right," she said to him.

Meanwhile, the carriage kept rolling on.

CHAPTER V—A NIGHT BEHIND WHICH THERE IS DAY

Jean Valjean turned at the sound of a knock on his door.

“Come in,” he said weakly.

The door opened.

Cosette and Marius appeared.

Cosette rushed into the room.

Marius stayed on the threshold, leaning against the doorframe.

“Cosette!” said Jean Valjean.

And he straightened up in his chair, his arms stretched out and trembling, gaunt, pale, and dark with grief, while immense joy shone in his eyes.

Choking with emotion, Cosette threw herself against Jean Valjean’s chest.

“Father!” she said.

Overcome, Jean Valjean stammered:

“Cosette! She! You! Madame! It is you! Ah, my God!”

And, held tight in Cosette’s arms, he cried out:

“It’s you! You’re here! So you forgive me!”

Marius lowered his eyes to keep the tears from spilling over, stepped forward, and murmured through lips tightened to hold back his sobs:

“My father!”

“And you forgive me too!” Jean Valjean said to him.

Marius could not find any words, and Jean Valjean added:

“Thank you.”

Cosette pulled off her shawl and threw her hat onto the bed.

“It’s in my way,” she said.

Then she sat on the old man’s knees, gently brushed aside his white hair with a lovely gesture, and kissed his forehead.

Jean Valjean, overwhelmed, let her do as she pleased.

Cosette, who understood only dimly what was happening, became even more affectionate, as if she wanted to repay Marius’s debt.

Jean Valjean stammered:

“How foolish people are! I thought I would never see her again. Just imagine, Monsieur Pontmercy, at the very moment you came in, I was saying to myself, ‘It’s all over. Here is her little dress. I am a miserable man. I will never see Cosette again,’ and I was saying that at the very moment you were coming up the stairs. Wasn’t I an idiot? Just look how foolish a person can be! One forgets to reckon with the good God. And the good God says:

“‘You think you’re about to be abandoned, you fool! No. No, that is not how it will happen. Come, there is a good man over there who needs an angel.’ And the angel comes, and one sees one’s Cosette again! 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 truly needed to see Cosette from time to time. A heart needs something to cling to. But I knew perfectly well that I was in the way. I told myself, ‘They do not want you. Go your own way. One has no right to hold on forever.’ Ah! Praise God, I see her again! Do you know, Cosette, your husband is very handsome? Ah! What a pretty embroidered collar you have on. That is fortunate. I like that pattern. Your husband chose it, didn’t he? And then, you ought to have some cashmere shawls. Let me call her thou, Monsieur Pontmercy. It will not be for long.”

And Cosette began again:

“How could you leave us like that? Where did you go? Why were you away so long? Before, your trips only lasted three or four days. I sent Nicolette, and the answer was always, ‘He is absent.’ How long have you been back? Why didn’t you let us know? Do you realize how much you’ve changed? Ah, what a naughty father! He has been ill, and we knew nothing about it! Here, Marius, feel how cold his hand is!”

“So you are here! Monsieur Pontmercy, you forgive me!” Jean Valjean repeated.

At those words, which Jean Valjean had just spoken again, everything that had been building in Marius's heart burst out.

He cried out:

"Cosette, do you hear? He has come to this—he is asking my forgiveness! And do you know what he has done for me, Cosette? He saved my life. He did even more—he gave you to me. And after saving me, after giving you to me, Cosette, what did he do for himself? He sacrificed himself. Look at this man. And he says to me—to me, the ungrateful one, the forgetful one, the hard-hearted one, the guilty one—thank you! Cosette, even if I spent my whole life at this man's feet, it would not be enough. That barricade, that sewer, that furnace, that cesspool—he went through all of it for me, for you, Cosette! He carried me away through all the deaths he pushed aside from my path and took on himself. He has every kind of courage, every virtue, every heroism, every holiness! Cosette, that man is an angel!"

"Hush, hush," said Jean Valjean softly. "Why say all that?"

"But you!" cried Marius, with anger that was full of reverence. "Why didn't you tell me? It is your fault too. You save people's lives and hide it from them! Worse still, under the pretext of revealing yourself, you slander yourself. It is terrible."

"I told the truth," Jean Valjean replied.

"No," Marius answered, "the truth is the whole truth, and that is what you did not tell. You were Monsieur Madeleine—why didn't you say so? You saved Javert—why didn't you say so? I owed

my life to you—why didn't you say so?"

"Because I used to think the way you do. I believed you were right. I had to go away. If you had known about that business in the sewer, you would have made me stay near you. So I had to keep silent. If I had spoken, it would have caused trouble in every way."

"Caused trouble for what? For whom?" Marius shot back. "Do you think you are going to stay here? We are taking you away. Ah, good God! when I think that I learned all this only by chance. You are part of our family. You are her father, and mine as well. You will not spend another day in this dreadful house. Do not imagine that you will still be here tomorrow."

"Tomorrow," said Jean Valjean, "I shall not be here, but I shall not be with you."

"What do you mean?" Marius replied. "Come now, we are not allowing any more departures. You shall never leave us again. You belong with us. We will not let go of you."

"This time it is forever," Cosette added. "We have a carriage at the door. I am going to run away with you. If necessary, I shall use force."

And with a laugh, she made as if to lift the old man in her arms.

"Your room is still ready in our house," she went on. "If you only knew how pretty the garden is now! The azaleas are thriving. The paths are covered with river sand, and there are little violet shells in it. You shall eat my strawberries. I water them myself. And no more 'madame,' no more 'Monsieur Jean'—we are living

under a Republic, everyone says thou, don't they, Marius? The whole arrangement has changed. If you only knew, father, I had a sorrow: there was a robin redbreast that had made her nest in a hole in the wall, and a horrible cat ate her. My poor pretty little robin redbreast, who used to put her head out of her window and look at me! I cried over it. I would have liked to kill the cat. But now no one cries anymore. Everyone laughs, everyone is happy. You are going to come with us. Grandfather will be so delighted! You shall have your own plot in the garden, you shall work it, and we shall see whether your strawberries are as fine as mine. And then I shall do everything you want, and then you will obey me nicely."

Jean Valjean listened to her without really hearing. He heard the music of her voice more than the meaning of her words, and one of those great tears—the dark pearls of the soul—slowly rose in his eyes.

He murmured:

"The proof that God is good is that she is here."

"Father!" said Cosette.

Jean Valjean went on:

"It's quite true that it would be lovely 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 say good morning to one another, who call out to each other in the garden. People see one another from early morning on. Each of us would tend our own little corner. She would make me eat her strawberries. I

would make her pick my roses. That would be lovely. Only . . .”

He paused, then said gently:

“It is a pity.”

The tear did not fall. It drew back, and Jean Valjean replaced it with a smile.

Cosette took both the old man’s hands in hers.

“My God!” she said. “Your hands are even colder than before. Are you ill? Are you in pain?”

“Me? No,” Jean Valjean replied. “I am very well. Only . . .”

He paused.

“Only what?”

“I am going to die soon.”

Cosette and Marius shuddered.

“Die!” cried Marius.

“Yes, but that is nothing,” said Jean Valjean.

He drew a breath, smiled, and went on:

“Cosette, you were talking to me—go on. So your little robin is dead? Speak, so that I may hear your voice.”

Marius stared at the old man in amazement.

Cosette let out a heartbreaking cry.

“Father! My father! You will live. You are going to live. I insist that you live, do you hear?”

Jean Valjean lifted his head toward her with adoration.

“Oh, yes, forbid me to die. Who knows? Perhaps I shall obey. I was on the edge of death when you came. That stopped it. It seemed to me that I was born again.”

“You’re full of strength and life,” cried Marius. “Do you think a person can die like this? You have suffered, but you will suffer no more. It is I who ask your forgiveness, and I do it on my knees! You are going to live—live with us, and live for a long time. We are claiming you back. There are two of us here now, and from this day on we will think of nothing but your happiness.”

“You see,” Cosette went on, bathed in tears, “Marius says you must not die.”

Jean Valjean kept smiling.

“Even if you were to claim me back, Monsieur Pontmercy, would that make me anything other than what I am? No. God has thought as you and I do, and he does not change his mind. It is right for me to go. Death is a good arrangement. God knows better than we do what we need. May you be happy. May Monsieur Pontmercy have Cosette. May youth marry the morning. May lilacs and nightingales surround you, my children. May your life be a beautiful lawn in the sunshine. May all the enchantments of heaven fill your souls. And now let me, who am good for nothing, die. It is certain that this is as it should be.

Come, be reasonable. Nothing is possible now. I know very well that all is over. Besides, last night I drank that whole jug of water. How good your husband is, Cosette! You are far better off with him than with me."

A sound was heard at the door.

It was the doctor coming in.

"Good day, and farewell, doctor," said Jean Valjean. "Here are my poor children."

Marius went up to the doctor. He said only one word to him: "Monsieur? ..." But the way he said it held an entire question.

The doctor answered that question with a meaningful look.

"Just because things are unpleasant," said Jean Valjean, "is no reason to be unjust toward God."

Silence followed.

Every heart felt heavy.

Jean Valjean turned to Cosette. He began to look at her as if he wanted to keep her face with him forever.

In the depths of the darkness into which he had already begun to sink, he could still feel ecstasy when he looked at Cosette. The glow of that gentle face lit up his pale features.

The doctor checked his pulse.

"Ah! You were the ones he wanted!" he murmured, looking at Cosette and Marius.

Then, leaning down to Marius's ear, he added in a very low voice:

"Too late."

Jean Valjean looked calmly at the doctor and Marius, while his eyes remained fixed on Cosette almost the whole time.

These barely formed words came from his lips:

"To die is nothing; not to live is dreadful."

Suddenly he stood up. Bursts of strength like this are sometimes a sign that death is near. He walked steadily to the wall, pushing aside Marius and the doctor when they tried to help him. He took down a small copper crucifix hanging there, then returned to his chair with the ease of a man in perfect health, and said in a loud voice as he set the crucifix on the table:

"Behold the great martyr."

Then his chest sank, and his head began to sway, as if the pull of the grave were taking hold of him.

His hands, resting on his knees, began digging their nails into the cloth of his trousers.

Cosette held up his shoulders, sobbing and trying to speak to him, but she could not.

Through the broken words blurred by the tearful saliva that comes with sobbing, they made out words like these:

“Father, do not leave us. Can it be that we found you again only to lose you once more?”

It might be said that agony twists and struggles. It goes and comes, moves toward the grave, then turns back toward life. There is a kind of groping in the act of dying.

After this half-faint, Jean Valjean recovered, shook his head as though trying to clear away the shadows, and became almost completely lucid again.

He took a fold of Cosette’s sleeve and kissed it.

“He is coming back! Doctor, he is coming back,” cried Marius.

“You are both good,” said Jean Valjean. “I am going to tell you what has been troubling me. What hurt me, Monsieur Pontmercy, was that you were unwilling to touch that money. It truly belongs to your wife. I will explain it to you, my children, and that is another reason I am glad to see you. Black jet comes from England, and white jet comes from Norway. Everything is written in this paper, which you will read. For bracelets, I came up with a way to replace the usual slides of soldered sheet iron with slides made of layered iron. It is prettier, better, and cheaper. You will understand how much money can be made that way. So Cosette’s fortune really is hers. I am giving you these details so your mind can be at ease.”

The portress had come upstairs and was peering in through the half-open door. The doctor sent her away.

But he could not stop the eager woman from calling out to the dying man before she disappeared: “Would you like a priest?”

“I have had one,” Jean Valjean replied.

And with his finger he seemed to point to a place above his head, as though he saw someone there.

Indeed, it is likely that the Bishop was present at this death agony.

Cosette gently slipped a pillow under his hips.

Jean Valjean went on:

“Do not be afraid, Monsieur Pontmercy, I beg you. The six hundred thousand francs truly belong to Cosette. My life will have been wasted if you do not enjoy them! We did very well with those glass goods. We competed with what is called Berlin jewellery. Still, we could not match the black glass from England. A gross, which contains twelve hundred very well-cut grains, costs only three francs.”

When someone dear to us is about to die, we look at them with a desperate gaze that clings to them and longs to hold them back.

Cosette took Marius’s hand, and both of them, speechless with anguish and not knowing what to say to the dying man, stood before him trembling in despair.

Jean Valjean weakened with every passing moment. He was fading; he was drawing near the dark horizon.

His breathing came in uneven bursts, with a faint rattle between them. He had trouble moving his forearm, and his feet could no longer move at all. But as his limbs grew more helpless and his

body weaker, the full greatness of his soul showed itself and spread across his brow. The light of the unknown world was already visible in his eyes.

His face turned pale and smiled. Life was no longer there; something else had taken its place.

His breathing faded, and his gaze grew more majestic. He was a corpse on which one could already feel the wings.

He motioned for Cosette to come closer, then for Marius. The final minute of the final hour had clearly arrived.

He began to speak to them in a voice so faint that it seemed to come from far away, as though a wall had risen between him and them.

“Come closer, both of you. I love you dearly. Oh, how good it is to die like this! And you love me too, my Cosette. I knew you still had affection for your poor old man. How kind of you to put that pillow under my hips! You will cry for me a little, won’t you? But not too much. I do not want you to have any real sorrow. You must enjoy life, my children. I forgot to tell you that the profit was even greater on the buckles without tongues than on all the others. A gross of twelve dozen cost ten francs and sold for sixty. It truly was a good business. So there is no reason to be surprised by the six hundred thousand francs, Monsieur Pontmercy. It is honest money. You may be rich with a clear conscience. You must have a carriage, a box at the theatre now and then, and beautiful ball gowns, my Cosette. And you must give fine dinners to your friends and be very happy. I was writing to Cosette a little while ago. She will find my letter. I

leave her the two candlesticks on the mantelpiece. They are silver, but to me they are gold, they are diamonds; they turn the candles placed in them into wax tapers. I do not know whether the person who gave them to me is pleased with me now, up there above. I have done what I could. My children, do not forget that I am a poor man. Have me buried in the first piece of ground you can find, with a stone to mark the place. That is my wish. No name on the stone. If Cosette wishes to come now and then for a little while, it will please me. And you too, Monsieur Pontmercy. I must admit that I have not always loved you. I ask your pardon for that. Now, to me, you and she are one. I am deeply grateful to you. I am sure you make Cosette happy. If you only knew, Monsieur Pontmercy, how much I loved her pretty rosy cheeks; when I saw them even a little pale, I was sad. In the chest of drawers there is a banknote for five hundred francs. I have not touched it. It is for the poor. Cosette, do you see your little dress there on the bed? Do you recognize it? And yet that was ten years ago. How time flies! We have been very happy. It is all over now. Do not cry, 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, do you remember Montfermeil? You were in the forest, terribly frightened. Do you remember how I took hold of the handle of the water bucket? That was the first time I touched your poor little hand. It was so cold! Ah, your hands were red then, mademoiselle; now they are very white. And the big doll—do you remember? You called her Catherine. You were sorry you had not taken her to the convent! How you used to make me laugh sometimes, my sweet angel! When it had rained, you would float bits of straw along the

gutters and watch them drift away. One day I gave you a willow battledore and a shuttlecock with yellow, blue, and green feathers. You have forgotten it. You were mischievous at such a young age! You played. You put cherries in your ears. All that is in the past now. The forests one has walked through with one's child, the trees under which one has strolled, the convents where one has hidden, the games, the hearty laughter of childhood—all these are shadows. I imagined that all of it belonged to me. That was my foolishness. Those Thénardiers were wicked. You must forgive them. Cosette, the time has come to tell you your mother's name. It was Fantine. Remember that name—Fantine. Kneel whenever you speak it. She suffered greatly. She loved you dearly. She had as much unhappiness as you have had happiness. That is how God divides things. He is above us, he sees us all, and he knows what he is doing among his great stars. I am about to leave, my children. Love each other well, and always. There is nothing else in the world but that: loving one another. From time to time, you will think of the poor old man who died here. Oh, my Cosette, it truly was not my fault that I did not see you all that time. It broke my heart. I went as far as the corner of the street. I must have looked strange to the people who saw me pass. I was like a madman; once I even went out without my hat. I can no longer see clearly, my children. I still had other things to say, but never mind. Think of me a little. Come closer still. I die happy. Give me your dear, beloved heads, so that I may lay my hands on them."

Cosette and Marius dropped to their knees in despair, choking back tears, each one beneath one of Jean Valjean’s hands. Those noble hands no longer moved.

He had fallen backward, and the candlelight shone on him.

His pale face was turned toward heaven, and he let Cosette and Marius cover his hands with kisses.

He was dead.

The night was starless and very dark. Surely, in that darkness, some vast angel stood waiting with outstretched wings for that soul.

[Illustration: Darkness]

CHAPTER VI—THE GRASS COVERS AND THE RAIN WASHES AWAY

In Père-Lachaise cemetery, near the common grave, far from the elegant quarter of that city of the dead, far from the elaborate tombs that parade all the ugly fashions of death before eternity, there is a stone in a deserted corner. It lies beside an old wall, beneath a great yew tree tangled with wild bindweed, among dandelions and moss. Like every other stone, it has not escaped the slow decay of time, damp, lichen, and the stains left by birds. Water has turned it green; air has blackened it. It stands away from any path, and people do not like to go that way, because the grass is high and their feet are quickly soaked. When a little sunlight reaches it, lizards come there. All around it, weeds tremble in the breeze. In spring, linnets sing in the trees.

The stone is completely plain. Whoever cut it thought only of what a grave required, taking no care beyond making it long enough and narrow enough to cover a man.

No name can be read on it.

Only this: many years ago, someone wrote these four lines on it in pencil. Little by little, rain and dust have made them almost impossible to read, and by now they are probably gone:

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 say that _Les Misérables_ was written for all nations. I do not know whether everyone will read it, but I wrote it for everyone. It speaks to England as much as to Spain, to Italy as much as to France, to Germany as much as to Ireland, to Republics with slaves as much as to Empires with serfs. Social problems cross borders. The wounds of the human race, those vast wounds that cover the globe, do not stop at the red or blue lines drawn on a map. Wherever man lives in ignorance and despair, wherever woman is sold for bread, wherever the child suffers for lack of the book that should teach him and the hearth that should warm him, the book of _Les Misérables_ knocks at the door and says, “Open to me, I come for you.”

In this stage of civilization through which we are now passing, still so dark, the name of the _miserable_ is Man; he suffers in every climate, and he groans in every language.

Your Italy is no more free from this evil than our France is. Your admirable Italy bears every kind of misery on its face. Does not banditry, that violent form of poverty, live in your mountains? Few nations are more deeply consumed by that ulcer of convents which I have tried to understand. In spite of Rome, Milan, Naples, Palermo, Turin, Florence, Sienna, Pisa, Mantua, Bologna, Ferrara, Genoa, Venice; in spite of a heroic history, sublime ruins, magnificent ruins, and superb cities, you are, like

us, poor. You are covered with marvels and vermin. Certainly, the sun of Italy is splendid, but, alas, blue skies do not keep rags off men.

Like us, you have prejudices, superstitions, tyrannies, fanaticisms, and blind laws that support ignorant customs. You cannot taste anything of the present or the future without the flavor of the past mixed into it. You have a barbarian, the monk, and a savage, the lazzarone. The social question is the same for you as for us. You may have a few fewer deaths from hunger and a few more from fever; your social hygiene is not much better than ours. The shadows that are Protestant in England are Catholic in Italy; but under different names, the _vescovo_ is the same as the _bishop_, and it always means night, of nearly the same kind. To explain the Bible badly comes to the same thing as understanding the Gospel badly.

Is it really necessary to stress this again? Must this sad parallel be proved even more completely? Do you not have poor people? Look below. Do you not have parasites? Look above. Does not that dreadful balance, with pauperism in one scale and parasitism in the other, still sway before your eyes as it does before ours, keeping its mournful equilibrium? Where is your army of schoolteachers, the only army civilization recognizes?

Where are your free, compulsory schools? In the land of Dante and Michelangelo, does everyone know how to read? Have you turned your barracks into public schools? Do you not also, like us, have a lavish war budget and a meager education budget? Do you not also have that passive obedience which so easily becomes military obedience? Do you not have a military system

that drives discipline so far that it fires on Garibaldi—that is, on the living honor of Italy? Let us examine your social order as it is, exactly where it stands. Let us look at its glaring offenses. Show me the woman and the child. Civilization is measured by how much protection surrounds these two vulnerable beings. Is prostitution any less heartbreaking in Naples than in Paris? How much truth comes from your laws, and how much justice from your courts? Are you fortunate enough not to know the meaning of those dark words: public prosecution, legal disgrace, prison, the scaffold, the executioner, the death penalty? Italians, for you as for us, Beccaria is dead and Farinace is alive. And then let us examine your reasons of state. Do you have a government that understands that morality and politics are one and the same? You have reached the point of granting amnesty to heroes! Something very much like that has been done in France. Come, let us review these miseries; let each side add its heap. You are as rich in them as we are. Do you not also, like us, suffer under two condemnations: religious condemnation pronounced by the priest, and social condemnation decreed by the judge? Oh, great nation of Italy, you resemble the great nation of France! Alas, our brothers, you are, like us, Miserables.

From the depths of the darkness where you live, you see the radiant, distant gates of Eden no more clearly than we do. Only the priests are mistaken: those holy gates lie ahead of us, not behind us.

I return to my point. This book, _Les Misérables_, is no less a mirror for you than for us. Certain men, certain classes, rise up against this book—I understand that. Mirrors, which reveal the

truth, are hated. That does not make them any less useful.

As for me, I have written for everyone, with deep love for my own country, but without caring more for France than for any other nation. As I move forward in life, I become simpler, and more and more I give my patriotism to humanity.

This, moreover, is the direction of our age, and the shining law of the French Revolution. Books must stop being exclusively French, Italian, German, Spanish, or English. If they are to match the widening of civilization, they must become European—more than that, human.

From this comes a new logic of art, along with new demands of composition that change everything, even the once narrow rules of taste and language. These too must broaden, like everything else.

In France, certain critics have reproached me—to my great delight—for crossing the limits of what they call "French taste." I would be glad if I had truly earned that praise.

In short, I do what I can. I suffer with this universal suffering, and I try to ease it. I have only the small strength of one man, and I call out to everyone: "Help me!"

Sir, that is what your letter moves me to say; I say it for you and for your country. If I have spoken so strongly, it is because of one phrase in your letter. You write:

"There are Italians, and they are many, who say: 'This book, _Les Misérables_, is a French book. It does not concern us. Let the French read it as history; we read it as a novel.'"—Alas! I repeat:

whether we are Italians or Frenchmen, misery concerns us all. Ever since history began to be written, ever since philosophy began to reflect, misery has clothed the human race. At last the time has come to tear off that rag and replace, on the bare limbs of the People-Man, that dark scrap of the past with the great purple robe of dawn.

If this letter seems useful to you in helping enlighten some minds and dispel some prejudices, you are free to publish it, sir. Please accept once again the assurance of my highest regard.

Footnotes:

1 (return) [French Alps patois: _chat de maraude_, a rogue or marauder.]

2 (return) [Liège: a cork tree. Pau: a pun on _peau_, meaning skin.]

3 (return) [She belonged to that set where cuckoos and carriages meet the same end; and being a jade herself, she lived, as jades do, only for a morning (or a jade).]

4 (return) [A former convict.]

5 (return) [This parenthetical remark comes from Jean Valjean.]

6 (return) [A bullet as big as an egg.]

7 (return) [Walter Scott, Lamartine, Vaulabelle, Charras, Quinet, Thiers.]

8 (return) [The inscription reads: D. O. M. HERE WAS ACCIDENTALLY CRUSHED UNDER A CART, MONSIEUR BERNARD DE BRYE, MERCHANT OF BRUSSELS, ON THE [illegible] OF FEBRUARY 1637.]

9 (return) [A heavy rifled cannon.]

10 (return) ["A battle brought to an end, a day completed, mistaken moves corrected, greater successes secured for the next day—all was lost in a single moment of panic and terror."—Napoleon, Dictées de Sainte Hélène.]

11 (return) [Five prize numbers in a lottery.]

12 (return) [Literally, “made cuirs”; that is, pronounced a _t_ or an _s_ at the ends of words where the other letter should have been used, or used one of them where neither belongs.]

13 (return) [Lawyer Corbeau, perched on a legal docket, held a writ of execution in his beak; Lawyer Renard, drawn by the smell, spoke to him more or less as follows, etc.]

14 (return) [This is the sign for Goblet Junior’s factory: Come choose your jugs and crocks, flower-pots, pipes, and bricks. The Heart sells diamonds to all comers.]

15 (return) [On the branches hang three bodies of unequal worth: Dismas and Gesmas, with divine power between them. Dismas rises to the heights; Gesmas, poor man, sinks to the lowest regions; the highest power will protect us and our belongings. If you repeat this verse, your things will not be stolen.]

16 (return) [Instead of _porte cochère_ and _porte bâtarde_.]

17 (return) [Jesus-my-God-bowlegged—down with the moon!]

18 (return) [_Chicken_: a slang reference to the sound made when calling poultry.]

19 (return) [Comic prints from that period depict Louis XVIII with a pear-shaped head.]

20 (return) [Tuck the shirttail hanging out back into your trousers. Let no one say that patriots have raised the white flag.]

21 (return) [To set the shaken throne firmly back on its foundation, the soil (Des Solles), the greenhouse, and the house

(Decazes) must be changed.]

22 (return) [_Suspendu_ means suspended; _pendu_ means hanged.]

23 (return) [_L'Aile_ means wing.]

24 (return) [A slang term for a painter's assistant.]

25 (return) [If Caesar offered me glory and war, and I had to give up my mother's love, I would say to the great Caesar, "Take back your sceptre and your chariot; I choose my mother's love."]

26 (return) [Whether the sun shines brightly or faintly, the bear goes back to his cave.]

27 (return) [In French, a peephole is called a _Judas_. That is the source of the half-punning allusion.]

28 (return) [Our love has lasted a whole week, yet how brief the moments of happiness are! To adore each other for eight days was hardly enough. Love should last forever.]

29 (return) [You leave me in search of glory; my sorrowful heart will follow you everywhere.]

30 (return) [A democrat.]

31 (return) [King Bootkick went crow-hunting, mounted on two stilts. Whenever one passed beneath them, someone paid him two sous.]

32 (return) [In earlier times, fouriers were the officials who went ahead of the Court and assigned lodgings.]

33 (return) [A game of ninepins played with a ball that is smaller on one side than the other, so it does not roll straight but curves along the ground.]

34 (return) [From April 19 to May 20.]

35 (return) [_Merlan_: a nickname for hairdressers, given because they were covered in white powder.]

36 (return) [The execution scaffold.]

37 (return) [Temple argot.]

38 (return) [Barrier argot.]

39 (return) [_The_ Last Day of a Condemned Man_.]

40 (return) [“In all that nonsense, you’ll find plenty of reasons for me to take my liberties.”]

41 (return) [It should be noted, however, that in Celtic, _mac_– means _son_–.]

42 (return) [Smoke blown into the face of someone who is asleep.]

43 (return) [I simply can’t understand how the father of the children can dress up his boys and little ones and send them off begging without upsetting himself.]

44 (return) [At night you can see nothing; by day you can see perfectly well. The bourgeois gets worked up over a fake scribble: practice virtue, tutu, pointed hat!]

45 (return) [_Chien_–: dog; trigger.]

46 (return) [Here comes the morning. “When shall we go to the forest?” Charlot asked Charlotte. Tou, tou, tou, for Chatou; I have only one God, one King, one halfpenny, and one boot. And the two poor little wolves were as tipsy as sparrows from drinking dew and thyme very early in the morning. And the two poor little creatures were as drunk as thrushes in a vineyard; a tiger laughed at them in his cave. One cursed, the other swore. “When shall we go to the forest?” Charlot asked Charlotte.]

47 (return) [There hangs the dreadful skeleton of a poor lover who hanged himself.]

48 (return) [She startles you from ten paces away and terrifies you at two. A wart sits on her alarming nose. Every moment, you fear she may blow it at you, and that one day her nose may fall into her mouth.]

49 (return) [_Matelote:_ a dish made from various kinds of fish. _Gibelotte:_ rabbit stew.]

50 (return) [Serve it, if you can, and eat it, if you dare.]

51 (return) [_Bip_ède sans plume:_ a featherless biped—pen.]

52 (return) [A municipal officer in Toulouse.]

53 (return) [Do you remember our sweet life, when we were both so young and wanted nothing more than to be well dressed and in love? When, even if you added your age to mine, we still did not make forty years between us, and in our small, humble home everything felt like spring, even in winter. Beautiful days! Manuel was proud and wise, Paris sat at sacred banquets, Foy hurled thunderbolts, and your bodice had a pin that pricked me.

Everything seemed to look at you. I was a lawyer without a brief, and when I took you to dine at the Prado, you were so beautiful that it seemed to me the roses turned toward you, and I could hear them say: Is she not beautiful! How sweet she smells! What flowing hair! Beneath her cloak she hides a wing. Her lovely bonnet is barely opened. I walked with you, pressing your supple arm. Passers-by must have thought that enchanted love had joined, in our happy pair, gentle April to lovely May. We lived hidden away, content behind closed doors, feeding on love, that sweet forbidden fruit. My lips had not spoken before your heart had already answered. The Sorbonne became the pastoral place where I adored you from evening until morning. That is how a soul in love lays the map of tenderness over the Latin Quarter. O Place Maubert! O Place Dauphine! When, in our fresh little springlike room, you pulled your stocking onto your delicate leg, I saw a star in the depths of the attic. I read a great deal of Plato, but nothing of it stayed with me; better than Malebranche, and later Lamennais, you showed me heavenly goodness with a flower you gave me. I obeyed you, and you yielded to me. O golden attic! To lace your dress! To watch you moving about at dawn in your chemise, looking at your young brow in your old mirror! And who could ever give up the memory of those days of dawn and sky, of flowers, gauze, and moire, when love speaks in its charming broken language? Our gardens were only a pot of tulips. You covered the window with your petticoat. I took the earthenware bowl, and I gave you the Japanese cup. And those great disasters that made us laugh! Your cuff scorched, your boa lost! And that dear portrait of the divine Shakespeare, which we sold one evening so that we

could have supper! I was a beggar, and you were generous. I kissed your fresh, round arms in haste. A folio Dante served as our table while we happily ate a cent's worth of chestnuts. The first time that, in my joyful den, I stole a kiss from your burning lips, when you went out with your hair undone and your face flushed, I turned deathly pale and believed in God. Do you remember our countless joys, and all those fichus worn down to rags? Oh, what sighs from our hearts, heavy with sadness, fluttered up into the depths of heaven!]

54 (return) [My nose is running, my friend Bugeaud; lend me your gendarmes so I can say a word to them. In a blue capote, with a chicken in his shako, here comes the banlieue, co-cocorico.]

55 (return) [Love letters.]

56 (return) [

“The bird chatters scandal in the elms, and claims that yesterday Atala went off with a Russian, where pretty girls go. Lon la.”

My friend Pierrot, you chatter too much, because Mila knocked on her windowpane the other day and called to me. The hussies are very charming; their poison, which enchanted me, would intoxicate Monsieur Orfila. I love love and its quarrels. I love Agnes, I love Pamela; Lise burned herself while setting me on fire. In earlier days, when I saw the mantillas of Suzette and Zéila, my soul seemed to mingle with their folds. Love, when you shine in the dark, you crown Lola with roses; I would lose my soul for that. Jeanne, you dress yourself before your mirror!

One fine day, my heart flew away. I think Jeanne is the one who has it. At night, when I come back from the quadrilles, I show Stella to the stars, and I say to them: “Look at her.” Where pretty girls go, lon la.]

57 (return) [But some prisons still remain, and I am going to put an end to this kind of public order. Does anyone want to play skittles? The whole ancient world fell into ruin when the great ball rolled. Good old people, let us smash that Louvre with our crutches, that Louvre where the monarchy showed itself off in frills. We forced its gates. On that day, King Charles X did not hold fast and came unstuck.]

58 (return) [Steps on the Aventine Hill leading down to the Tiber, where the bodies of executed criminals were dragged with hooks and thrown into the river.]

59 (return) [Mustards.]

60 (return) [From _casser_, to break: neck-breakers.]

61 (return) [“Jeanne was born at Fougère, a true shepherd’s nest; I adore her petticoat, the little rogue.” “Love, you dwell in her; for it is in her eyes that you place your quiver, sly rascal!” “As for me, I sing of her, and I love, more than Diana herself, Jeanne and her firm Breton breasts.”]

62 (return) [An allusion to the expression, _coiffer Sainte-Catherine_, “to remain unmarried.”]

63 (return) [“Thus, narrowing the course of your thoughts, Alcippus, it is true that you will soon be married.”]

64 (return) [_Tirer le diable par la queue_, meaning “to scrape by from day to day.”]

65 (return) [“Triton trotted ahead, drawing such enchanting sounds from his conch shell that he charmed everyone!”]

66 (return) [“A marriage on Shrove Tuesday will have no ungrateful children.”]

67 (return) [A small mask.]

68 (return) [Referring to the story of Prometheus.]

69 (return) [_Un fafiot sérieux. Fafiot_ is a slang word for a banknote, taken from the rustling sound it makes.]

70 (return) [He is sleeping. Though his fate was very strange, he lived. He died once he no longer had his angel. It happened simply, on its own, the way night falls when the day is over.]

New editions will take the place of the earlier one—the older editions will be given a new name.}

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